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CROSSING THE WATER: AN INTERPRETATION OF
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CROSSING THE WATER:

AN INTERPRETATION OF SIX INDIAN WOMEN

EDUCATED IN THE WEST

by

Elizabeth Bulette

A THESIS

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

CROSSING THE WATER:
AN INTERPRETATION OF SIX INDIAN WOMEN
EDUCATED IN THE WEST

By

Elizabeth Bulette

Compartmentalization and the tool box approach have been methods suggested by Milton Singer and Sheryl Daniel respectively, to describe strategies by which Indians use to cope with both traditional and modern lifestyles. In this thesis, the author uses data she has collected from fieldwork in Delhi and Calcutta to illustrate how the combination of both modern and traditional attitudes and values is worked out in the lives of six young Indian women who have been educated in the United States. Because these six informants are at an age where they are redefining their own identities, the tensions between the modern and the traditional become even more poignant, especially when parental expectations are involved. The author argues that her informants and their families take more of an eclectic approach in the blending of attitudes from various cultural sources, which is illustrated by their accommodation of modern attitudes in the traditional arranged marriage system.

Dedicated to my parents,

Katherine K. and Warren C. Bulette,

who taught me the value of education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

> Their way of life, which the Hindus share at the margins with other non-Hindu Indians, is marked by uncertainties. The good life is now being defined in terms of borrowed criteria, namely, Western liberal ideals of material prosperity, political democracy, and secularism. The outlook on life of no modern Indian---neither of Tagore nor of Gandhi or Nehru---can be understood without taking India's encounter with the West into consideration---an encounter which has involved, first, the loss of the "self" and, then, various attempts to recover it (Madan 1987:15).

Westernization in India, which was brought on by British supremacy in the 19th century, has been a phenomena experienced primarily by the higher castes living in urban areas (Srinivas 1967:67). Westernization, as M. N. Srinivas defines it, is a "blanket term" which "includes Western education as well as the adoption of Western ways of life and outlook. It also implies a degree of secularization and rationalism" (1962:77). Although the new opportunities brought about by Westernization in the areas of education, commerce and politics were theoretically available to all castes, these opportunities were most accessible to the higher castes which had a tradition of learning, governmental employment and urban residence (Srinivas 1966:90). Therefore, it was the higher castes with a literary tradition which were the first to take on Western education, and as a result, obtain prestigious positions with high salaries (Ibid.).

Today westernization is especially apparent in the urban areas of India,

where a prosperous business class is expanding as a result of Rajiv Gandhi's loosening of the governmental industrial controls. A new generation of entrepreneurs has rushed into the consumer products market, sparking a boom in production and buying activity (Spaeth 1988:30). The new opportunities found in the city have been, in part, responsible for the changing of Indian lifestyles and attitudes about ritual purity. Of the Indians living in these cities, their daily routine, place of residence, time of meals, etc. has been patterned as a result of the jobs they hold, rather than by the standards their castes traditionally sanctioned (Srinivas 1966:123). Clearly urbanization and greater exposure---through magazines, television, the cinema, home videos, and travel--- to Western ideals have affected Indian society.

The role of Indian women has greatly been influenced by these changes. In the last decade urban women have begun to tap into the business arena for reasons of self-worth, economic independence, and personal challenge. In these last ten years the number of women entering the work-force has quadrupled, according to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Badhwar 1988: 44). Some women are entrepreneurs creating their own niche in the business market while others are obtaining previously established positions in banks, accounting firms, consulting groups, consumer product companies and so on. This trend is but one more manifestation of the consumer explosion occurring in India which is beginning to greatly challenge the traditional role of women in the family.

Additionally the accessibility of higher education to the urban middle class woman has broadened. The number of arts, science (including research institutions) and commerce colleges in India has increased from 542 in 1950 to

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8,011 in 1983. Similarly, the number of Indian universities has increased from 27 in 1950 to 137 in 1983 (Ghosh, 1987:14). Yet only about three percent of the female population is highly educated. These advantaged few have been sent to private high schools, supported through elite institutions of higher learning, and now some are the career-oriented females mentioned above in professional positions. Unfortunately, however, for the rest of the Indian female population, the educational situation is bleak. Results from the national census taken in 1981 indicate that 24.8 percent of all Indian females were literate, as compared to 47.7 percent of all males. In fact, the literacy ratio by sex has only slightly increased over the last fifty years (Ibid. :13). In 1985, the last year of the government's Five-Year Plan for Educational Reform, free education was declared in all states at the primary level for ages six to eleven. An additional three years of free education (up until age fourteen) was also instituted in all states except Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (Ibid.). The effects of this reform on the literacy rate has yet to be determined. No doubt, the Indian educational system and business arena for entrepreneurial women remains elitist and urban-oriented.

A few of these elite young women venture beyond the borders of India to the West in search of greater opportunities and challenges, both educationally and professionally. I had the pleasure of advising several Indian students at a small women's college in the Washington, D. C. area, which is how my interest in India began. From 1983 to 1985, I was responsible for recruiting and advising a small population of international students at this private liberal arts college. During the first new student orientation program I conducted for the incoming international freshman, I became keenly aware of the varied cultural baggage each

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student bears and how it influences the students' individual adjustment process, outlook on her educational career, future goals and ties with home.

The Indian students struck me as being individuals who were able to endure a great number of difficulties without allowing these setbacks to deter them from achieving their goals. Whether the setbacks involved social pressure or adjustment, financial difficulties, grieving the loss of a family member, or the two national tragedies which occurred during their college education---the slaying of Indira Gandhi and the Union Carbide incident in Bhopal---these young South Asian women never complained of the adversities confronting them. Instead they were students who had an air of confidence about themselves, were well prepared for class and who were acknowledged by the faculty as having excellent written and oral communication skills. Consequently, they achieved the highest academic honors. These same students also spoke of their great determination to obtain status and power professionally, after completing a successful educational career.

Their intent to achieve these professional goals perplexed me. During the various counselling sessions I had with the South Asians, the subject of arranged marriage continued to surface. Some spoke of it as a serious problem which would interrupt their educational and career goals, while most simply referred to the arranged marriage tradition as an inevitability. I received several letters from concerned parents requesting that I guide their daughters in making moral decisions about their social interactions so that these daughters would remain unstained for the ultimate gift of marriage. One student in particular was quite anxious about receiving telephone calls and letters from her father in fear that

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at any moment he would cut off her financial support and insist that she return home because a marriage proposal had come through. She explained to me that this was not because he placed little value on her education, but rather that she was getting older (age 22) and soon would be too old to be given away in marriage. Understanding the importance of the arranged marriage system in an Indian cultural context, I questioned how the Hindu students were planning to incorporate the role of a Hindu wife and mother, with their expressed professional goals and newly learned independence.

I left my position at the college before this first group of Indian women graduated. However many of the students kept in touch with me through occasional letters and telephone calls. I also visited the college on several occasions and met with these students, as well as some of the new South Asian students. When I began my graduate work in Social Anthropology, it was clear to me that my research focus would involve the changing roles of highly educated Indian women who are faced with new challenges, both socially and professionally, as a result of India's modernization. My timing was fortuitous. As I was ready to conduct my field research, some of the Indian students whom I first counselled were graduating and confronted with choices about their future. Some were returning to India to be married or to find jobs, while others were staying in the United States to attend graduate school. Naturally I chose this group of six students as my key informants. I suspected that their experience of attending an American women's college would illuminate even more vividly the tensions surrounding the transitional state they were undergoing.

Literature Review

In this paper I will use the observations I have made of my informants to illustrate how these six young Indian women and their families are combining modern and traditional life-styles, attitudes and values. When I use the term "modern", I am referring to a set of attitudes, life-styles, etc. which are the result of Western, secular thinking; whereas, when I make references to a "traditional" way of life I am speaking of life ways which are sanctioned in the religious and moral literature of India. The Hindus in my study are neither just traditional, nor just modern. Rather, they are an amalgamation of the two. I see the choices they make in their lives as strategies for blending values and ideas from two different modes of life.

Milton Singer observed in his study of industrialists in Madras City (1972:387), that Hindus were not replacing their traditional life-style with a Western model, as they became more exposed to modernization. Rather, they were "compartmentalizing" their lives so as to not lose the old in the process of gaining the new. Thus, the two operated concurrently, but in separate realms of daily discourse. In the words of one of Kathleen Gough's informants, "When I put on my shirt to go to the office, I take off my caste, and when I come home and take off my shirt, I put on my caste" (Srinivas 1966:123). In other words, Singer and others saw the lives of these industrialists as being divided into distinct units; modern norms of behavior were used in the work place, while traditional beliefs and behaviors were found at home (Singer 1972:320).

Sheryl Daniel takes another approach toward Indian society's "multiplicity"

of cultural attitudes. She likens the process of adapting both modern with traditional to that of choosing implements from a tool box; hence, she calls it the "Tool Box approach" (1983:59). An Indian is like a carpenter or plumber who picks and chooses among the cultural beliefs (tools) available to him or her in order to make sense of life's circumstances or dilemmas. She explains, "He is free to pick whatever tool fits his immediate contextual need" (Ibid.).

With respect to my informants, I did not see their modes of life in terms of separate compartments. Nor did I see the life choices they made as being selected from a tool box of different varieties which would be used to fix the circumstance before them. Tools are implements used to make or repair something. My informants were "trying on" attitudes---both Western and Hindu---and searching for some way to accommodate both in some sort of coalescence. They were trying to incorporate what they had learned from their college experiences in the West, with the cultural norms they were brought up with in India.

This blending of attitudes is a coping strategy which I observed being adopted by urban Indians from many different stages. However, I have focused my study on a group of young women who are in a phase where they are no longer children and yet, culturally, will not be considered adults until they marry and enter into the Hindu defined stage of householdership (*grhastha*). The stage of adolescence---where the individual goes through a "sequence of process fluctuations that define the posturing of the self" (Gould 1978:531) and where the individual experiences, to use Erikson's term, an "identity crisis" (1968)---is not recognized in India as a distinct phase separate from that of childhood (Ramanujam 1979:37). The Western view of adolescence, as a time for

identity formation, is in opposition to the Indian emphasis on wholeness and conformity to a group (Dumont 1970). In the West the young adult is encouraged to conquer the issue of role diffusion by establishing personal identity; whereas, in India there exists an "enveloping maternalism" in which fusion with the wider family unit is valued (Erikson 1969:43). Indian women learn to define their identity in terms of their relationships with others, particularly men (Fruzzetti 1982:127). They are socialized to be dependent on men in all stages of life—first their father in childhood, then their husband in adulthood, and finally a son during old age (Ramanujam 1979:48). "Indian social structure does not permit the emergence of a cogent adult role as perceived in Western society..." Ramanujam points out, "Self-assertion becomes selfishness, independent decision making is perceived as disobedience..." (Ibid:25). Naturally, when the young Indian woman comes to the United States for higher education and is exposed to an educational system which emphasizes the notion of individuality, the Indian student is confronted with the task of having to re-examine her own definition of her self. This scenario in my study will provide us with the medium in which to see how the blending of attitudes from varied cultural sources gets worked out in the lives of individuals. Moreover, it occurs at a phase in my informants' lives when the tensions between the modern and the traditional are most poignant, because my informants are in the process of redefining their own identities.

I see my informants in a stage of what Levinson calls "developmental transition": they are at a "turning point or boundary between two periods of greater stability" (1977:57). In India, when a girl comes of marriageable age (which is the age of my informants), she usually will leave her father's home and

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be incorporated into her conjugal home following the marriage ceremony. The boundaries from childhood to adulthood are neatly drawn with the wedding ceremony being the *mangala* (rite of passage in the life cycle) ceremony par excellence (Carman and Marglin 1985:1). Hence, there is no opportunity for the young woman to establish her own sense of individual identity. Because of the greater opportunities for urban elite women to participate in higher education, the clearly defined marriage traditions are becoming muddled. This segment of the population is experiencing a prolonged phase in the life cycle where the young, to-be-married woman is neither here nor there in the traditional Hindu scheme of life stages. She has reached the physical maturation point in her life where she is ready for marriage and the stage of householdership, but intellectually and emotionally she is sustaining her current life stage as a student (*antevasin brahmacarya*). During this extended period of time, her parents become concerned over two aspects of her Indian womanhood which are highly valued by society, due to the obligation her father has in giving her away in marriage. I am referring to the daughters virginity, as well as, to the daughter's willingness to be molded into an active member of her husband's family. Van Gennep (1960) emphasizes the precarious nature of marginal states of being. In the case of the unmarried college educated Indian woman, the more prolonged her marginality, between leaving her father's home and being incorporated into a conjugal home, the greater chance exists for her chastity to be threatened and for an independent identity to emerge.

In Hindu culture, marginal states of being (liminality) are closely linked to the domains of purity/impurity and auspiciousness/ inauspiciousness. Several Sanskrit words which translate to mean 'auspicious' include: *mangala, subha,*

siva, kalyana, sreyas, bhadra, dhanya, and *ista.* Translated, taking into
consideration various subtleties, these words mean: pleasant, agreeable,
propitious, favorable, salutary, better, fortunate, prosperous, desirable,
beautiful, handsome, good, charming, radiant, beneficial, as well as auspicious
(Carman and Marglin 1985:30). In short, auspicious is the state of being
favorable. The delicate distinction between auspiciousness and purity has been
argued to be a variation between events and things, respectively. Madan
suggests that subha (auspicious) is an adjective used in describing opportune
times for performing significant acts. "The notion of auspiciousness," he adds,
"is also associated with places, objects and persons connected with events or
actions" (1987:51). Auspiciousness is tied to the normal forward flow of time.
Judy Pugh points out that "to speak of auspicious times or auspicious events is
to state separately the terms of a unified moment of well-being which is realized
only when actions flow with the times which are appropriate to their purposes"
(1983:48).

The auspicious state widely experienced in Hindu culture is that of
householdership, and thus marriage---that event which initiates the stage of
householdership---is also considered the most auspicious life cycle ceremony.
Louis Dumont suggests that marriage is the one rite of passage in which no
impurity is involved. It is the only means by which a Hindu can simultaneously
satisfy the three basic aims of human existence---*dharma, artha, kama.* Madan
points out that "the pursuit of *dharma* is not a call to an exercise in
abstraction: it is in the everyday life of economic pursuits (*artha*) and bodily
appetites (*kama*) that *dharma* has to prevail" (1987:33). Consequently,
artha and *kama* are encompassed by *dharma* (Dumont 1970:41) in the

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householdership stage. In sum, the most auspicious state for women is that of a married woman (*cumankali*---literally translated as "she who is auspicious") because she possesses both wealth and a husband.

Suddha (purity), on the other hand, is not used in reference to events but rather to animate beings, inanimate objects and places with which humans come into contact in the course of everyday life (Madan 1987:58). "The connotation of *suddha* is conveyed by invoking images of fullness or completeness in the specific sense of perfection. It thus refers to the most desired condition of the human body or, more comprehensively, the most desired state of being," says Madan (Ibid.). Veena Das, Frederique Marglin and David Mandelbaum have also been interested in the association of purity with the ideas of order, wholeness, perfect closure and complete incorporation. Marglin, in a paper on power, purity and pollution, illustrates the importance of wholeness of the body in the Hindu value structure. She indicates that bodily pollution is a "symbolic statement about the crossing of boundaries in the ascending order of caste" (1977:265). In other words, the crossing of certain boundaries disrupts order, wholeness or complete incorporation, thus casting impurity onto a previously harmonized system. Marglin mentions that in the past this idea was carried to the extent of crossing geographical boundaries---i.e. to go outside of India brought about loss of caste (Ibid.). Veena Das (1976:245) argues how impurity symbolizes liminality. She draws on Van Gennep's model of separation, transition and incorporation and expands on his idea of the threatening nature of all marginalities---intellectual, social and cosmic. "Margins are considered to be dangerous in all societies," she says, "...the profound threat of these marginal positions lies in their power to question the ordering of everyday reality,

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through their capacity to ignore or transcend normal customary divisions"
(1976:252). She emphasizes that the most poignant examples of impurity are
marked off by those liminal situations when an individual experiences his social
world as separate from the cosmic.

In summary, the highly valued, most auspicious state for an Indian woman is
that of being a wife and a mother. For it is in this state that she is wholly
and completely incorporated into the Indian social structure. When an
interruption occurs between certain life boundaries causing a prolonged
liminality, the individual experiencing the marginality is seen by the others in
the society to be at risk. In fact, from the literature just cited, marginality
is an impure state for the Hindu whose social world is in disharmony with the
normal flow of time and events. By taking a careful look at the prolonged
transitional period which my six informants encountered by attending college and
finding employment before marriage, I will attempt to portray their experience of
liminality as they and their families' expressed it to me.

Methodology

When anthropologists assume the task of representation, they must also
address the issue of interpretation. As Clifford Geertz explains, "...what we
call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of
what they and their compatriots are up to ..." (1973:9) The very nature of
ethnographic anthropology is interpretive. In trying to grasp the meaning behind
the daily discourse of our informants, we must tap into what Bronislaw Malinowski
coined as "mental culture"---"the native's point of view, his relation to life,

his vision of his world" (1922:25). However, this inclination to express empathy---to slip into the skins of others---is not entirely possible. How can an ethnographer assume what his or her informants perceive? Instead the ethnographer must act as a mediator between what Geertz calls experience-near and experience-far concepts (1983:58). Those categories which are experientially distant are categories or concepts of social life which are more general in nature. On the other hand, Geertz suggests that, "People use experience-near concepts spontaneously, unself-consciously, as it were colloquially; they do not, except fleetingly and on occasion, recognize that there are any "concepts" involved at all. That is what experience-near means---that ideas and the realities they inform are naturally and indissolubly bound up together" (Ibid.). When the ethnographer can accurately identify these local concepts and reconcile them with experientially distant categories, then interpretation becomes useful. For it is in understanding the tacit knowledge of the "native" which allows the observer to attach meaning to the informant's everyday life.

To arrive at a deeper construction of how my informants ordered their worlds, I paid close attention to how these informants experienced womanhood in both an Indian setting, as well as in a Western one. I was concerned with how they integrated their experience abroad into their own mental conceptions of themselves as Hindu women. I tried to tap into what it meant to my informants to be between cultures. Meeting with each of the students in the United States to conduct interviews, diagram kinship charts and social networks, and to transcribe their life histories, I felt was not enough. After receiving authorization from the college, I asked the students to provide me with essays they had written several years earlier about their goals in life which were a part of their

application materials for entrance into the college. Some even were able to supply taped interviews describing what they perceived as their own personalities, values and life expectations. These taped interviews were conducted in India as a requirement for a scholarship for which they had applied. I also reviewed old files that I had kept on the students while I was serving as the College's foreign student advisor. These files contained past letters the students and their parents had sent to me in addition to the notes I had kept on each student as a result of counselling sessions.

However the most significant body of data which I was able to gather was that which I collected while living among each of these six students' families during a four month stay in India. Behavior, ideas and people's explanation of the two are often not congruous. By going to India, I was able to see the discussions I had had with the students, their written essays expressing their values and goals, as well as the concerns they and their parents had communicated to me in letters, all being played out in reality. Also by living with these families in Delhi and Calcutta, I could reach deeper into the layers of meaning surrounding the transition process which each student was experiencing because I was able to see how this experience also affected each of the students' families. I spent time with each of the family members, and I interacted with the family friends, neighbors, distant relatives, business colleagues, servants, in addition to the students' school friends, teachers and counselors. When I conducted formal interviews, I used a tape recorder in addition to taking notes, so that the statements I recorded were verbatim. Much of my data on the daily interactions of my informants, their families and friends, I recorded in a daily journal.

I conducted my interviews in English and asked my informants to identify certain key concepts such as purity, auspiciousness, change and honor, in the vernacular. We discussed the translation of these key concepts from Hindi into English. As additional sources of emic data, I used two Indian journals---India Today which is India's most popular news journal distributed throughout India and to over 100 countries, and Women's Era which is the most widely read women's journal in India. Both bi-monthly magazines are published in English. I used these journals to gain a clearer understanding of the local conceptualization of such notions as marriage and dating, as well as to get a better appreciation for Indian social norms and standards as depicted through mass communication.

I had fairly easy access to my data. The issues of arranged marriage, non-traditional female professionals, and United States higher education were frequently discussed topics at social functions because the individuals present at these events where often affected by such issues. Parents of prospective students talked with me about their concerns over sending their children to a university in the United States. Other parents, whose sons or daughters had returned from the West, discussed the benefits and difficulties of having this experience. I was invited to several private high schools in Delhi and Calcutta to speak with school faculty and administrators on the topics of the American educational system and values of American youth. I also met with prospective students during these school visits to discuss their interest in the U.S. and the process of applying for admission into an American university. These encounters were mutually beneficial because while I was able to answer questions about Western culture and education, I learned from these individuals their attitudes, concerns and even the way they perceived certain circumstances as a result of the

manner in which they asked questions. There were occasions when people would discuss very personal matters with me---matters which they claimed they would not address among their friends. Because I was not a part of their Indian social circles, perhaps they felt comfortable in confiding in me. After all, I was a stranger from another culture who would slip out of their lives as easily as I had slipped in. It was during these emotional discussions however, that I gained the most vivid appreciation of the family tensions surrounding the circumstances which cause marginality.

Confidential information is powerful information. It can easily be abused if used in an inappropriate context. Sifting through my field notes I realize that much of my data is confidential. I wonder how fair it is for anthropologists to examine closely the lives of others. These six informants and their families generously opened their lives to me, not to be scrutinized but rather, I should think, so that we can learn from each other. Is this not what Marcus and Fischer are referring to when they speak of a "reflexive dimension" in ethnographic research---"a kind of cultural critique necessary in a rapidly homogenizing world" (1986:109). To protect the six students and their families, I have referred to each of them as "my informant" or "informant's mother, brother, etc." (an awkward term, not to mention impersonal, but that which allows for anonymity) instead of spelling out their names or even disguising them. I have carefully tried to render the information I gathered in a most faithful account of what I observed, however being cautious not to include information which was given to me in confidence. Although this ethnography is not as realistic as if I had taken a video tape of my encounters, I felt it necessary to blur deliberately the faces of the actors for the purpose of anonymity.

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Consequently, in my reconstructions, it is my aim not to describe what one sees by looking at the surface of reality, but rather to make more clear the underlying issues which perhaps even my informants experience subconsciously, and know only vaguely.

CHAPTER TWO: FULFILLING ARTHA

> I stir and animate the merchant Indra: may he approach
>   and be our guide and leader.
> Chasing ill-will, wild beast, and highway robber, may he
>   who hath the power give me riches.
> The many paths which Gods are want to travel, the paths
>   which go between the earth and heaven,
> May they rejoice with me in milk and fatness that I may
>   make rich profit by my purchase.
> With fuel, Agni! and with butter, longing, mine offering
>   I present for strength and conquest;
> With prayer, so far as I have strength, adoring—this
>   holy hymn to gain a hundred treasures.
> Pardon this stubbornness of ours, O Agni, the distant
>   pathway which our feet have trodden.
> Propitious unto us be sale and barter, may interchange
>   of merchandise enrich me.
> Accept, ye twain, accordant, this libation! Prospious
>   be our ventures and incomings.
> The wealth wherewith I carry on my traffic, seeking, ye
>   Gods! Wealth with the wealth I offer,
> May this grow more for me, not less: O Agni, through
>   sacrifice chase those who hinder profit!

(Artharva Veda, III:15; in Embree 1966:39)

I arrived in Delhi on January 13th, the locally celebrated coldest day of the year. Looking out of the taxi window, as I was driven to South Delhi, I recognized the shapes of human bodies scattered here and there along the roadside, wrapped like mummies in woolen shawls, old blankets or burlap bags. The shapes began to stir as the morning light awakened them. The air smelled of burning leaves and other debris which had been swept into roadside piles by the street cleaners, causing the dust that had settled overnight to rise again. Nomads were huddled around small contained fires trying to keep warm. The sun would not burn off the night's damp air until mid-day.

As the taxi entered South Delhi the neighborhoods became more spacious and

streets were tree-lined. Large attractive homes juxtaposed the tents and huts where the less prosperous lived. The disparity between those-who-have and those-who-have-not was sharply contrasted. The driver turned down the street where my first informant lived with her family. After haggling a little with him over the amount of the fare, I paid him the agreed upon price and got out of the taxi with my bags in hand. A large black iron gate demarcated the family's property. I opened the gate door, walked down the paved driveway and stepped onto the patio where I could look through the sliding glass doors. I saw a man and a woman, I presumed my informant's parents, being served tea by a servant as they scanned the morning paper. I stood still for a few moments, gaining my confidence to knock---a knock which would begin a relationship with a family and a culture similar and yet, quite dissimilar from my own.

The purpose of the present chapter is to 'set the stage' for the chapters which are to follow. It is important for the reader to understand the socio-economic background from which my informants come. For it is their position in India's class and caste hierarchy which makes them more likely than other Indians, to go abroad for higher education. I entitle the chapter "Fulfilling Artha" because it is this aim in the Hindu life which one is most aware of when visiting these six families at their homes. I could have also entitled the chapter, "Living in Luxury" or "Material Prosperity", but chose the former because of the importance which *artha* plays in the ideology of one of the four Hindu life stages, namely, that of the householder *(grhastha).*

T. N. Madan, in an article on the ideology of the householder (1982:110) suggests that the most highly valued identity of a human being in the Hindu

scheme of life and values is that of a householder. For it is only during this

stage of life that an individual can simultaneously and completely fulfill the

components of *dharma* (one's life duty) which encompass *artha* (economic

pursuits) and *kama* (bodily pleasures and love). Clearly, each of my informant

families have satisfied the elements of their *dharma* as they live out the stage

of *grhastha*. *Artha* is the Hindu's first aim of life and that which is obvious

in the lives and homes of these six families. Heinrich Zimmer (1951:35) defines

artha as comprising a range of tangible objects which are required in daily

life for the upkeep of a household, raising a family, and for the religious

obligations one has. Such objects include fine clothing, jewels, comfortable

housing, beautiful works of art, and plentiful food. He explains,

> the word *artha* thus connotes the "attainment of riches
> and worldly prosperity, advantage, profit, wealth,"
> [and] also [results] in "commercial life" [which
> includes] "business-matter, business-affair, work, [and]
> price" (Ibid.)

Although none of the six families I visited spoke of a specific aim to fulfill

artha, the material wealth evident in their homes and the commercial savvy

being played out in their professional lives typify *artha* at its best.

Each of my informants' families belonged to one of the three "twice-born" or

"ritually pure" *varnas*. In fact, four of the six families were *Kshatriyas*.

Another family had *Brahmin* heritage (The father's background was *Kayastha*.

The mother's was unknown, as she was adopted.). The sixth family was *Vaishya*.

Among my informants' parents, there were no intercaste marriages, except for the

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possibility of the one mentioned above involving the wife of unknown kinship. Each of these marriages had been arranged, except again in the case just mentioned. In this case the couple met each other at the university in their town and had a "love-marriage" after four years of knowing one another.

Each informant grew up in a nuclear family arrangement with few siblings. Although my informants' parents grew up in families where they were, on the average, one of six children, each of my informants had just one brother, with the exception of two; one had three brothers, and the other was an only child. Their parents all grew up in extended family homes. However, when these parents married, each couple moved to the city (Delhi or Calcutta) to establish themselves in a different way of life. In fact, one couple even changed its surname upon moving to Calcutta because, as the wife told me, they did not want their caste to be identified. None of the parents grew up in the states to which either Delhi or Calcutta belong. Five of the couples are from North India from one of the following states: the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, or Rajasthan. One couple migrated from the South Indian state of Kerala.

I use the term "upwardly mobile" to describe the socio-economic status of my informants' families. They come from the upper middle class or upper class strata of urban India. To borrow the definition of upper class which Manisha Roy has suggested in her book Bengali Women, these families are part of a "homogeneous culture" which places "value on higher education and salaried professions" (1972:xv). Four of the families spoke of "a large amount of land" and "ancestral homes or compounds" which the parents remember from their childhood. Two of these families lost their land during partition, and left

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everything behind when they fled from the area. A common thread which runs through all six of my informants' families is some previous exposure to the West prior to sending their daughter to the United States for higher education. Three of the students' fathers had been educated in either England or the United States, and five fathers' occupations involved business contact with the West on a regular basis. Each of the six students were the first women of the family to be university educated in the United States.

The families' accessibility to the West was evident in the interiors of their homes. These homes had both Eastern and Western influences. In fact, some of the homes I visited more closely resembled the posh homes featured in "House and Gardens" or "American Architecture" than they resembled anything particularly Indian. Elaborately decorated interiors and carefully architected gardens were the norm, rather than the exception, of each household. Signs of Western influence or accessibility included furnishings such as original oils of European street scenes, imported European furniture, British silver tea services, not to mention such appliances as General Electric microwave ovens, G.T.E. cordless telephones, space heaters, Sunbeam steam irons, Zenith televisions, Conair hair blow dryers, toaster ovens, Cuisinart food processors and high tech stereo equipment. I was told by my informants about the kind of value Indians place on Western goods. Not only are Western-made appliances time saving devices in the upkeep of a home, but they are also signs of prestige. When certain goods are not available on the Indian market, then it is evident to guests who visit the homes of families who have such Western products, that the families must have "connections" with the West. This contact with the West, I was told, is highly valued in Indian society.

Many of the homes had central air-conditioning systems which were not affected by the city's recurring power outages, because these homes were also equipped with their own generators. In some cases the families were provided a company-owned car with a personal driver. Most of the families drove the Indian-made Ambassador, which is the type of automobile frequently driven by members of the upwardly mobile class. The average urban Indian, however, owns a scooter or bicycle, or simply rides the bus or rickshaw to commute into the city. I was told that foreign-made cars, especially European, are true signs of wealth. A few of my informants' families drove such cars.

Each of the families I visited employed servants to take care of some of the mundane or dirty chores of the house. A few of these households had as many as a dozen employees to carry out such duties as cooking, caring for the children, guarding the house, driving the cars, gardening, laundering the clothes, buying the fresh produce and staples at the market, washing the dishes, dusting the house, sweeping the floor and cleaning the toilet facilities. Tasks were assigned to servants in a hierarchical fashion. Those who had the lowest caste status performed the most polluting or dirty jobs of the household such as sweeping the floors and cleaning the toilets. These servants were not permitted into the kitchen when food was being prepared because of the corporate pollution they possessed as untouchables (Mandelbaum 1970:190). Some of the servants lived on the premises and had been employed with the family all their lives. Even though, in some cases, their ill-health or personal problems greatly affected the servant's usefulness in the household, they were considered a part of the family and would remain with the family even if the family moved from one city to another.

In most cases, the homes in which these families lived were owned by the companies for which the husbands worked. Rather than being paid high salaries, the attraction of holding a management position in a large company or financial institution in India is the fringe benefits that come with that position. Not only are these higher level employees provided with a home but additionally their cars, servants, and some interior furnishings are often company provided. While the parents of most of my informants had modest salaries, they could lead gracious lifestyles with company expense accounts, sport and social club memberships, and corporate parties at five star hotels. This is especially true in Calcutta where the "old world charm" continues. In an article in India Today addressing this "charm" of Calcutta, the author suggests that the good corporate life is more relaxed in the city than in other Indian cities such as Bombay or Delhi where the business climate is more competitive, less conservative and faster paced (Das Gupta 1988:66-67). The traditions from the British era are still manifested in the long-drawn-out winter parties, two and three hour executive lunches at the Bengal Club, evening drives, weekly golf outings at the Tollygunge Club, and a regular drink at the Saturday Club or the Calcutta Cricket Club (Ibid.).

The positions that my informants' fathers held were all upper managerial posts. Several directed multi-national corporations, one owned and operated an international shipping firm, another was a top manager of an exclusive Asian hotel chain. Only two of the six mothers had salaried jobs, both of whom held teaching positions. The other mothers had taken on volunteer work in the community with such organizations as the Mother Teresa Foundation, the Rotary Club, and Spastic Society. One mother was enrolled in the Montessori teacher

training program in Calcutta. When not involved in organizational work, or in spending time with their children, or entertaining their husbands' business clients or colleagues, these women were engaged in an active social life. It was not unusual for neighbors or friends to just drop by for tea, lunch, or even dinner. Afternoon tea sometimes developed into an elaborate eating affair with pastries, *samosas* (a flaky dough shell filled with spicy vegetables or meat), Indian sweets, and even *dosas* (South Indian pancake filled with chutney). During these teas, the women exchanged individual concerns, private jokes, and social gossip. However personal issues were treated very delicately, even among best friends, because of the social pressure experienced by these women and their families.

The circles in which these families socialized placed tremendous emphasis on reputation. Just one member of the family could enhance the family's status or demote it as a result of certain activities, friendships or business practices. For example, a family member could bring prestige to the family by taking a holiday overseas or better yet, attending college in the United States. Even though each of these families lived in a large metropolitan city, social standing did not go unnoticed. The social circuits in which these families moved were small, and everyone seemed to know each other's business. Identification with a certain close community of friends was common among all of the families in my study, perhaps because each family was not native to the city in which it lived. The parents of each of my informants migrated to either Delhi or Calcutta shortly after they were married because they were after a higher standard of living. There seemed to be promising business opportunities for them in the city. Instead of identifying themselves with their extended family unit, these nuclear

families found a group of friends in the city with whom they had a sense of belonging.

As a result, members in the group would influence each other, which was especially evident in the decisions they made about child rearing. Choices made by one family concerning where to send their children to school were sometimes similarly followed by others. When Indian children of the upper middle class reach the age of three or four, families make application to enroll their child in the city's elite, privately owned schools. I was told by my informants that entrance into these schools in both Delhi and Calcutta is extremely competitive and largely based on the parent's pocketbook and social connections. I observed heightened anxiety among several of my informants' friends and extended family who had toddlers whose admission interviews were soon to come about. The anxiety during the application period is not only a result of concerns about the child's future, but also it is because some families see the admission decision as affecting their social future. Once admitted, the child's educational experience of moving through the primary and secondary private school system (although these schools are privately owned, Indians refer to them as "public schools") will ensure success in gaining admission into India's elite institutions of higher learning. During several visits to these schools, I was told that between 93 and 97 percent of these students do choose to go on for higher education, either in India or in the West.

Each of the private schools I visited incorporated community service as part of the curriculum. Every student was assigned to a volunteer project which the faculty hoped would instill a sense of "service to others before self." At the

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same time, however, the increasing wealth of the upper middle class was beginning to permeate the attitudes of the children in school. The schools' teachers and administrators expressed to me concern that the abundance of material wealth among the "nouveau riche" was in part responsible for the students' changing values. They explained that the children, especially of parents who are in India's business sector, are placing increased emphasis on owning Western items such as the latest popular music tapes and designer clothes and accessories, as well as possessing attitudes such as being "me-centered," which they considered Western. Additionally, the faculty complained that some of the students were not serious about their studies because they knew their parents' money would buy their future.

I met a number of these children, mostly sons, who had finished school and were now managing small entrepreneurial-type companies which their fathers had organized for them. Some of these young entrepreneurs were my informants' friends, while others were brothers and cousins, who were sometimes referred to as the "Indian Yuppies." In the words of one of the students in my study,

> An Indian yuppie is a single guy under 35 who owns his
> own car, always wears suits and a pair of sunglasses,
> has manicured nails, a nice hair style, has an expense
> account with which he is able to lead a fast life in the
> evening. But he works real hard during the day. He has
> a very professional approach and a certain amount of
> polish or finesse because he has lived overseas.

Another student explained to me that,

> Indian yuppies like Western things---they want the
> latest and the best as soon as they can get it from the
> West. Indian yuppies are successful because their
> fathers are in big business and so employers can predict
> that the sons or daughters will have the same kind of
> connections that their father's have. Yuppies break a
> lot of rules about taxation---they deal mostly in the
> black market like their fathers. They bribe their way
> to beat the system.

When I asked one of my informants' brothers if he would like being labelled a

yuppie, he replied, "I wouldn't like it, but then again, I wouldn't really mind

it either. It is a compliment."

From parents to children, the tradition of *artha* is passed. Whether or

not these upwardly mobile families acknowledge their material world as being the

result of fulfilling the first aim in life, the value of being wealthy,

prosperous, glorious and ingenious in trade is deeply rooted in the Indian

tradition of the householder. Because the families of my informants were of the

higher castes (particularly *Kshatriyas*) who traditionally had power and status

in their locality, members of these families had the means and where-with-all to

acquire higher education and a professional life when British influence brought

about modernization in India. It is the fruit of their *dharma* which now has

allowed them to enjoy material prosperity and to be able to afford to send their

daughters abroad for higher education.

It comes as no surprise that some Indian youth from upwardly mobile families

are attracted to the Western notion of the yuppie. However, their "yuppie" or "puppie" (prosperous bunch of urban Punjabis), as some Indians have renamed it, takes on a character somewhat different from that which we know in the West. I suspect the image is less individualistic and more of an image which affects the entire family. As one informant's mother told me, "We have materialism in India as you have it in America. But in India the family comes first and the material things allow for a better family life. Whereas in the United States, I think materialism comes first. Material things help the individual feel more powerful." In other words, the desire for material things (*artha*) to this Indian woman is for the betterment of her family, which is the focus of her efforts, as opposed to the advancement of herself.

In closing this chapter I will present a prayer which I saw on the wall of a young Indian woman's room when I first arrived in India. Although the prayer could represent the traditional value of material wealth (*artha*) which is appropriate as desired during the householder stage, in addition it indicates Western influence. Not only does the prayer include the types of material goods and services which are also valued by some Americans, but moreover it is evident that these items are for individual pleasure, rather than communal use. As Singer has suggested in his research on a group of Madras executives (1972:266), in some cases, the incorporation of the modern into the traditional ways of life occurs without much tension and can, as in this example, even occur with little awareness. Certain values such as "wealth, power, and pleasure, while perhaps subordinated to those of doing one's duty and of attaining release, have always been accepted as essential to the complete scheme of life" (Ibid.). Clearly the notion of artha persists even among "modern" Hindu families, however transformed

it may be as these families experience their own redefinition of their values as they are increasingly exposed to Western ideals.

The Yuppie's Prayer

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray my Cuisinart to keep. I pray my stocks are on the rise, and that my analyst is wise, that all the wine I sip is white and that my hot tub's water tight, that racquetball won't get too tough, that all my sushi's fresh enough. I pray my cordless phone still works, that my career won't lose its perks, my microwave won't radiate, my condo won't depreciate. I pray my health club doesn't close and that my money market grows. If I grow broke before I wake, I pray my Volvo they won't take. That's all for now.

CHAPTER THREE: ALLIANCE INVITED FOR A BEAUTIFUL HOMELY GIRL

> Prosperous Sindhi family of high status seeks
> matrimonial alliance for beautiful, homely girl,
> age 21/160 cms., slim, fair coloured, sharp
> features, convent educated, B.A. from reputed
> American university. Groom should be
> industrialist/businessman holding top executive
> position, well educated, from respectable family.
> Write to box A-5233-CA, Hindustan Times,
> New Delhi—110001.

Hindu marriage is an alliance between families. In this type of marriage the union between husband and wife is not a personal matter based on love, but rather a communal decision made between two households for the purpose of continuing the male lines of descent, and for the maintenance of one's caste status (Fruzzetti 1982:8). In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, "...Marriage [is] categorically regarded as contract, inasmuch as this relation is undertaken for an end, the definite purpose of fulfilling social and religious duties (1948:148). The social obligation is such that once a daughter is properly married, it is as if a debt has been paid off (Das 1979:93). Alliance negotiations are conducted in a business-like fashion and the choice of a suitable match is made according to caste principles and rules. In North India, the pattern of hypergamy is generally followed, where a slightly lower *varna* of the wife's family in relation to the husband's, is permitted (Dumont 1970:116).

Since the giving and taking of daughters in marriage alliance is a sacred obligation of the family, the responsibility of deciding who the daughter will

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marry is often a group decision. Parents generally play the largest role in this decision making, but other members of the family are also involved, not to mention friends, servants and sometimes a matchmaker (Roy 1975:12). Traditionally the bride- and groom-to-be rarely had a voice in the decision-making process, and in fact, sometimes never even saw each other prior to the wedding ceremony. This, however, seems to be changing. I met a number of married Hindu women of varying ages whose families at least allowed them to meet their husband-to-be prior to the wedding. In some cases (usually women who had been recently married), the soon-to-be husband and wife were able to see each other on occasion, but were often chaperoned by a sibling or friend.

The important factors which my informants' families considered in finding a family suitable for a matrimonial alliance include similarities in caste, socio-economic status, reputation and regional language. I was told that the particular qualities of the bride or groom in which negotiating parents are interested include: educational background, physical attractiveness (especially fair skin color), professional potential (in the case of a groom) and personality. In large Indian cities, families often take out newspaper advertisements, such as the one illustrated above, announcing the availability of a daughter or son who has reached marriageable age. Although the families are looking for a match of equal reputation and wealth, a large dowry of cash and gifts may be offered by the brides' family to make a match in a family of higher status (Roy 1975:13).

Marriage is to the Hindu the most important life cycle ritual because it enables individuals to take on the highly valued role of a householder

(Madan 1982:110). Status as a wife is especially critical for a Hindu woman since she can only achieve complete identity through her relationship to her husband (Ibid.). Married women enjoy the highest status among all Indian women, and once they have given birth (particularly to a son), they have fulfilled their duty (*dharma*) in continuing the male line. Lina Fruzzetti (1982:31) points out that, since a woman must be a mother before she can become a complete person, Hindus believe that daughters should be married and not kept in their father's house for too long. The presence of an unmarried adult daughter in a household is inauspicious for the men of that household because of the daughter's vulnerability of loosing her virginity before marriage or even the fear of inner family breeding (Ibid.). Both offenses bring shame to the household because they impede the family's obligation to sustain its descent line. Therefore, it is the fathers foremost duty to marry off his daughters when they come of age.

A Hindu woman is not considered a full ritual member of her natal lineage (Bennett 1983:165). Emotionally, she has a strong attachment to her family of birth, but it is only through her relationship to her conjugal home that she achieves her full religious and social identity (Ibid.). Through marriage, a girl gives up her ephemeral identity as a daughter of her natal household to become a fully incorporated member of society whose new identity is defined in relation to her husband and his family (Madan 1982:115). It is for this reason that the ideal incoming wife is a girl who has not yet developed too much of an expression of her own personality. Rather, she will find her identity as one of a collectivity in her husband's household. (I use the terms "girl" and "boy" as Indians use these terms when referring to young adults. Only until after marriage are individuals called "woman" and "man.") Traditional families are looking to

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bring into the household a girl who is "homely"---someone who will be docile and humble, who will willingly play an integral part in maintaining the household, both in carrying out the domestic chores as well as in rearing children, who will obey the norms of the household, and who will set aside her own preferences and goals for the happiness of the whole household (Fruzzetti 1982:98). The underlying Hindu principle at play in a traditional home is that of group cohesiveness. The key to understanding an Indian woman's sense of herself is in understanding that womanhood is a process of "self-realization" through participation as a member of her husband's household, rather than self-expression as an individual (Madan, personal communication, February 1989).

Taking all this into consideration, it is not difficult to see why many Hindu girls trust their parents to find them a suitable husband. As a well-educated Indian girl of 19 said to me, "Why should I be concerned about my parent's choice of husband? They know what's best for me." To a Western-minded person, it is out of our experience to think that anybody other than oneself could be a better judge in choosing one's lifetime mate. However, it is in fact this free choice of finding someone we love which is the point of departure between the Western and Indian philosophy of marriage. Indians view a marriage which is the result of free choice as something antisocial in that it separates the couple involved from their caste brothers and close relatives (Fruzzetti 1982:12). To the traditional Hindu, this type of marriage lacks permanence in the society's social structure. More recently, however, some Indians have opted for a "love-marriage." These marriages tend to be intercaste marriages which cause tension in the couples' households because they are considered meaningless, in that they breach the hierarchical principles of caste and kinship (Ibid.).

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As a result, the newly wed couple is often barred from the household, and even in some cases, the brothers and sisters of both households are negatively affected by becoming ineligible for marriage to members of the "good houses" (Ibid.).

Just as the idea of a love-marriage is antithetical to the Hindu scheme of alliance, similarly, courtship is superfluous in an arranged marriage (Bennett 1983:71). In dating, the girl involved is at risk in the eyes of her parents because of the increased chance of losing her virginity (Ibid.). In a marriage alliance, one of the two required gifts the father gives in giving his daughter away is the girl's virginity. (The other is a dowry.) The gift of a virgin insures purity in the descent line. It is no wonder then that traditional Hindu parents guard their daughters from dating and encourage them to socialize in groups so that the possibility of "calf-love" ("childish" love which occurs during adolescence while the boy's or girl's emotions are still "untamed" [Kamala 1988:57]), which may develop between a boy and girl, is reduced. In an article in Women's Era the author points out that although courtship has been occurring more and more in Indian society, the experience has serious consequences for the couple involved (Ibid.). Adolescence, she says, is a vulnerable time for teenagers because they are physically and mentally maturing. The daughter who is introduced to sexual intimacy finds it "heavenly" and exciting; however, she is unaware of how it will "disturb her mental concentration," which is the "key to a bright academic future." The author warns that, "If a person escapes from falling in love in adolescence, he can achieve many things in life, and a lot of emotional strain and mental agony can be avoided" (Ibid.).

Although the fear of premarital sex is strong in parents of teenage

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daughters, they also are apprehensive about dating because it often leads to a love-marriage. Some parents are unaware that their daughters are involved because the daughters carry out their relationships with boys away from home. I attended a party in Delhi with one of my informants and her older brother. The friend who was having the party planned it for a weekend when his parents would be away, and since he lived in a nuclear household, no other family elders were present. The others attending the party knew each other from the private high school from which they had all graduated. This group of friends socialized together frequently either at parties or at several of the city's night clubs where they could "disco-dance." I noticed that an attractive young woman, who seemed to be quite popular with the young men at the party, disappeared for about two hours upstairs with one of the male guests. My informant's brother later told me that,

> "Although the guys find Radha beautiful and want to
> be involved with her, she is one of those girls
> whose past you don't want to know if you end up
> marrying her. She comes from an orthodox family
> who's recently made a lot of money. I'm sure her
> parents will have an arranged marriage for her but
> they don't know what kind of reputation she has.
> It would be best for her to be married to someone
> in another town."

In several of the Indian households where I lived, a great amount of family conflict existed as a result of daughters having boyfriends. Of two cases in particular, the daughters had been involved with their boyfriends throughout high school and college. One informant limited her relationship to telephone calls and meeting her boyfriend at parties. The other, however, saw her boyfriend more frequently as she often invited him to her parents' home for meals. She explained to me, "Neighbors can't talk much about my friendship with Ravi because

they know he comes over for dinner. Obviously my parents know about our relationship and accept it. It's not as if we're hiding it from anybody, and besides, what could we get away with in my parent's home?" On the contrary, both sets of parents told me that they tolerated their daughters' relationships with these boys. Their philosophy had been to ignore the relationship at its earlier phase rather than aggravate the daughter and cause her to disrespect them by continuing the relationship. However, this philosophy had not worked. The daughters were still seeing the boys and the parents complained that their reputation, in addition to their daughter's reputation, was being tarnished.

Both sets of parents admitted that one of the reasons they sent their daughters away from home for higher education was because they hoped that their daughters would forget about their boyfriends back in India. During this time, while the daughters were in the United States, the parents had hoped to find boys from eligible families into which they could marry their daughters. The investment of sending their daughter abroad for a bachelor's degree could, in some cases, increase the daughter's value in an alliance. Of course the daughter's American education would be valued only by other Western-minded Indian families—families who in addition to being of the proper caste and social standing, had boys who maybe also attended a university in the United States or perhaps had business contacts in the West. Not only were the parents of these students disapproving of their dating because of the social stigma attached to it, they were also concerned that the boys were not good enough for their daughters. A certain amount of investment goes into grooming a daughter for marriage. These parents felt that their daughters' boyfriends were not from the proper social standing, educational and professional level, not to mention caste,

for a match to be made. Thus it seems that while courtship to the more traditional Hindu family threatens the marriage tradition because it leads to the controversial "love-marriage," dating, as perceived by the Western-minded parents in my study, is also problematic because the boys their daughters are dating do not have as high of a caste or social status as that of their daughters. Most important however, that there seems to be a concern shared by both traditional and modern thinking Hindus that dating puts daughters in a riskier position with respect to losing their virginity.

In some families dating has been incorporated in the arranged marriage practice as a prelude to the marriage itself. A recently married Hindu woman told me about the turmoil she caused in her family when she insisted that she would not marry the boy her parents had selected for her unless she could date this boy for at least three months before she consented to the arranged marriage. Understandably, the parents were upset with their daughter's insistence because it broke Hindu tradition. However, much to their own consternation, they agreed to the daughter's request under the condition that she be engaged to the boy before seeing him regularly. In agreeing to the courtship, the parents were compromising on their belief that an alliance is a social obligation and not for the sole happiness of the daughter. Still they allowed the daughter to pursue this modern notion of developing a relationship with her future husband within the parameters of the "quasi" arranged marriage they agreed upon with the boy's family. The arrangement turned out to be successful in that the couple agreed to marry within just two months of their courtship. The daughter told me that once the marriage occurred, her parents stopped arguing with her and that "there was peace among both households again."

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Another example of how modern attitudes are being accommodated for in the arranged marriage system is evident in the more recent practice of disregarding caste status. It is not unusual to read several classified advertisements in the matrimonial columns of the Sunday newspapers which read "caste no bar." This is an interesting example of how modern influence is challenging the hierarchy of Indian society. Marriage is entered into to insure the continuity and purity of the male descent line (Fruzzetti 1982:8). It is for this reason that one marries within, or very close to, one's *varna*. Marriage without caste restrictions, would otherwise break down this hierarchy.

If over time, caste status takes a secondary role in Hindu marriages, then other qualities or factors will naturally become more critical. As mentioned earlier, the socio-economic status of a family, as well as reputation, seem to play a large part in marriage negotiations today. I have also been told by Indian parents that educating a son or daughter abroad is a kind of "investment" that parents make for a more attractive marriage alliance. A Western college education for an Indian daughter is a sign of status (Roy 1975:10). Many parents who send a child abroad for higher education, are 'grooming' that son or daughter for an alliance with another Hindu family who also enjoys a high standard of living---both Western and traditional. Here again we see an example of Hindu families making adjustments in previously established values to accommodate for new modern attitudes. The parents of daughters who attend college in the West are taking a chance, and in some cases even end up compromising their standards, on their daughters virginity and her sense of identity in relation to the family. Although this process of accommodation is a strategy for coping with both modern and traditional values, the two spheres do not necessarily exist in harmony.

CHAPTER FOUR: ALCOHOL, DRUGS, BOYS AND GIRLS

> Bittu, when you go to America to study, avoid these
> things---alcohol, drugs, boys and girls.
> (Indian father)

Hindu parents who send their children to the West to be educated show concern about their son or daughter being introduced not only to drinking, drugs and pre-marital sex, but even to homosexuality. In the minds of many Indian parents, children in the West grow up with an excess of freedom that can cause problems when these inexperienced teens take advantage of their freedom by getting involved with smoking, substance abuse or sex (Nene 1988:95). When one of the students in my study decided to apply for undergraduate admission to the college where I previously worked, her uncle (close family friend) tried strongly to dissuade her and her parents from carrying out their plans. "Uncle came to Calcutta, sat me down, and gave me a big long lecture on why I shouldn't go to the United States for college." She continued:

> He warned me and my parents that I would have a
> difficult time fitting into society once I returned
> because I might pick up bad habits such as drinking
> and smoking from American college students. He
> also said that my parents would have a difficult
> time getting me married to a decent husband from a
> respectable family. I think he was worried that I
> would defy my parents while I was away, become more
> independent, and get involved with boys.

Irrespective of the social pressure that parents receive, some families who can afford to, send their children abroad to be educated. In the cases of the six young women I studied, many of their parents told me that they chose to send

their daughters to an American women's college because they felt it would be similar to the convent schools where many upper-class Indian families send their daughters for primary and secondary education. The convent schools in India are generally run by catholic nuns, are segregated and usually have strict rules about moral behavior. As some of the parents later learned, women's colleges in the United States are not as "safe" as they had originally assumed.

At one of the convent schools I visited, I had an enlightening conversation with the upper school counselor and several faculty. Each admitted that within the past five years, the attitudes of the girls they taught had changed. Their students were now more assertive and talked about wanting careers in medicine, advertising, law, hotel management and computer science. The idea of going to the United States for a college education was quite popular among the students even though some of their parents expressed a strong desire for their daughters to stay in India. Apparently there had been a few successful business families in the community who started the trend of sending their daughters to the United States which sparked interest in the other younger students at the school. Receiving admission from a college or university in the United States brings the same kind of attention that the latest popular music from the West or European designer fashions can bring. Though the upper school counselor tried to discuss with her students some of the difficulties she perceived they could encounter upon returning to India after graduating from an American college, she explained to me that some of the more "independently-minded" students seemed just as determined to go abroad. This independence among some of the students was a phenomenon she had not encountered with previous classes. She commented on the irony of it, suggesting that these same independent students still operated with

a "locus of control" outside of themselves. Although they had strong convictions about their education abroad and future careers, they were leaving what she perceived as their major purpose in life—their marriage—up to the choice of their parents and confirmations from horoscope readings.

From the amount of concern that parents expressed about their daughters' virginity and suitability in a marriage alliance, it seems clear that the fathers of these more modern-minded daughters are still planning to give them away in a traditional alliance after their American education. The night before his daughter left for the United States to attend college, an informant's father said to the daughter, "Remember, the best gift you can give your husband when you marry, is your virginity." Although this father told me that he was concerned about his daughter being introduced to some of the American ways (i.e., meat eating, self-centeredness, disrespect for the family and elders, drinking and smoking), his biggest worry was his daughter's purity. He trusted that his daughter would make moral choices based on the value system he and his wife tried to inculcate in their children while they were maturing. However, he worried that his daughter might be taken advantage of by an insensitive American boy. Not only have Hindu fathers traditionally believed that the best gift a future wife could give to her husband would be her virginity, but they also believed that a daughter's virginity was the necessary gift for a father to give the boy's family to insure that the family line of descent continued unpolluted (Fruzzetti 1982:8). Thus in sending a daughter away to college, whether in India or the West, the parents place full trust in their daughter to take caution in her social interactions so as to insure a "pure" status when her father gives her away in marriage. Traditionally, daughters were married before the onset of

menses to assure this virgin status, but since 1955, Indian law requires the girl to be at least fifteen years of age (Jacobson 1974:120). Today Hindu families are becoming more tolerant about marrying their daughters at an older age.

In most Indian homes, discussions about sex and its purposes are never communicated between parents and their children. Traditionally, it has been the older brother's wife who informs a bride-to-be about what to expect on her wedding night (Ibid:143). In the case of my informants, none of them had been directly confronted by their parents about sex even though each grew up knowing that pre-marital sex would destroy the silent responsibility they have to their parents. Sex, to the Hindu wife, is an act performed not so much for desire or pleasure, as much as it is for the creation of children and therefore, the continuation of the male line (Fruzzetti 1982:14). Thus sexual activity is considered a prelude to motherhood---that most highly desired stage of a woman--- and yet, it is this state which embarrasses new mothers from nursing their babies before elders of either their natal or conjugal homes, not because they are ashamed of exposing their breasts but because their child represents absolute proof of sexual activity (Jacobson 1974:150).

When I asked the students and their mothers separately about the Hindu notion of sex, they became shy and in some cases ashamed even to discuss it with me. I was informed that in India to speak of sex openly is a tabu. Many mothers told me that they could not talk to their children about procreation because they, themselves, were too uncomfortable talking about it. One mother explained to me how she tried to broach the subject by deliberately placing an issue of Newsweek on the kitchen table opened to an article on herpes so that her teenage

son and daughter would see the article and read it while eating their breakfast. She remained in the adjoining room carefully listening for any discussion her children might have after reading the article. To her dismay, she overheard her children giggling and commenting on the ridiculousness of their parents' modesty. Thereafter she never again tried to address the issue with them.

Another mother shared with me how she and her husband decided, the night before their daughter was to leave to study in the United States, that they would try to confront the issue of sex with her. They were in a hotel room for the night because their daughter's plane was to leave early the next morning. The parents agreed that the father would talk with their daughter while the mother was in the bathroom getting ready for bed. The mother told me how she purposely took twice as long in the bathroom as she usually did, to insure enough time for her husband to fully explain "boy/girl relationships" to the daughter. When she came out of the bathroom, she found her husband and daughter embracing each other and lamenting the daughter's soon-to-be departure. The father said to his wife, "Have you told her about everything?" Realizing that they had not even addressed the issue of sex, the mother responded, "What do you mean?" Although she fully knew what he was asking, much to his chagrin she wanted to put him on the spot by making him be more explicit in referring to the subject. The awkwardness soon ended when the daughter interjected, "You don't need to worry about that. You forget, I'm a biology student."

While I was serving as the Foreign Student Advisor during the time these students were just entering the college, the first letter I received from any of their parents was written by a concerned mother requesting that I talk with her

daughter, as well as the other Indian students, about "dating, petting, kissing and contraceptives." The mother explained to me that talking about these issues with her daughter made her nervous and yet she felt it necessary for her "innocent eighteen-year-old daughter" to understand the facts of life. She further elaborated:

> It's not that they haven't been to "socials" and danced with boys but "dating" as such is not encouraged (to put it mildly) by Indian parents— there is no such thing as "sex education" in schools, and the girls pick up what they can or whatever their parents tell them about. I know American morals are very different—your girls know how to look after themselves and to a great extent, are blase about boys. Nobody really knows how a[n Indian] girl will react—least of all her parents. Subha has no brothers, no boyfriends, no crushes on anyone—though she did correspond with one or two male friends she'd met on a camping trip. Therefore I am all the more frightened that she may get carried away by the first boy who makes eyes at her!!

The mother apologized for being so "outspoken" about issues concerning "the opposite sex" and reassured me that not only she, but all the mothers of the Indian girls at the college would be relieved if I gave them this "little talk."

Some Indian parents feel that sex education should be taught in the school system. In an article entitled "Sex and Marriage" in Women's Era, the author suggests that if mothers cannot guide their marriageable daughters on sexual matters, then they should approach their daughter's school principal to arrange for several lectures on sex education, or even consult the family doctor and request him or her to speak with the daughter (Pankajam 1988:10). Some feel, however, that sex education in the school will arouse "premature sexual

stirrings" among the students (Ibid). The notion that naivete toward sex is the best protection from the loss of a girl's virginity seems to be widely supported among Indian parents.

Boys, on the other hand, are expected to know more about sex. In fact, an informant's male cousin told me that although boys expect to marry virgins, many boys have had pre-marital sex. "It is culturally acceptable," he explained, "And something that chaps like to brag about with their classmates. Whether or not they have actually had relations with a girl, you never know." Doranne Jacobson points out these double standards through a traditional analogy, "A woman is likened to an earthen pot which, once polluted, can never be cleansed, and a man is compared to a metal pot which is easily purified with water" (1974:121).

The image of the female in relation to sex, has many contradictory meanings in Indian society. At one extreme, Brahmanical tradition views women as shameless temptresses without self-control who are likely to go astray unless controlled by their menfolk (Jacobson 1974:135). Some high-caste men in North India limit their sexual relations with women because they see the women as having life-taking forces. They believed that having intercourse with a woman depletes their energy through the loss of semen (Ibid 148). As mentioned earlier, some Hindu women express a sense of embarrassment in their natal home over their first-born child because the infant is confirmation that the daughter has had intercourse.

On the other hand, women are also perceived as having life-giving qualities. As Madan illustrates, "The mother is the feeder and preserver of the fetus. It

is because of this fact that Hindus worship the black stone *saligrama*, the symbol of *Visnu*, the preserver, which resembles the womb in shape" (1982:105). The *Kamasutra* (a religious text composed in the third and fourth century A.D. by Brahman *Vatsyayana*) is another example of the important role sexuality has in Hindu culture. The celebrated *Kama* teachings depict a wide range of possible erotic experiences. According to Hindu philosophy, *kama* is the second aim in life (following *artha*), which encompasses the spheres of love, sex, sensual gratification, and delight (Zimmer 1951:145). It is that purpose in life which brings forth progeny, ensuring immortality and continuity in the male descent line.

Today, modern Hindu women complain about "Eve-teasing" as being the result of a "sex-starved society" (Chatterjee 1988:63). Even while bathing at a beach resort, I observed Indian women wearing *salwaar kamiz* or a *sari* to conceal their bodies which, as I was told, if left uncovered, are an open invitation for men's sexual desires. As a Hindu woman explained to me:

> I like the West because when I'm by myself walking
> in a city, doing my thing and minding my own
> business, nobody bothers me. But in India, if I'm
> in public alone, I can't go anywhere without being
> watched. But what really angers me is that I know
> men are undressing me with their eyes.

Although few of the Indian students had much interaction with boys before they left home, they soon learned that dating in the United States is a different matter. One of the first weekends of the semester, an Indian freshman awoke in the middle of the night to find that a "strange man" was sleeping in her American roommate's bed. The man turned out to be another student from a neighboring

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university who her roommate had met earlier that evening at a party. Since the American roommate happened to have another boyfriend visiting her that weekend, she and this lover were in a friend's room down the hall while the new male friend, waited for her in her own bed. To say the least, the Indian student was shocked by her roommate's private life. Other Indian students have commented on how matter-of-fact American society is when addressing sexual issues. When the concern over AIDS first flooded the mass media, one of the students was participating in a semester- long exchange program at another university. The university administration had decided to conduct several workshops on "safe sex", and as part of a promotional, each student received an invitation to the workshop series along with a sample condom. When the Indian and her Latin American friend received their invitations, they could not stop "giggling" as they opened one of the condoms to see what it looked like. The Indian student saved her condom to take back to India with her to show some of her female friends.

Other aspects of the American college social scene which surprised the Indian students included: the amount of drinking which occurred, the unconcealed homosexuality which existed, and the apathy some American students took toward attending classes—classes for which their parents paid much money.

On the other hand, the students and their parents were pleased by the scope of extra-curricular activities available to students at American college campuses. One student commented, "Education in India means just education, but in the United States it includes so much more." Leadership was the "buzzword" among the faculty and staff while I was an advisor at the college. The philosophy we held was to provide the students with many leadership opportunities

through various student government positions, extra-curricular organizations as well as academic programs. By encouraging students to take on leadership positions during college, they could build self-confidence and learn to be self-directed which would be useful tools when facing the Western professional world. The college prided itself in educating women who were holding top managerial posts in large multi-national companies or investment institutions, who were lawyers, physicians, or scientists conducting cutting edge research on cancer, and who were highly visible in the political arena on Capitol Hill. The atmosphere at the college could not help but to also influence the Indian students on campus. Many agreed that while they considered themselves to be fairly independent before leaving India, their American experience enhanced that characteristic. Other characteristics which the students mentioned they acquired while studying in the United States included being self-reliant, pragmatic, frank, dependable, confident, assertive, and ambitious. As one informant said to me:

> I have become a lot more aware of myself as an individual, rather than what everyone else's expectations are of me. Now I think for myself and I'm not easily persuaded by others. In India, everyone expects that at age 18 you will get married. But in the United States, everyone I met made decisions for themselves. They took charge of their lives because after all, it is their life.

In summary, it seems evident that parents choose to send their daughters to the United States for higher education to insure a better future—a future which capitalizes on the best of both Western and the traditional Hindu worlds. However, the risks involved in achieving this better standard of living are high. Not only are parents gambling with the possibility that in the United States

their daughter could be introduced to smoking, drinking, or taking drugs, but of greater concern is the daughter's sexuality. In addition to these factors which challenge the physical state of the daughter, other more subtle changes, such as learned independence or individualism, are also the price parents must pay. The following poem is a good example of how a daughter's sense of self-identity could come into conflict with the expectations of a more traditionally-minded mother.

Mother's found a husband for me,
She says he has a good degree,
From a fine family she says,
Ideal for me.
But does he share my political views?
Will he discuss with me the causes of
  socialism and feminism,
'Your horoscopes match exactly,
And his parents come from a very good
  village in India.'
But will he come with me on demos against
  apartheid and the Bomb?
And will he listen with me
To records by The Style Council and Billy
  Bragg?
'He is a decent young man,
And just look at all that gold his mother
  wears.'
But will he help me in my struggles, support
  me in my career?
Will he still want me if I tell him of my
  lovers past?
'Yes, yes what a perfect match,
Fate and destiny have been so good to you,
How could you ever question that?'

(Daksha Mistry; in Vaid 1987:10)

One might ask if striving to bridge both a traditional and modern way of life is worth all the risks and tensions involved, especially in the case of sending a daughter to the West for higher education.1

CHAPTER FIVE: BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

> While the leopard gets wet crossing the river, she
> does not wash out her spots.
>
> (A. E. Upodor; in Behrens and Bennett 1986:26)

In the course of this paper I have addressed several of the tensions the young Indian women in my study are undergoing as a result of being "betwixt and between" two different cultures and stages of life. My informants are in a period of transition. They are experiencing a state of liminality between two more stable boundaries, which for the traditional Hindu woman is defined in terms of the household---her identity is established as either a daughter in her father's household, or as a daughter (once she gives birth to a child) in her husband's father's household (Fruzzetti 1982:127). In this traditional scheme, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, for the female, are neatly drawn. Marriage functions as the rite of passage which transforms the Hindu girl into a "ritual adult" fully incorporated in Indian society (Madan 1982:115). Moreover, marriage brings about the highly valued stage of the householder (*grhastha*), and thus it is considered the most important life cycle ritual (Ibid. 111).

Soon after the onset of menses, girls are married off so that the possibility of losing their virginity during this liminal state between childhood to adulthood is minimized (Jacobson 1974:120). As Veena Das suggests, "Margins are considered to be dangerous in all societies," because they threaten "the

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ordering of everyday reality" (1976:252). According to Hindu tradition, a daughter who loses her virginity before the marriage rite of passage puts herself and her family in jeopardy. For it is the unwed mother in Indian society who is considered impure and therefore, inauspicious (Reynolds 1980).

The Indian girl who leaves her father's household to continue her education at the university level, experiences a prolonged liminality. Although still perceived as a member of her natal home, during her college years away from that home the girl learns to be more independent. This is especially true when Indian girls pursue a degree in the United States. Not only is the process of developing a sense of independence and self-identity encouraged by academic institutions in the West, it is also valued overall by American society. In a traditional Indian household, an incoming wife who has developed a sense of her own identity poses problems for the other women in the household whose sense of being exists as members of a corporate unit. In summarizing Coomaraswamy's paper on the status of Indian women (1948), Dr. Madan suggests that, "within the Indian tradition...every woman is given the opportunity to be a woman, to win her freedom, through self-realization [as belonging to a collective] rather than through self- expression" (personal communication, February 1989). Therefore in making a transition from her father's household to her husband's household, it is best for a girl to be "homely" so that she can be easily molded into being a contributing member of her conjugal home.

In light of the traditional expectations placed on Hindu brides, some Hindu families are leery to bring into the household a girl who was sent away to the United States for higher education. Not only is the girl's virgin status in

question, but also the possibility exists that she has developed a strong sense of independence and self-identity. On the other hand, the parents of these Western educated girls are tolerant of their daughters' learned independence and argue that this characteristic is in fact helpful to modern Indian girls in case the girl's future marriage would end abruptly. The issue of pre-marital sex, however, is treated by parents in a more conservative way; they expect that their daughter will honor them by remaining virgins until marriage. Of the six families included in my study, the parents did not discuss the issue of sex with their daughters until shortly before the daughters were leaving to study abroad. In some cases the parents were too embarrassed to broach the subject with their daughters.

By looking at the lives of these six informants, their families, and community of friends, my intent has not been to make any broad generalizations about urban Indian families, but rather I have used these families to illustrate how traditional values exist in juxtaposition to modern ways of life. For it seems most evident in the family lives of these young women who have directly been exposed to the West, that an eclectic approach of combining "the best of both worlds"---as one informant's mother described it to me---is used as a coping strategy to incorporate both Eastern and Western life-styles. The small population from which I have drawn my data is only but a minuscule segment of Indian society--- a segment comprised of families who are able to afford to send their children abroad for education. These families belong to the successful, upwardly mobile class of professionals whose caste restrictions and regional backgrounds have been overshadowed by more modern modes of social interaction as a result of having moved into the Indian urban areas. They have learned to be

"two-faced," as M. N. Srinivas suggests, "with one face turned toward their own society" in maintaining some of their traditional values and life-styles, "while the other turned toward the West" as they carry out their professional roles (1966:80). Clearly the process of modernizing to these Indians is not occurring as a clear-cut transformation, but rather in a piecemeal fashion (Madan, letter to the author, February 1989). Although this blending of the "best of both worlds" serves as a coping strategy, the transformational process bears its own unique tensions.

Upon graduating from college in the United States, the students in my study are now faced with several choices about their future. The options they have discussed with me as likely future realities include: marriage and children, a career, or further education in graduate school. These options are not mutually exclusive of each other and in fact, several of my informants foresee various combinations of these options in their futures.

Each of my informants expects to marry and have children; yet the type of marriage (arranged or a love- marriage) is still unclear to them. Many of these students informed me that they knew their parents were actively looking for a suitable match but no arranged marriages had yet occurred, except in the case of one student. This student was the oldest of the group (age 24) and as she explained to me in a letter, "Mama kept telling me that she was extremely worried about me and wanted me to settle down as soon as possible...She explained how important it was for me to settle down now, before I got too old." Another mother informed me that girls who reach 24/25 years of age are too old to be married off to boys of good families. She said, "If my daughter doesn't marry

soon, we may be able to find her a nice boy, but probably not from a good family. Wealthy families want to marry their sons to young girls." From the discussions I had with various Indians, it seems that for college educated girls the best time for marriage occurs between the ages of 20 and 24. Since parents want their daughters to marry into households which are just as good, if not better, than that of their own, parents are concerned about their daughters marrying at the proper age. In the case cited above, the daughter was "happily pursuing her career" in business and making plans to attend a graduate program in the United States to study business administration. She was living with her brother and cousin in California and returned home to see her parents for a few weeks. She writes:

> When I went to New Delhi, to Mama's best friend's place, it [my life] was a different story. Mama's friend, Laxmi Aunty, has two daughters who are married and very well settled...Anyway Aunty asked me about my future plans and explained to me how important it was that I be married....I agreed to see the eligible suitors. I was to leave on July 30th and I met my fiance on July 28th....After Laxmi Aunty negotiated with both parties, it was agreed that a wedding would take place. The priest was called in the evening and our horoscopes were matched. The stars are very compatible. The priest ('Pandit') told Mama that if an engagement were to take place, it could only take place tomorrow (July 29th), since it was an auspicious day. Else we would have to wait to get engaged in October. So Ma said yes at 7:30...at 11:30 I agreed. Everyone was told in the morning. All the sweets, the fruit, my sari, the ring, etc., etc. was bought. Within three hours everything was arranged and at 6:30 pm we were engaged!!!

Shortly after the engagement, this informant returned to California to complete several projects she had underway in her job, to pack her belongings,

and resign from her position. Several months later she returned to India to be married and is now living with her husband and his family, participating in the maintenance of the joint household.

While this woman's experience so far has been good (she has told me that she "thanks her lucky stars" for marrying into such a good family), other women have told me about the difficulties they have experienced in adjusting to their conjugal homes. A highly educated Indian woman in her forties discussed with me some of the problems she has had with her marriage. This woman has gained recognition for publishing several children's books, as well as a weekly editorial column in the city newspaper. Yet she claims that her husband will not acknowledge her identity separate from his own public persona as a successful businessman. She is bitter about her relationship with her husband and explained to me how she could not imagine why a woman would ever marry a second time after having to "put up with" her first husband. In her words, "Once you get burned, why would you want to get burned again?" This woman continues to encourage her 19-year-old daughter to attend college in the United States because she thinks it will insure a better future. However, her daughter responds, "What good has a good education been for you, but frustration. Look at you, you are a bright woman, and it only causes trouble for Papa. I would rather not be so highly qualified, so that maybe I can have a better marriage."

I asked another unhappily married woman, who nostalgically reflected on the years she was a college student in Bombay before her marriage, why she agreed to the arranged marriage. (She had been able to dissuade her parents from earlier negotiations with other families, arguing that she wanted to complete her

degree---which up until the time of her marriage was still in progress.) She explained, "Marriage is a stage which every Indian woman must go through. It isn't necessarily something you want at the time it comes, but you go through with it, so you can be part of the main stream of society."

A love-marriage is a possibility for each of my informants but only one set of parents actually admitted that they would not mind their daughter to marry a boy of her choice. This informant's parents themselves had a love-marriage---the only love-marriage among the six sets of parents. However, they also informed me that they were looking at potential matches. These parents were the parents of one of the students I mentioned earlier who had continued her relationship with her boyfriend since high school. While the parents claimed they would not object to a love-marriage for their daughter, they did strongly object to the possibility of her marrying this boyfriend.

In general, the difficulty that a girlfriend has in ending a relationship seems to be tied into a deep sense of loyalty to that person whom she first loved. An informant told me that girls choose to marry their childhood boyfriends after many years of "dating" them because they do not want others to consider the relationship to be just an "affair." "They would rather have a 'relationship' which ends up in marriage." Similarly, a young Indian man explained to me that he had a childhood girlfriend who has since gone abroad to the United States for college. He had met another Hindu girl whom he thought he loved and would like to marry. Even though he no longer deeply cared for this other girl, he felt obligated to marry her even after six years, because he loved her first. When I asked one of the students why she would choose to marry her

boyfriend instead of a boy her parents had chosen for her who may be from a
"better family," she responded:

> I learned to be independent since attending
> college. What boy in an arranged marriage would
> put up with my independence and career aspirations?
> And what would his parents say? Even though Ram
> stayed here for college, he has grown with me. I
> know sometimes he doesn't like some of the
> attitudes I learned from the States, but he accepts
> them anyway. I know Ram would give me the most
> freedom in my career.

Some of my informants are furthering their education by attending graduate
school. I have been told by several different Indians, that sending daughters to
graduate school is an acceptable way for wealthy parents to "buy time" if they
have not yet been able to find a suitable family for their daughter's marriage.
Sending a daughter away from home for graduate studies has also been used as a
nonconfrontational method of keeping the daughter away from an unsuitable
hometown boyfriend. (I have yet to see this "method" work successfully.) Age is
a major issue which concerns parents about their daughters continuing their
education at the graduate level. As Mr. K.S. Nair, the Deputy Director of the
United States Educational Foundation of India (USEFI) explained,

> "We don't see it like you Americans who stop for a
> few years, get work experience and then go back to
> school. Girls, especially, should do their
> undergraduate and graduate education back to back
> while they are still young. In India, parents of
> girls have to worry about the proper marriageable
> age" (interview, February 18, 1988).

Some of the students in my study questioned whether they should return to the
United States for graduate school or try to get admission into one of the Indian

graduate schools. They felt that by attending one of the top Indian institutions of graduate studies, they could be assured of better job placement in India upon graduation. However, as one informant explained to me, since she attended college in the United States she would have to take a whole year to adequately prepare for the highly competitive national entrance examination. On the other hand, if she wanted to gain admission to one of the top MBA programs in the United States, she would still need to break her studies by taking at least a year, if not more, to gain work experience. Although either option could qualify her for placement in a respectable managerial post upon graduation, neither was attractive to her parents because of the additional time involved.

However it is not necessary for women to have a graduate degree in order to be hired in a "respectable" position in India. As the Deputy Director of USEFI informed me, "young women are obtaining jobs after college graduation because they are generally more reliable and committed to their work than young men" (Ibid.). He pointed out that an American education is considered prestigious and that graduates from Western colleges and universities will probably be successful professionally not only because of their own accomplishments, but also because of their family's contacts. Banks are likely places of employment for Indian women graduates. Mr. Nair told me that an increasing number of banks, both foreign and national, are being established in India, and that women who have graduated from American colleges are likely candidates for positions in the banks because of their learned analytical skills (Ibid.). It is interesting to note that four of the six students in my study had each worked in a foreign bank (Citibank, Grinleys, Bank of Paris) in India as part of a summer internship program the college required for business majors. In fact, one of the students became a

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permanent bank employee as a result of her internship at the bank. The parents of these students spoke with pride about their daughters' work experience in one of these reputable banks. I was told on separate occasions by various individuals of the upwardly mobile class that the acceptable type of employment for women in their social standing includes health care, teaching, and banking. When one of my informants was offered an administrative position in a five star hotel upon graduation, her parents were distressed because they felt that a hotel was not the "proper" place for their daughter to be working. Later I learned that in India among the upper middle class there is a stigma attached to women who work in hotels. As a male friend of an informant put it, "Male guests think female hotel employees come as a perk with their rooms." Although this is an extreme example, it seems that for the young women in my study, their choice of profession is greatly influenced by what their family's social group determines as "acceptable" or "proper" fields of work.

Although there are several directions from which my informants can choose, it is evident that their future is, to some extent, determined by the interplay of their society's traditional expectations, and their own recently experienced Western views of life. How the balance of these two extremes becomes fleshed out over time is a paradigm for future study. I have entitled this concluding chapter "Betwixt and Between" because I perceive my informants in a phase of "developmental transition" where they are 'testing out' or 'trying on' new attitudes and lifestyles. The parents of my informants elude to their daughters' liminality as being a result of a transformational process from girlhood into womanhood. The daughters, on the other hand, acknowledge this stage as a time of self-definition, trying to incorporate both traditional and modern values.

Among the six students, several clearly articulated the difficulties they were undergoing as a result of taking on some of the new values they learned in the West. Some of these students had direct confrontations with their parents about the choices they were making concerning their future. After several long hours of expressing to me both the appreciation she had for her learned independence and self-confidence, as well as the anger she carried as a result of her parents not accepting her new attitude, an informant threw her arms up in despair and said, "Who am I, but a stranger in two cultures." This young woman, as well as several other informants, explained to me that they no longer saw themselves as closely linked to their natal family as they had been earlier. In one case it was because of a falling out the daughter had with her parents over the daughter's social behavior in the United States. Several others simply felt it was because they had been away from home for so long, and that the gap in time left them unaware of the day-to-day issues which serve to incorporate them as active members of the family. For whatever reasons, these young women were not identifying themselves with their natal home and yet (keeping the traditional view of Indian "womanhood" in mind), they had not yet a conjugal home in which to establish their identity.

While the process of gaining a sense of independence and individuality was never expressed to me by the students as being something they perceived as wrong, their parents saw it as a problem because it caused a separation in their relationship to the daughter. One of the students told me about the conflict she had with her mother when her parents came to the United States for their daughter's college graduation. The parents had not seen the daughter for some time and were surprised to see the way their daughter looked when she met them at

the airport. Later during a heated discussion which lasted late into the night, the mother said to her daughter:

> Look at you. I am ashamed to say you are my own daughter. Who will marry you like this? When I got off the plane and saw you, I wanted to get right back on and return home. Why don't you come back to India and let Mama take care of you. You don't depend on me anymore. If you did, you wouldn't look like this. I don't know what I've done in my past life to deserve this.

Knowing that she could not return to the mother/child relationship she had with her mother when she was living at home, the daughter felt ever more strongly about remaining in the United States for graduate studies. In this example, as in other family situations I saw being played out in India, the parents seem to be having a difficult time seeing their daughters as having separate identities from the family. Several informants claimed that their parents were trying to make decisions for them, as if they were still children. Even though they saw themselves as adults, they are not yet traditionally considered adults until they are married. Treating their daughters as adults seemed difficult for the parents because they (especially the mothers) did not experience such a prolonged liminality between childhood and marriage. The mothers of my informants found their identity first in their natal home, and then they established their adult identity in their husband's family home. Each of these mothers, except for one, lived in her natal home up until the day she was married, at which point she moved into her conjugal home. There was no opportunity for these mothers to establish their own sense of individualism or independence, such as their daughters were doing.

Although these parents chose to send their daughters to the United States for higher education, each were struggling, to some degree, with the daughter's prolonged stage of liminality. Between the onset of menses and the ritual of marriage, the daughter's virginity is of concern to her father. Because of the prolonged liminal period the students in my study experienced, the parents of these students had even more time to worry about their daughter's purity; the longer this marginality, the greater chance there existed for their chastity to be threatened. Furthermore, the intensity of the daughter's learned independence was something they did not anticipate. Upon their daughter's graduation, the best option they saw for her future was marriage. By marrying, the daughter would be wholly incorporated as an adult into mainstream society, the father would have fulfilled his traditional Hindu obligation, and the mother would no longer receive the social pressures concerning her daughter's increasing age, vulnerability of becoming impure, childhood boyfriend, etc. However, because of the daughter's learned independence, she was not yet interested in marriage, but rather was anxious to establish herself as an individual through continued education in a graduate program or in a career. In breaking tradition by sending their daughters to the United States for higher education, these parents have interrupted the clearly defined path that an Indian girl takes from childhood into adulthood. The wedding ceremony, which traditionally neatly drew the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, will occur for these students later in life---after they have had a chance to define their own sense of identity.

This process of self-definition is antithetical to the culturally established Indian scheme of womanhood. I would like to suggest that the difficulty these families are having in incorporating the Western attitude of

independence with their traditional expectations and obligations is due to the fact that the notion of independence challenges the Hindu tenet of what it means to be a woman, which plays an integral part in the Indian social structure. Other attitudes and values, such as materialism, exist in harmony with Hindu tradition in the life-styles of my informants because the new is just an extension of the old (for example, materialism seems to be a modern version of the notion of *artha*). An eclectic approach of blending attitudes and life-styles allows for Indians to incorporate parts of the modern world in their lives which are grounded in Hindu tradition, rather than uproot one's cultural background. Naturally there exist degrees of tension between which of the old values and attitudes are overshadowed by the new, and which remain side by side. Those aspects of the West, such as independence, which are in opposition to certain fundamental elements in the traditional framework, pose the greatest challenge to my informants and their families. In short, the process of transformation is messy, and while the young Indian woman gets wet in crossing the water, she does not wash away her marks---marks of tradition.

ENDNOTE

1. In response to this question, the parents of the first group of South Asian women who attended the college claimed that their daughters had always been the "adventuresome type." These young women had long been interested in travel, perhaps because their fathers had either studied abroad or did business abroad on occasion. A guidance counselor in Calcutta who advised several of the students, told me that the type of Indian girl who attends college in the West is a "well-rounded, independently-minded student." She is not usually at the top of her class academically, but rather she has interests outside academics and is very competitive in all fields. The counselor further explained, "This type of student is outgoing, resourceful, enterprising...There is something in her background which gives her this itch to go abroad." These first few students made up the "pioneer group" whose experiences abroad sparked the interest of other students in later classes. Of the students in the succeeding classes, they and their parents were more knowledgeable about the risks involved in studying abroad because they were able to discuss their concerns with their friends whose daughters constituted the "pioneer group."

The idea of risk taking is not a new concept to these families. After all, their professional life in the business arena involves gambling with risks on a daily basis. Could it be that their fathers' enterprising and opportunistic attitudes in their business affairs were also being carried over into the decisions they made concerning their daughters' personal lives? In particular, their decision to send their daughters abroad for higher education? Two points can be made in support of this argument. First, on many occasions I was told by my informants' families that they considered the act of sending a daughter to college as an "investment" in that daughter's future. The expected outcome is a better marriage proposal. In the cases of my informants, this meant receiving marriage proposals from families who also valued certain aspects of a Western lifestyle. Moreover, in every case of the students included in my study (all six informants as well as many minor informants who were either new or prospective students at the college), their parents' decisions to send their daughters abroad hinged on the financial aid package the college could offer them. In these cases, applying for admission to colleges and universities in the United States was one of several measures taken to see what future options where available to them. I was told that once admission into an American college materialized, then the family began to think seriously about the opportunity of sending their daughter overseas. Yet, it was not until the scholarship was granted did the parents and student recipient consider the option a reality and become excited about it. Because the scholarship grants were quite substantial (in some cases as much as the father's yearly salary), several of my informants and their parents said, "Despite some of our concerns, it was an opportunity we just couldn't pass up."

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