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ON THE EDGE OF THE AUSPICIOUS: THE PRACTICE AND MEANING OF GENDER AND CASTE IN RURAL NEPAL'S LOW-CASTE HOUSEHOLDS AND SOCIETY

By

Mary Margaret Cameron

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ABSTRACT

ON THE EDGE OF THE AUSPICIOUS:
THE PRACTICE AND MEANING OF GENDER AND CASTE
IN RURAL NEPAL'S LOW-CASTE HOUSEHOLDS AND SOCIETY

By

Mary Margaret Cameron

This is a study of gender and caste as practiced by the people of lower caste in western Nepal. It uses ethnographic and quantitative data based on fieldwork carried out in Nepal in 1988/89 to demonstrate how gender and caste, as both cultural practice and social position, are mutually constituted within relationships manifest in the household and the community. That the low-caste household is embedded in community-wide land-based class relations, the analysis is situated within the context of landholding relations in the peasant community of Bhalara in western Nepal. The study focuses on women of low-caste to show how gender and caste are manipulated to sustain and reproduce forms of social hierarchy, as well as resistance to domination.

This is the first study of its kind to systematically address the problem of gender relations and caste hierarchy in Nepal. The majority of the ethnographic literature on Nepal is about non-Hindu groups of Tibeto-Burman ethnic minorities. The lower caste artisans and farmers who are the subjects of the study include ironsmiths, gold- and silversmiths, basketweavers, masons, former palace guards, tailors, leatherworkers, and potters, entertainers, and female prostitutes. What links these groups together is their ritual impurity vis a vis their upper caste counterparts. Thus, while addressing the theoretical

question of the relationship between gender and caste, the study also provides extensive ethnographic detail on the culture of the lower castes.

The study looks at gender and caste within the history of landholding relations and their impact on current patterns of productive work; patron-client relations between upper and lower caste families; forms and meanings of women's productive and reproductive labor; honor and marriage among the lower castes; and sexuality and childbirth. The analysis concludes that the social and cultural relationship between gender and caste is one of reciprocal articulation and mutual appropriation, as well as differentiating autonomy and reification.

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control. Dr. Rita Gallin is responsible for having directed me toward that single idea, found in the work of Verena Stolcke on the relationship between gender and social hierarchy. Dr. Gallin's assistance was unlimited. Her unmatched knowledge of gender theory made our discussions interesting and challenging, and her brilliant editing skills helped polish the dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. William Derman who agreed to serve on the committee during its final stage, and to Dr. Paul Muller-Ortega in the Department of Religious Studies for agreeing to serve as the outside reader.

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INTRODUCTION: THE PEOPLE, THEIR PLACE, AND RESEARCH METHODS

"I will try to talk well. I came because my sister-in-law asked me to. My clothes are all torn, I had nothing nice to wear. I have no *naata maata* [valuable possessions]. What do poor people need with *naata maata*? Nothing. If I do not have something nice then I will just have to wear what I do have. My *man* [soul; heart] is big, but my clothes are not good."

- Dharu Damai, 50, Gugai village, 1989

The Problem

This is a study of gender and caste as practiced by the people of lower caste in western Nepal. The study uses ethnographic and quantitative data to demonstrate how gender and caste, as both cultural practice and social position, are mutually constituted within relationships manifest in the household and the community. The analysis identifies the relationship between gender and caste as constituted through certain cultural practices that reciprocally articulate and mutually appropriate issues of gender and issues of caste on the one hand, and other cultural practices that differentiate and separate gender from caste so as to enunciate and reify the autonomy of one or the other. Because the low-caste household is embedded in community-wide land-based class relations, the analysis is situated within the structure of landholding relations in the peasant community of Bhalara. The study focuses on women of low-caste to show how gender and caste are manipulated to sustain and reproduce predominant social relations and hierarchy.

This is the first study of its kind to systematically address the problem of gender relations and caste hierarchy in Nepal. The majority of the ethnographic literature on Nepal is about non-Hindu groups, the so-called Tibeto-Burman ethnic minorities: the Sherpa (Fisher 1979; Ortner 1978), the Tamang (Holmberg 1989), the northern Tibetans (Levine 1988; Haimendorf 1966), the Magar (Fisher 1987; Hitchcock 1966; Molnar 1981), and the Newar (Toffin 1977). Emphasis on ethnic groups has led to a misrepresentation of the cultural landscape of Nepal as more Tibeto-Burman (and therefore "Buddhist") than "Hindu" (and therefore caste-

organized), in spite of the fact that the majority of people in Nepal call themselves Hindus and rank themselves in three out of the four caste categories (a fourth, in the Nepalese system, comprises the ethnic groups). Notable exceptions to the predominantly Tibeto-Burman studies of Nepalese people are Bennett (1983), Acharya and Bennett (1981), Borgstrom (1980), and Caplan (1972). These latter studies address women of high-caste and relegate lower caste persons into a residual category of "untouchable and others" (Bennett 1983; Acharya and Bennett 1981), or address political conflict and change such that lower caste groups appear as victims of high-caste political aspirations and machinations (Caplan 1972; Borgstrom 1980) rather than political, social, or cultural actors in their own right.

The choice to study women of low caste was neither neutral nor easy. Had I tried to do research on the "caste system"' in Nepal twenty or even ten years ago, I would have been prohibited by a Nepalese government wishing to deny its traditions of dominating practices. In prior contact with people of Bhalara I had seen such practices on a daily basis in the contacts between my upper caste landlady and many lower caste families and people. Interested in the lives of women in Nepal, and the seasonal flow of peasant agricultural life, I came to learn, through this research, the critical part that people of low-caste play in the continuity of that flow. As intercaste land disputes surfaced, as infants were birthed through the expertise of low-caste midwives, as I participated more in the marriages and rituals, play and work of people of low-caste, they grew before me much larger than the humble, subservient, and silent "beggars" who tried the patience of my landlady at times, only to recede amidst upper caste privilege.

From the start there seemed to be a social paradox within Bhalara's gender and caste systems worth investigating. Women of low caste are ritually impure (according to the high-caste view), but possess what the Nepalese regard as social autonomy and economic power. Women of lower

caste can move freely throughout the village, hire themselves out as daily wage laborers, are public entertainers, and can remarry if widowed. This social autonomy is coupled with wage earning in many forms – cash, in-kind, daily, seasonal, *riti-bhagya*. From this observation flows the central question of this dissertation: What is the relationship between gender and caste such that women of lower caste can lead lives that appear so different from the lives of women of upper caste?

The conceptual difficulty with addressing this problem is finding a satisfying model to explain how the 'parts' of gender and caste fit together. One way to conceptualize the dialectic effect of gender and caste on a single individual or group of persons is to think of competing statuses, of rankings that leave one 'low' on one system, but 'high' on another (Stolcke 1988). These systems are not reducible one to the other, though they can be translated into the language of another. Thus the language and practice of gender at certain points merges with the language and practice of caste. This framework worked initially to ferret out the features of gender and caste as they impact on individuals. However, once the complex manner in which gender and caste operate in people's lives and in their actions began unravelling, I had to abandon this "ladder" approach for one more "holistic". At this point, the study transformed into one of how social relationships are constituted through gender and caste.

The purpose of this study is to examine how gender and caste are mutually constituting domains of social experience, how the experience of gender is altered within the context of caste, and vice versa. To examine the nature of intercaste and gender relations within the peasant economy I focus on Nepalese peasant women of low caste, a little-understood group in South Asian studies. Low-caste women are an analytically interesting and relevant group in which to study the relationship between the hierarchies of gender and caste for two

reasons. First, they are structurally at the 'bottom' of three domains of social stratification: caste, gender, and class. Secondly, low-caste women are of interest to the anthropology of South Asia because little is known about them culturally. The implied portrait of untouchable women by South Asian scholars is that they have more freedom and autonomy than women of high-caste because they experience fewer social and behavioral restrictions due to their ritual impurity (Dumont 1970; Allen 1982; Kolenda 1982; Bennett 1983; Sharma 1980). Undocumented and reductive, this view erases the myriad of intervening and complex cultural and social values, practices, relationships, and meanings that indelibly write the narrative of the low caste woman.

The Title

Corresponding to what fluctuates as reductive representation or nonrepresentation of women of lower caste in the literature on gender and the literature on caste in South Asia, and the dominating practices of the upper castes over those of lower caste, I have titled the study On the Edge of the Auspicious. The intended polysemic feature of the title directs us to multiple images and ideas. First is the idea of marginality conveyed through the geographical image of "edge". As low-castes, persons are marginalized ideologically, ritually, economically, socially, and politically. As female persons in Hindu society they suffer the same fate. Yet "edge" is an in-between state, and bears an image of possibility, relation between states, emergence, uncertainty, and redefinition. These descriptives appropriately characterize many aspect of the lives of women and men of low caste. "Edge" also refers to the land, the vast, unending terraces of the agrarian community. Thus, "edge" refers to social and economic marginality in the context of the sculpted, appropriated land in Bhalara's peasant economy.

Auspicious, *subha*, is an image drawn from the ethnographic context. Auspiciousness refers to "time and temporal events in relation to particular categories of people", and to "places, objects, and persons

connected with [those times]", (Madan 1985,12-13). Thus, auspiciousness involves spaces, time, and 'things' (people, objects) which, if connected in proper and appropriate ways bear well-being, happiness, health, and 'balance'. Auspiciousness is, therefore conceptually different from the impurity of *jaat*, although there is overlap since the caste status of Brahmin bears much more potential for auspiciousness than does the caste status of Damai, for example, a lower caste *jaat*. (Refer to Table A.1 in the Appendix for information of those objects and events that can bear auspiciousness, and those that can bear impurity.)

Bhalara's low-caste population is situated in a system that marginalizes them from many collective auspicious events. Nonetheless, in their own religious practices and beliefs, and in their subculture, the people of low-caste continue, not indifferently, to bring auspiciousness to their lives. Finally, regarding the theoretical aim of this study, which is to demonstrate how gender and caste are related, I suggest that the planes of gender and caste themselves touch surface to surface, edge to edge, in their movements of mutual articulation, appropriation, and differentiation.

Organization of Chapters

In chapter two I lay out the theoretical foundation for the study and define the concept of the household, differentiating it from its sometimes overlapping meaning with family and patriline. In chapter three I address the relationship of caste and gender within the history of landholding relations and social relations of production. Patrilineal inheritance of land in South Asian Hindu society bears significantly on the organization of rural society and its socioeconomic relationships. The history of the social relations of production in Bhalara, landholding, and the development of the feudal-like *riti-bhagya* (patron-client) system provide the context within which gender and caste divisions of labor in contempory Bhalara are discussed. In chapter three, I focus on the many forms of lower caste women's labor in

agricultural and artisan production that contribute to household provisioning, and the cultural value of that work.

Turning from production relations to those of reproduction of the household and its members, chapters four, five, and six addresses gender relations in the family. I demonstrate how gender is differentially embedded in the ideologies of caste and patriline. A focus on honor and its relationship with gendered ideas about duty, *dharma*, "sin", *paap*, and sexuality illuminate conceptual levels of the sex-gender system in Bhalara. In chapter four I describe the appropriation of sexual metaphors in gender antagonism and conflict, and the articulation between gender relations, sexuality, and work. Next, in chapter five, I describe alternative forms of low-caste marriage. A focus on the practice of "selling daughters" allows further examination into how gender and caste are construed through kinship. In chapter six I turn to the biological reproduction of the *jaat*, the patriline, and the household through the bearing and raising of children. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I propose a framework for conceptualizing the mutual constitution of caste and gender. Drawing from the prior descriptions and analyses, I suggest that processes of autonomy, reification, and appropriation are at work in constituting gender through caste, and caste through gender.

The Place

Bhalara is the local name for the seat of a former kingdom located in Bajhang District of Seti Zone in what is referred to as far western Nepal. The former kingdom of Bhalara was one of many such lineage-based ruling principalities in Nepal that enjoyed varying degrees of sovereignty and that figure importantly in local people's concepts of politics and government. Bhalara is at an average altitude of 4500'(as is Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal and the seat of national government), and enjoys rich seasonal changes from cold winters to hot dry springs that erupt into many rainy months of summer monsoon. The

most spectacular season in Bhalara is autumn when the brilliant green and yellowing rice is ready for harvest, the days are crisp and sunny, the nights cool and comfortable, the harvest ripe, and the mountains spectacular.

Bhalara is an isolated region, accessible only by foot, and, from Kathmandu, by plane. Dry goods are portered into Bhalara from India to the south, journeys taking one month. (See Table A.2 in the Appendix for the main commodities sold in Bhalara). The people of Bhalara are friendly to outsiders and strangers, but they are thankful they never see any of the many tourists that flock to Nepal throughout the year. They do recall a group of Japanese butterfly collectors who appeared for a brief sojourn two decades ago (some villagers thought they were collecting the winged insects to eat), and a more recent mountain-climbing expedition from Colorado which passed through on their way to an unsuccessful attempt to scale one of the three highest and as yet unconquered western Himalayan peaks, Api Himal.

The people of Bhalara call themselves *gauko manchay*, village hill people. Their clustered hamlets of stone, wood, and mud houses dot the sides of rolling and ever-rising hills that peak in the western Himalayan mountains, and flatten and descend to the Gangetic plain in the distant south. The vast snowcapped peaks are visible from only the highest vantage points in the surrounding area, but the mountains frame the identity of these people as hill peasants – small-scale farmers who use no mechanized or capitalized means of production, have little capital for exchange purposes, and have a high population density to feed and house. What one is able to see from every place in Bhalara are steep and narrow terraced slopes, green with fertile crops of summer rice or winter wheat, and brown in the late spring and fall between growing seasons. Connecting the hamlets are a myriad of human and animal footpaths cutting across fields and up the sides of hills, guiding people to and from their fields, their neighbors' homes, and more

distant sites. There are no roads in Bhalara (or anywhere to the north of the Terai, thus making this far western part of Nepal the most remote and difficult to regularly access by any means of transport other than foot and airplane) and there is no electricity or running water inside their homes.

Of the ten villages in Bhalara, seven were chosen for the research because of their low-caste communities. These seven are Haat, Kot, Dubaali, Sadil, Seralagau, Gugai, and Pikhet. Maps of the seven villages are included at the end of this chapter.

The people of Bhalara situate their community in relation to the rest of the world with geographical reference to Tibet and India. Tibet to the north is a place of pilgrimage. The Himalayan mountain top, Manesurowa, where Lord Shiva spent thousands of years in deep meditation, is just over the border in Tibet. The lake at the foot of the peak is regarded with special reverence and some villagers have made the two-week long treacherous journey to its banks for sacred water. India is also a place of pilgrimage, but is more often discussed as a place of gainful employ – a country of opportunities not available in the foothills of the Himalayas.

The people of Bhalara have many conceptual categories of places and spaces. For women there is the natal home and her husband's home; for men, there are the places of trade, employment, and political activity, such as India and the district center Chainpur; and for all persons, there are those places of spiritual or religious significance, such as Khaptad Lekh, Manesworura in Tibet, and temple sites in India. Each of these categories have a different and distinct set of meanings attached to them.

THE LOW-CASTE PEOPLE OF Bhalara

The People: Language, Caste, and Culture

The people of Bhalara speak Bajhangi, a "dialect" of Nepali, the national language of Nepal. Nepali and Bajhangi are linguistically similar to Hindi so that most villagers understand Hindi. Nepali is the language used in school, and because few woman and persons of lower caste attend school, Bajhangi was the primary language used during research. The people of Bhalara feel a close affinity with India because it has been an important place of travel and employment, and is much closer than the important Nepalese urban centers of Kathmandu, Pokhara, and many souther Terai cities. To give an idea of their association with India, more people understand Hindi than Nepali language.

Caste ranking in Bhalara is similar to that found in India and the rest of Nepal and is based on relative ritual purity. In the dissertation I focus on the groups of low caste rank; thus, I first discuss their position in Nepal's caste hierarchy. What links the low-caste groups together is their ritual impurity relative to those above them. Although there are many arguments within caste theory about what makes the low-castes 'low' (and these are subsequently examined in the following chapter), locally they are labelled *nachunay manchay* or *jaat*, "not touchable people" (to those of higher caste); and *saano* or *talo jaati*, small or low 'caste'.

In addition to their untouchable status in relation to those of high-caste, there is ranking among the low-caste groups themselves. The upper ranked and intermarrying groups among the low castes include the following artisans and specialized laborers: basket weavers, goldsmiths, ironsmiths, masons, and former guards for the local king. These artisans, some of whom are also marginal farmers, do not touch those person of caste rank lower than themselves. The second tier includes leatherworkers and tailors who do not intermarry but are of equivalent status. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy are a single group of

potters, musicians, and female prostitutes who are untouchable to all other groups above them. The highest ranked and most ritually pure *jaat* in the Nepalese caste structure are Brahmins, followed by the Thakuri and Chhetri *jaat*.

This structure mirrors that of India but there are two unique features of the Nepalese caste structure (Dumont 1970; Hitchcock 1978; Hofer 1979). There are no recognizable Vaishya groups (who occupy the third – or second to bottom – level on the Indian system); rather, at this third level are the Matwali groups which include the numerous Tibeto-Burman (and largely Buddhist) ethnic groups in Nepal, such as the Newar, Tamang, Sherpa, and Magar. However, because there are no representatives from the ethnic groups in Bhalara (or in most of western Nepal), they are not further discussed.

Hindu communities throughout Nepal and India do not display equal distributions of caste groups for two reasons (Kolenda 1978; Lynch 1969; Moffatt 1979). Specific caste groups have developed clusters of households based on lineage relatedness and extended family structures. In addition, high-caste groups systematically discourage low-castes from settling near them as neighbors. Thus, as is shown in Figure 1.1, the caste composition of the seven research villages show inter- and intra-village heterogeneity. No village is like any other village in terms of caste composition.

Village Name

	P	G	Se	H	D	K	Sa	Total
Village Population	535	303	131	341	403	156	189	2058
Number of Households (HH) per village	90	56	20	55	68	27	33	346
Total # and percentage of low-caste HH per village	15 17%	35 63%	0	15 27%	40 59%	27 100 %	8 24%	140
Sample # and percentage of low-caste HH	3 6%	7 14%	0	2 4%	9 18%	8 16%	2 4%	31 62%
Total # and percentage of high-caste HH per village	75 83%	21 37%	20 100	40 73%	28 41%	0	25 76%	209
Sample # and percentage of high-caste HH	6 12%	3 6%	2 4%	4 8%	3 6%	0	2 4%	20 40%

Names of Seven Research Villages: Haat (H), Kot (K), Piket (P), Gugai (G), Seralagau (S), Dubaali (D), Sadil (Sa)

Figure 1.1 Sample Population by Village and Caste

Narrative Conventions: Untouchables, Low-castes, and Artisans

Throughout the text I use the terms "untouchable", "low-caste", "lower caste", and "artisan" interchangeably to refer to those persons or groups who are considered, by birth, to be ritually impure to those above them in the caste hierarchy. The term "low" and "untouchable" are ethnographically accurate; the local terms for these persons *talo jaat* (low caste), *saano jaat* (small caste), and *nachunay manchay* (not touchable person). These are the least derogatory terms. Other terms used locally to denote people of untouchable status (and which I have chosen to exclude from systematic use unless relevant) include *dume* (inauspicious, undesirable) and *chow* (impure). People of low caste dislike the former term, and the latter term includes any person in a permanent or temporary state of impurity to others and is thus not solely tied to caste rank.

Religion and the Lower Castes

Although they are Hindus, the people of low caste are prohibited from using the sacred Hindu texts during worship, and from worshipping certain major Hindu god and goddesses such as Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, and Parbati. Low-caste women regret that they are prohibited from worshipping the main Hindu gods and goddesses but they are devout in their worship of local deities – Masto, Bhaatwaalo, Terdi, and others who are the *kuldevta*, lineage or house gods, of a family. In their worship, the lower castes share deities with the high-caste groups; many of these local deities are also the *kuldevta* of high-caste families, and are accorded a high place in the local version of the Hindu pantheon. Low-caste people are prohibited from entering local temples, but they manage to make animal sacrifices (a critical part of Hindu *puja*, worship, in Nepal) by presenting collectively purchased or raised animals to high-caste patrons (who then sacrifice the animals at the temple) during the autumn festival of Dasai. Low-caste women make regular pilgrimages to Khaptad Lekh, a famous site that was recently declared a national park by His Majesty's Government in Kathmandu.

Below I provide a brief, introductory description of each of the low-caste *jaat*, caste groups, in Bhalara. The work that low-caste men and women perform, their roles in provisioning for the household, the forms of paid and unpaid labor, and other aspects of the economic dimensions of their *jaat* are discussed in the following chapters.

Luhar Ironsmiths

The Luhar[1] make agricultural tools and household utensils such as the sickle, knives, hoe, shovel, plough tip, nails, and ax. The work of the Luhar ironsmith requires physical strength and a willingness to endure noise and heat during the pounding and firing process. A Luhar's smithy is a noisy hut adjoining the house, a popular place for low-caste men to socialize. There is a high percentage of *dhaami*, shamans, who are of

[1] The Luhar are also known as Kaami in other parts of Nepal and in India. "Luhar" is more commonly used in Thalara.

Luhar caste. These men and women attribute their ability to go into trance to the unrelenting drone of pounding iron.

All households in Bhalara require Luhar commodities. Even if not engaged in farming, each family minimally requires sickles, axes, and knives. Thus, the Luhar are the most relatively economically secure low-caste *jaat* in Bhalara. For example, the most prosperous low-caste family in Bhalara is Luhar. This family, as well as most of the other Luhar families, lives in Dubaali village (refer to maps at the end of the chapter). The Dubaali Luhar built their homes somewhat distant from the other caste groups in Dubaali, perhaps because of the noise from the smithy. The remaining Luhar live in Piket.

Okheda Guards

The Okheda are one of the untouchable castes who are not artisans but provide a service. Formerly they were guards and tax collectors for the local king. Today the Okheda are mainly farmers and laborers. There are only a few Okheda families in the region. None were chosen as part of the survey sample, but they were valuable informants (especially one Okheda man named Goray) who were interviewed and fully participated in important ways in the reserach. The loyalty of the Okheda to the former king is renowned. One Brahmin claims euphemistically that the Okheda were in service to the king for 3000 generations. All of the Okheda families live in Kot.

Oudh Masons

The Oudh are masons and carpenters, and are few in number. All houses and shops in Bhalara have been built solely or partially by the men of the Oudh *jaat*. The demand for their services is sporadic and most of them subsist from farming and working for others.

Parki Basketmakers

The Parki make a variety of storage baskets and floor mats from bamboo procured in the high hill regions. Their products are more expensive than those of the other low-caste artisan *jaat*, but most families in Bhalara own one or more grain storage baskets, flour sieves, and bread baskets. Only wealthier families (Brahmin, Thakuri, and Chetri) own more 'luxury' Parki products such as floor mats. The Parki baskets and mats are well made and can last several decades if maintained. They are considered aesthetically pleasing with their smooth golden surface. Baskets are time-consuming commodities to produce. Bamboo is brought from the high hills, and softened in a solution for several days. Then long strips are sheared from the stalks with sharp sickles. These are woven into the simple shapes of square or round bread baskets, tall hollow grain storage bins, or long and wide flat floor mats. All products take several days to produce, and women and men work cooperatively on the larger baskets. Women deliver the bread baskets to *riti*, patrons, and men deliver the grain baskets and mats.

There are only a handful of Parki families in Bhalara, and most of them live to the west of the Brahmins in Dubaali.

Damai Tailors and Seamstresses

The Damai *jaat* are tailors and seamstresses, and their most reliable source of income comes from sewing. Both men and women sew. The skill of sewing is kept within the *jaat*, since Damai marry only other Damai. Damai are the stereotype of the low-caste; when speaking about the people of low-caste generically, Damai are often mentioned as the stereotype. The stereotyping results from their ubiquity in rural Hindu villages; this is due, in turn, to the demand for their service, their learned skills in sewing (such that the Damai are often called "master", a general term for someone with a special skill), their performance and ritual roles in weddings, and their practice of caste endogamy (the Damai stay together as a caste via exclusionary marriage practices).

Sarki Leather Artisans

The Sarki make shoes and other products from cow and water buffalo skin. Their products include leather sandals and shoes, part of the plough harness, and a flour sifter made of leather. Few of the Sarki items are regularly manufactured; the demand for the products is sporadic and infrequent. For example, farmer's need new harnesses only after several years, and the sturdy leather sandals and shoes have been replaced by rubber Nepalese or Indian manufactured thongs.

As a result of low demand for their products, the Sarki are extremely vulnerable economically, and are the poorest *jaat* in Bhalara. Their children are malnourished and uneducated, and their hamlets are crowded and crumbling. Sarki hamlets are concentrated on both sides of the Gugai village hill and were the farthest from my apartment. Thus, I was unable to observe the Sarki on a daily basis like some of the other low-caste groups. I did have long interviews with Sarki women, though, and these data are incorporated in the text.

Baadi Potters and Entertainers

The Baadi are not farmers, and they have no desire to become farmers (unlike the other low castes). No Baadi families own agricultural land, and they never seek to buy or rent land. However, Baadi are fond of livestock and several families own and raise water buffalo. The Baadi's frequent public declarations of extreme displeasure with performing hard physical labor are supported by their long hesitation at doing anything physically difficult (like collecting firewood or pounding rice) in exchange for food during begging. The Baadi describe themselves as *laato*, (Lit. "deaf and dumb") stupid, when discussing farming.

The Baadi are potters who make vessels out of local red clay. Their most popular items are water storage *gaagri* and tobacco pipes called *sulpa*. The Baadi say it takes five days to make eight *gaagri*, or large water vessels, their most popular product. The potting process begins with

bringing the red clay dirt used specifically for the potting and ends with an all-night firing.[2] Unfortunately, the *gaagri* is gradually being replaced by plastic, bronze, and brass containers from India and other parts of Nepal. Brass and bronze containers are also made by Sunaar in other areas outside of this region.

The Baadi are also entertainers – singers, dancers, and female prostitutes. They focus on the entertaining aspects of their work when they describe themselves: "*Hamro jaatko kaam kushi banaunay kaam ho*" ("Our caste work is to make people happy "), says a Badini. The primary work of the Badini – singing and dancing – is not inherently impure, yet the Baadi are the lowest ranked in Bhalara's caste hierarchy.

Table 1.1 lists the activities involved in the productive and service processes of each artisan and entertaining caste, and provides a breakdown of men's and women's involvement in these activities. As can be seen in Table 1.1, and as is discussed in more detail in the following chapters, men, in general, are more involved in artisan production than women, yet women's degree of involvement varies from complete involvement in the entire production process (as among the Damai and Parki), to partial or supplemental involvement (as in the Baadi, Sarki, and Luhar), to complete absence (as in the Oudh caste). Thus, though the gender division of labor may vary, women's degree of involvement is consistent; put another way, if a Sarki woman works in leather commodities' production, she is involved only partially because women are never fully involved (due to prohibitions), as are men. If a

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[2] Day one: Red potting clay is carried to the hamlet in baskets and laboriously mixed with water. Day two: The *taal* or lip of the vessel, and the large *gaagri* base of the vessel are shaped, using a paddle and hand to pound it into shape. The *taal* is then fitted to the base. At this time other items are prepared, such as *sulpa*. Day three: the *gaagri* and other objects are put inside the house to dry. Day four: the clay objects are brought outside to dry in the sun. Beginning in the late afternoon and throughout the night the pots are fired in a smoldering pile of stalks and dried leaves. There are usually many pottery items in the fire, made by different families.
Day five: The pots are removed from the fire, brushed off, and prepared for delivery.

Damai woman is involved in sewing clothes, she participates as much as a Damai man because there are no prohibitions against her doing so.

Table 1.1 Gender Division of Artisan Activities, Low-castes

CASTE	MALE	FEMALE
Baadi potters, entertainers	collect, mix clay. pound clay. shape vessel parts. dry. fire. decorate./ dance, sing, drum.	carry, mix clay. shape pipes. carry fodder. deliver goods./dance, sing, prostitute.
Sarki sew leather goods	skin animal. tan hide. design and stitch goods. deliver.	design and stitch goods. deliver.
Sunar gold- and silver- smith (none in survey sample)	collect materials. sell gold, silver. design, create jewelry: fire, hammer gold into sheets, silver into pellets; make wax mold; melt gold into mold, pound silver into shape; shine, decorate, deliver.	pump bellows. deliver.
Luhar ironsmith	collect, recycle iron scraps; fire, pound iron into tools. deliver.	pump bellows. deliver.
Parki weave baskets	collect bamboo. split into strips. design. weave. deliver.	collect bamboo. split into strips. design. weave. deliver.
Oudh mason	collect rocks, clay, manure, wood; break rocks, carve wood; measure, construct wall, house, steps.	-
Damai tailor, seamstress	buy cloth and/or notions; sew men's, women's, children's clothing. deliver.	buy cloth and/or notions; sew men's, women's, children's clothing. deliver.
Okheda guards (none in survey sample)	guards and tax collectors for the former king	-

The kinds and cost of items made by Luhar, Parki, Sarki, Damai, and Baadi men and women are given in Tables A.4 to A.8 in the Appendix.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative Research Methods

Audio Recordings were made of twelve women's life histories using open-ended interview schedules and involving both high- and low-castes, with a preponderance of the latter. Other activities and behaviors recorded

included women's self-composed songs, verbal inter-caste economic and social transactions, interviews with low-caste female specialists like mid-wives and shamans, and select recordings of Women's Questionnaire interviews.

Audio and Visual Recordings were made of all activities surrounding the 15-day Dasai festival (with an emphasis on the final 3 days), and *Bhai Tika*; three low-caste and two high-caste weddings; low-caste shamans' performances at home and in temples; one-week pilgrimage with the current Bajhangi King to main temples; women's pre-wedding satire, *jakram*; one-day firewood and fodder foraging with low-caste women; and other gender and/or caste-specific work, agricultural, social and religious activities.

Quantitative Survey Instruments

Gender, caste, and class stratification in Bhalara lend themselves to empirical investigation. The survey research population involved a 15% sample from the total number of households per each of the ten selected villages, giving a sample total of fifty-one households – thirty-one low-caste and twenty high-caste. However, one low-caste family participated irregularly, and most of the data are from fifty households. During the first phase of the research all quantitative survey data were obtained from the Demographic Survey, Landholding and Income Survey, and Time Allocation Survey (TAS).

The time allocation survey was conducted for an entire year and involved all fifty households. Thus, the data generated by this survey are an extremely abundant source of information on the amount of time spent in various activities by all members of these households. These data are important in establishing exact measures of relations of production and patterns of work according to many variables (caste, gender, age, education). The TAS technique is straightforward. Before visiting the household a one-hour time slot is randomly selected for each of the

fifty households from within a time-frame of fourteen hours. During the pre-selected time the household is visited and the activity being performed by each household member is recorded. The enumerator (me or one of my two research assistants) records activities through observation and questioning of family members about those who may be absent. This is done for every household, every other day, for a full year. (see Minge-Klevana 1980, Gross 1984, and Messer and Bloch 1983 for discussions of the application of TAS research methods to human behavioral studies).

During the second phase of research, survey instruments included two Women's Questionnaire, one for women married only once, and a second for women married more than once. A Final Survey for all castes was used at the end of the research and contained various questions generated throughout the duration of the research period.

Research Problems and Difficulties

Most of the life-history recordings were from 60 to 90 minutes duration, though the interview period was longer. Because I was residing in a high-caste family's house, I had to obtain permission from my landlady before the low-caste interviewee could be allowed inside my quarters. My quarters were chosen as the interview site because the women could be away from their home responsibilities and their families, and the privacy necessary for intimacy and revelation of confidences was only possible there. Often it was difficult to convince a women to enter the house because of the presence of my high-caste landlady. Negotiating these issues was challenging, but revealed complex dimensions of inter-caste relations among women, particularly how women separate themselves from each other based on caste. Respect, deference, and service to the high-caste women were behavioral rules for low-caste women.

In the following chapter I define the main analytical tools and cultural concepts used in the study by situating it in the literature on gender

and caste in South Asia. These concepts include hierarchy, dominance, *jaat* (category) of gender and caste, and household. I also provide data on the types of households found in Bhalara.

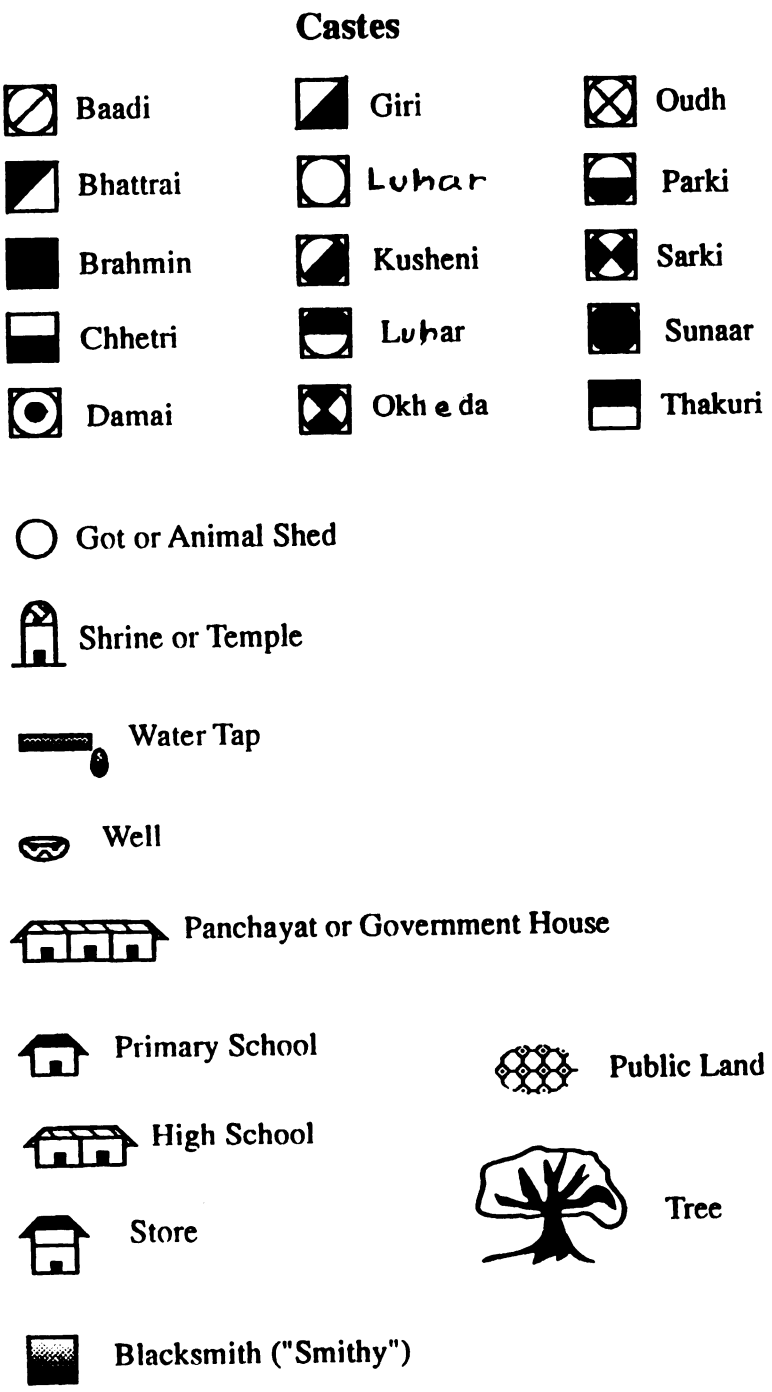

Figure 1.2 Map Legend

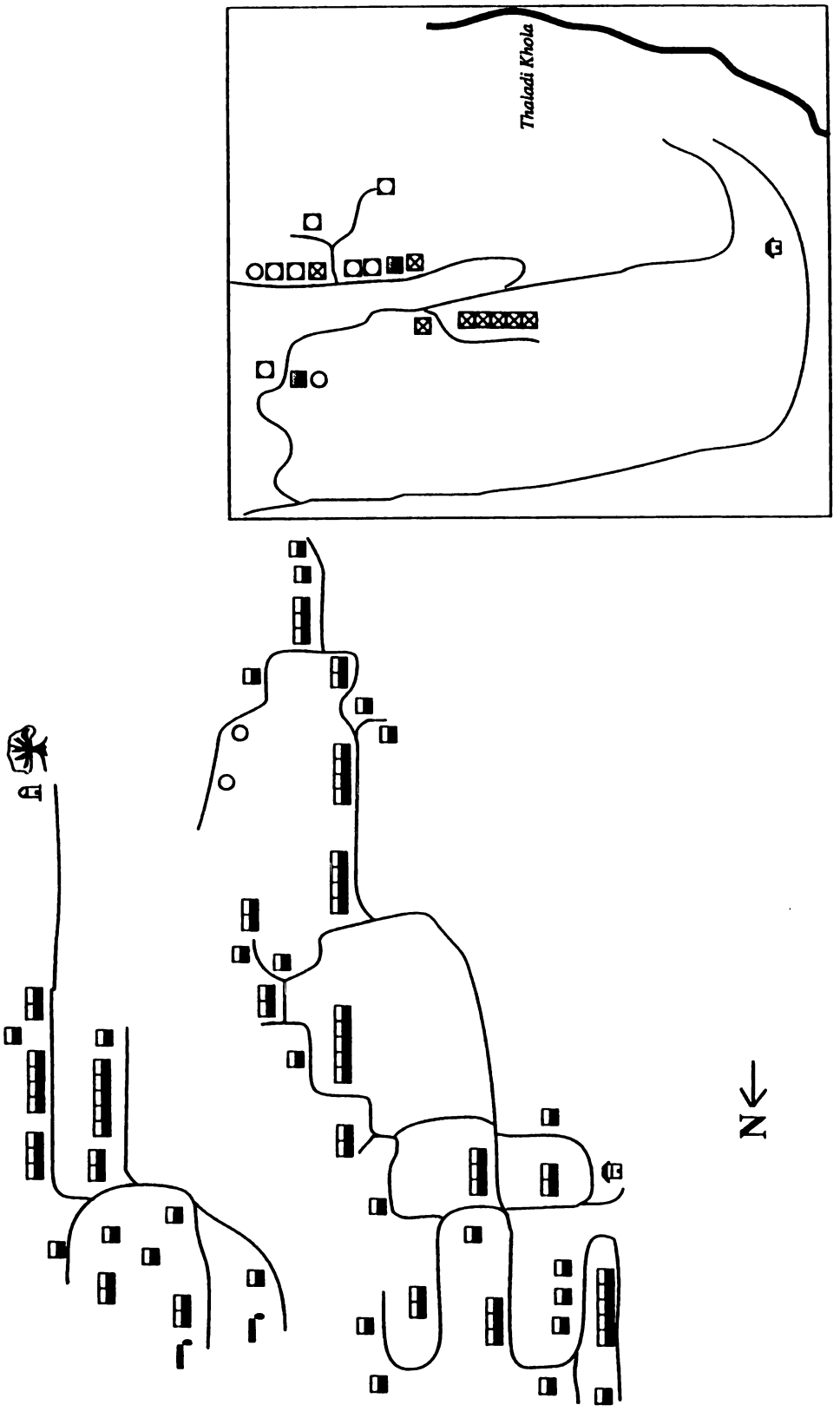

Figure 1.3 Map of Pikhet Village

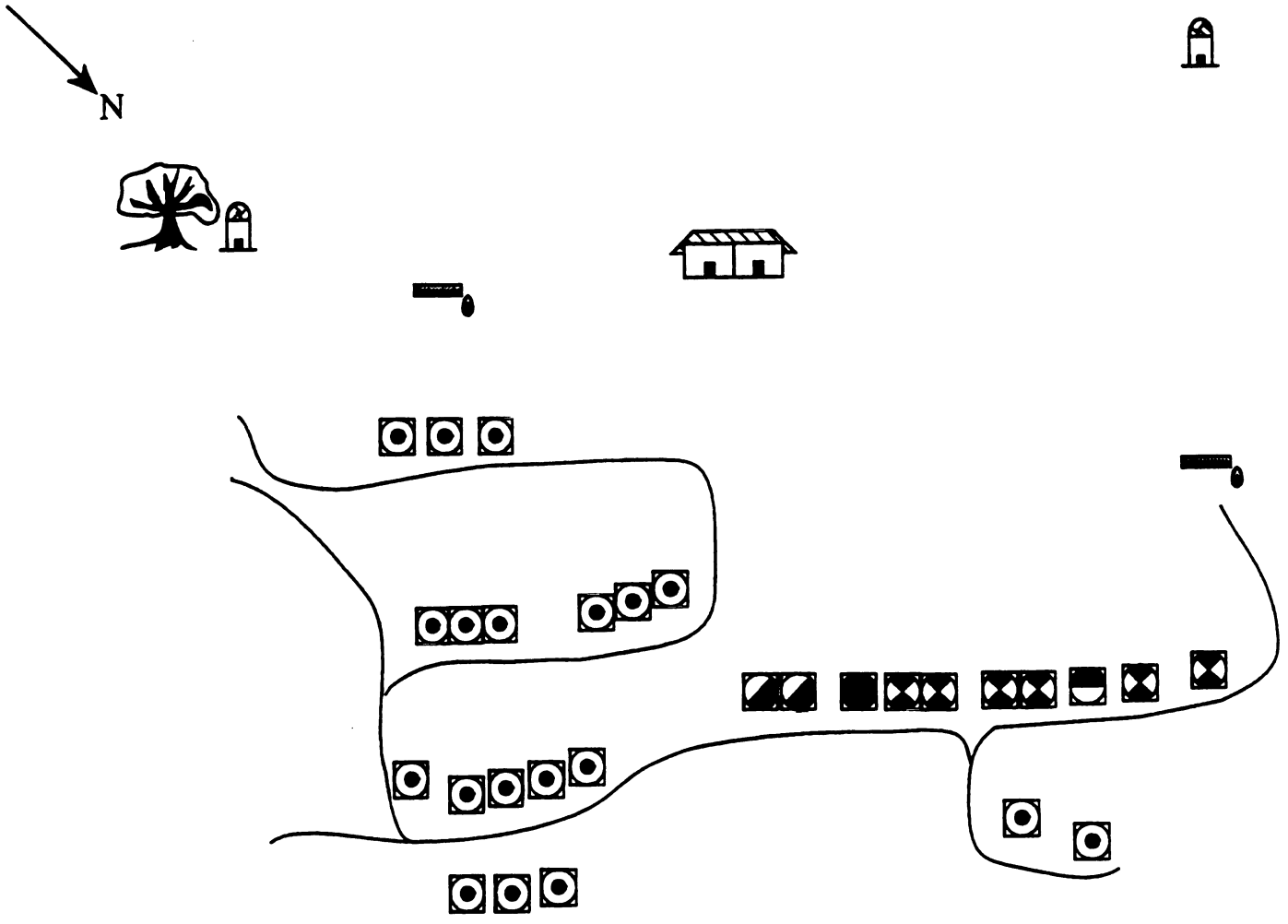

Figure 1.4 Map of Kot Village

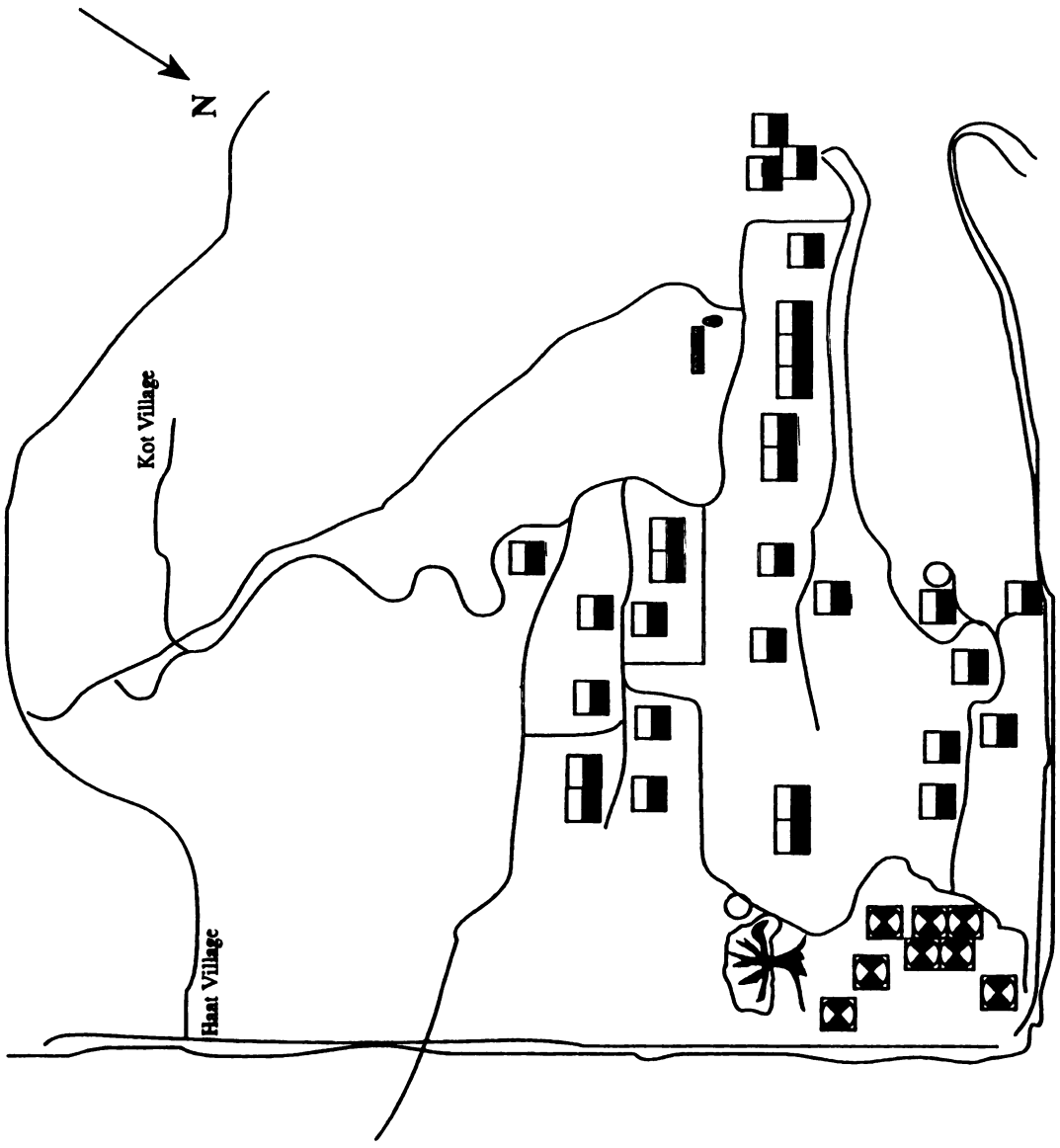

Figure 1.5 Map of Sadil Village

Figure 1.6 Map of Dubaali Village

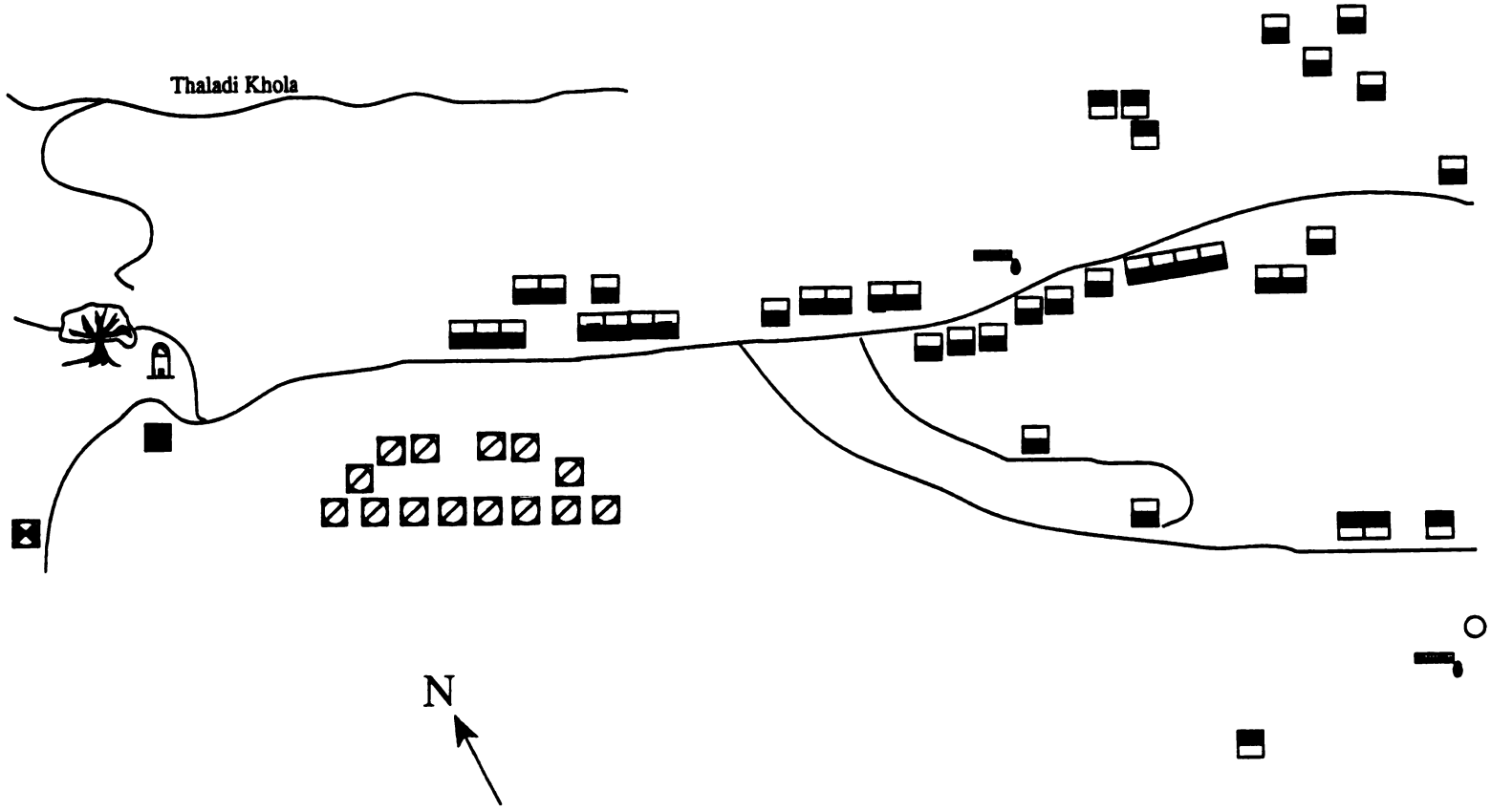

Figure 1.7 Map of Haat Village

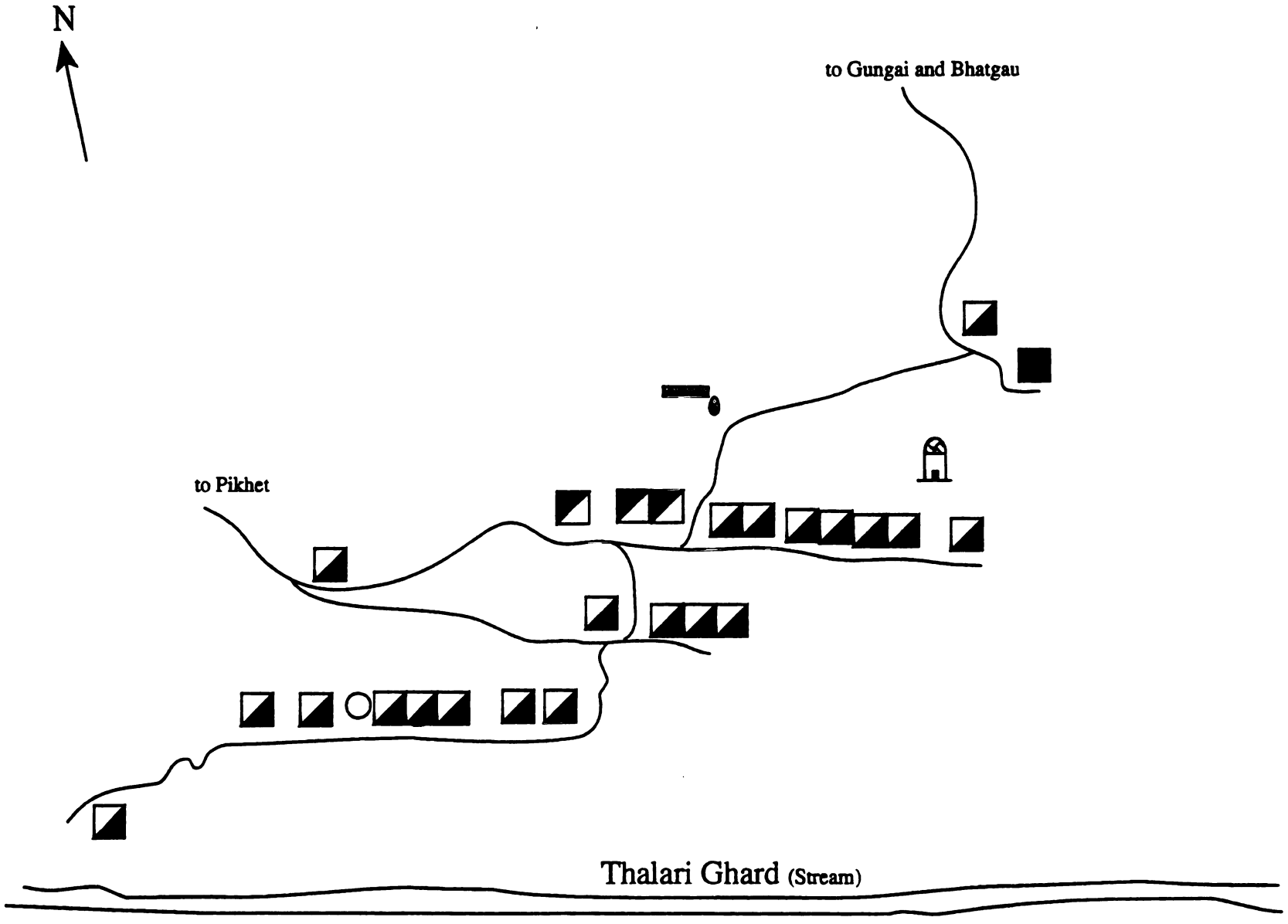

Figure 1.8 Map of Seralagau Village

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TOWARD A CULTURAL THEORY OF GENDER AND CASTE: THEORETICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES

Hierarchy, Dominance and Society

In clarifying the goals of this study, it serves a purpose to state what it is not. This is not a study of the roles of women, nor a(nother) study of caste, nor a study of gender roles in a peasant society, though it includes all of these. Rather, it is a study of social relationships analyzed through the cultural meanings and practices of gender and caste in a peasant economy. At its most generalizable level, then, the following is a study of social organization that approaches the problems of gender and caste through the problem of society.

The governing principle or ethos of society in Bhalara is hierarchy, rank. Social hierarchy and asymmetry presuppose social difference. The men and women of Bhalara organize themselves in relation to one another, their deities, and their environment within differentiating (as opposed to 'collectivizing' or homogenizing) metaphors and practices. The practice of hierarchy is found throughout much of South Asian society. For example, a long-standing and prevailing model of the nature of hierarchy in the caste system in South Asia is one that first identifies hierarchy as about the exchanges between persons through which an asymmetry between donor and recipient is established in the giving (Dumont 1970; Moffatt 1979; Parry 1979; Wadley 1975). This asymmetry retains a cultural base through the concept of relative impurity between persons. In the most current study of 'dominance' in South Asia, Raheja (1988) proposes an alternative model to the prevailing one of hierarchy. In her model, two forms of prestations are distinguished by who the 'gift' recipients are: either one's 'own' (including kin and members of lower caste service families) or those lower in rank than oneself (Raheja 1988). Raheja forcefully argues that prestations are not solely about hierarchy per se but are about the transferral of inauspiciousness

to those "not one's own", thus establishing the 'dominance' of the donor.

However, Raheja's model cannot adequately account for dominance and hierarchal structure in Bhalara. The reality of prestations in this Hindu society is that only a small amount of the grains and 'gifts' received by the lower castes from the upper castes fall within the model of 'mutuality' between donor and recipient that Raheja claims characterizes most prestations (a model that she hopes will lead us out of the prevailing model of 'dominance'). Rather, the bulk of 'giving' to low-castes is in the form of payment for services rendered or commodities produced, and grain shares given to low-caste clients, *bhagya*. Raheja's model minimizes the importance and prevalence of such forms of payment-prestations. Yet in Bhalara, such prestations are clearly measured, calculated payments, and are not given in any ritualized or benevolent form, nor characterized by the donor as a removal of inauspiciousness. Thus, a model of caste dominance as asymmetry, and not of 'inauspiciousness', is retained in this study.

Everyday Forms of Dominance

The shortcoming of a purely prestation, process, and transactional model of dominance and hierarchy found in the ethnosociological approach to caste and Hindu culture (Marriott 1968; 1976; 1989; Daniel 1984; Marriott and Inden 1977) is that it neglects the behavioral and communicative aspects of hierarchy (Habermas 1979), what to the natives dominated – the lower castes – is the experience, 'common sense' (Geertz 1983) and literal facts of being dominated (Scott 1990). If an implicit issue in explaining dominance in South Asia is explaining how it is maintained and reproduced, and, in a more political vein, what are its consequences, then one needs to examine the social practices of domination, such as material resource asymmetry and the perpetuation of privilege through social hierarchy. People do not remain dominated through the force of ideology alone, but through the practices of

domination (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1972). If we accept the anthropological notion that culture is about everyday practices of everyday people (Geertz 1983) then we are forced to examine those hierarchizing and dominating practices in the lives of those dominated, and not to "spin notional complexities [to be then reported as] cultural facts" (Geertz 1983,89). When the Nepalese of Bhalara say that the 'big' people are men and upper castes, and the 'little' people are women and lower castes, we are to take this literally; they mean what they say, and nothing else. What we do need to report is how the 'women' and the 'lower castes' become lumped together, and what the popularly understood nature of the asymmetry between 'male' and 'female', and 'high-caste' and 'low-caste' is, such that common sense features of 'big' and 'little' can be ascribed to them.

Gender in the Ethnography of South Asia

It is telling of the relationship between anthropologist and culture that there are few explicit studies of gender in South Asia. The vast majority of studies on South Asia deal with either caste, religion, or kinship, and interrelationships between them. Where gender or women in Hindu society are mentioned (and they often are not), it is within these 'overarching' frameworks, and in the form of roles of (usually high-caste) men or women within Hindu ideology or kinship (Allen 1982; Bennett 1983; Sharma 1980). Such studies do not begin with a theoretical model of gender and society, but are rather directed toward the roles, position, and status of women in society. Furthermore, the predominant focus on women of upper caste does little to advance our understanding of women of lower caste, nor our understanding of the similarities and differences in the hierarchies of gender and caste. Could it be the case that gender is not an indigenous concept, that it is somehow so subsumed within caste or religion or kinship that it is not an ethnographically relevant category to address? This is certainly not the case; the very word used to refer to the category of caste, *jaat*, can also denote gender. As Marriott and Inden point out,

> "*Jaati* means the whole earthly populations that we call families, kin groups, genders, occupational categories, speakers of the same language, regional populations, religious communities, nations, races; it encompasses the categories of gods in their heavens, demons, etc. It means 'genera' or 'species' in the broadest sense" (Marriott and Inden 1977,230).

Among the living beings, all members of each genus "shares from the moment of its generation its defining qualities (*guna*), powers (*shakti*), and actions (*karma*). These together make up its corporate code for conduct, *dharma*..." (Marriott and Inden 1977,231). In the view of ethnosociology, then, there is a category of gender, with its attendant essential features, just as there are categories of "caste" with their attendant features.

However, this is not a study of those features as contained in Hindu ideological thought or Sanskrit texts (although that would be an interesting and important project). Rather, it is a study of gender and caste at the social and cultural level, as gender and caste intersect and interact in ways defined and practiced by the actors themselves. It draws largely from what people do and say, not from what the sacred texts say they are doing and saying. It is not doubtful that the lower caste people of Bhalara recognize and practice such core Hindu concepts as *jaat*, *dharma*, *shakti*; they speak of these ideas regularly. What is doubtful is that they would see the dominant groups as justified in their domination by virtue of their "coded substances" (as the transactional model would have it), Rather, the lower castes see the upper caste dominance residing in their economic power.

While it has been argued that our concept of dominance as applied to South Asia is too negative, etic, and dualistically orienting in a culture that does not recognize duality, the text that follows shows that gender and caste are differentiating discourses used by the people of Bhalara to make female different from male, low-caste different from high-caste. While such discourses draw on 'religious' metaphors, they also draw on other metaphors of sexuality, agriculture, and work. Thus, analyzing gender and caste as cultural practices allows us to view

social hierarchy with an anthropological perspective. This is not the case with the relativistic and particularizing domain of 'religion' and the Hindu view of women. As put by Collier and Yanagisako,

> "Instead of asking how the categories of "male" and "female" are endowed with culturally specific characters, thus taking the difference between them for granted, we need to ask how particular societies define difference" (Collier and Yanagisako, p.35).

An assumption of this study is that in Bhalara, people define difference through gender and through caste.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE HOUSEHOLD

Family, *Pariwaar*, Household, *Moe*, and Patriline, *Daaju-Bhai*

One of the lessons of feminist inquiry is that the terms 'family' and 'household' should not be used uncritically (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Harris 1981; Moore 1988). In this study, the survey unit called the 'household' is based on local delineation of the *moe*, a group of persons related through birth and marriage, living in one structure, and usually comprised of at least one married couple and their children. The *moe* may be an extended, stem, or nuclear family. Thus, one conceptualization, and the defining feature of the household as the *moe*, is the physical structure of the house, the *ghar*, which demarcates its inhabitants as eating all meals together and sharing resources – the domestic unit of commensality and reproduction.

A second level of conceptualization of the household concerns ideas of identity, such as the "low-caste household", as distinguished from its high-caste counterpart.[1] Here the 'household' embodies and reproduces the ideologies of the patriline, *daaju bhai*, as these simultaneously form the basis for its integration into the community and its

[1] Bennett discusses the ideology of the high-caste patriline and the *pariwaar* in the context of eastern Nepal (Bennett 1983).

differentiation from other 'parts' of the community whole. This dimension of the 'household' thus acts as a 'whole' articulated less by the physical structure than by its ethos of commensality and the 'natural' relatedness of its members, and that presumably has features common with other 'household' wholes of similar identity. Though there are common features found in the worldviews of households in peasant societies, such as fertility, wealth, and well-being, seen by the actors as essential for its subsistence goal of survival (Pina-Cabral 1986), the "moral economy" of the low-caste household, generated on a daily basis in Bhalara through interaction with other households, has its foundations in dominating and dependent caste-based economic interaction. As a result, one significant difference between the worldview of the high- and the low-caste household is that the former believes itself to be able to survive through its own means, whereas the low-caste household generates a worldview of production and inter-household relations that are grounded in dependency relations with high-caste landholding households. Thus, it is impossible to claim that all Hindu households share the same set of ideals and identities since lower caste household identities involve non-family members in hierarchical relations.

At the same time it is possible to claim that there is more intra-caste than inter-caste similarity among households. To assert that the principles of hierarchy that govern intercaste relations have no absolute difference from the principles that structure intracaste relations among kin (Dumont 1970; Moffatt 1979; Inden and Nicholas 1977) is to draw an equivalence between all relationships among low-caste kin, and those among high-caste kin. This study argues that the relationship of gender among low-caste kin and within the low-caste household is inherently different from that relationship within the high-caste household, and that the people of Bhalara themselves draw such distinctions. In this respect gender is appropriated by caste to assert caste differences.

A third dimension of the 'household' involves the processes by which the first two dimensions, physical and ideological identity, are reproduced – the 'how' of a household. The focus here is the 'reproduction' of the household in the physical sense of the term, with an emphasis on production, labor, work, sharing and pooling of resources, and provisioning. These actions are assumed to be directed toward the survival of the household with the cooperation (and conflict) of its members (Netting et al. 1984). It is to this goal of survival, often in the context of crisis and uncertainty, that the 'moral' aspect of the peasant economy develops (Scott 1976). This is the 'household' that gets the (economic and ritual) work done.

The lowest common denominators shared among these different conceptualizations of the household is that its members are related by birth or marriage, they share an ethos of pooling most resources towards the goal of subsistence, and they achieve this through interaction with other households. Thus, family, household and patriline are not analytical constructs alone (Wolf 1990), they are ethnographically relevant. It is essential to the analysis that follows to retain cultural ideas of the household, family, and patriline in Bhalara because much of gender relations turns on these culturally-defined contexts; household, family and patriline are cultural entities empowered and conceptualized in ways that appropriate gender and caste, and as such are the context of the cultural and political nature of gender and caste relations.

The purely analytical construct in this study is the "low-caste household" (or family, or patriline) (see Strathern on the distinctions between cultural and analytical concepts, and when each is relevant 1988,14-18). To explore what the culture sees as real caste-based differences in gender relations and relations of production, I utilize the concept of the "low-caste household". The society of Bhalara practices its ranking of persons marked by gender and caste at the

household level primarily because the household is integrated into the local economy and society primarily through caste- and class-based structures. Gender and caste are lived through the position of the household in the community's economy, and through the fact that members of a household share the same economic base. Gender relations within the household are construed by its members through the household's position in local relations of landownership, and its position within the caste system. The heuristic value of retaining the household as an analytical entity in the form of the "low-caste household" is to allow continuous reference to its social and economic status without conflating caste and class. Thus, "low-caste household", as argued in chapter three, denotes a caste and class position.

The concepts of "low-caste family" and "low-caste patriline" are less problematic than 'household' because the former are terms of kinship and not terms of social position, as was argued above for 'household'. The family is the minimal functioning unit of the patriline. The people of Bhalara define the family as *daaju-bhai*, elder and younger brothers, living together with their wives, their children, and their parents, and thus 'family' implicitly refers to the patriline. The patriline is comprised of persons related through birth, marriage and caste 'substance', these persons jointly own property and rights to upper caste patrons that they pass to males, and they work cooperatively to provision the household. What distinguishes the low-caste from the high-caste patriline is the ownership of property in the form of land in the case of the latter, and the lack of land ownership in the former. The patriarchal or, to use Bennett's term, "patrifocal" feature of the patriline, in which privilege and higher status are afforded its male members over its female members, rests to a large degree on its vested interests in property and rights in the services of its female members (Bennett 1983,186). Thus, it follows that landownership, which materially differentiates high- from low-caste patrilines would also differentiate the patriarchal nature of patrilineal ideology in the

high- and low-caste households. This study demonstrates that this is, indeed, the case. What we find in Bhalara are less patriarchal features of (though still differentiating) gender relations within the low-caste family vis a vis their high-castes counterparts.

Households in Bhalara

The most common family sizes in the research population were families of four members, and families of seven, followed by families of three, five, six and eight members. Of these the majority (58%) are two generation families, consisting of a married couple and children (conventional nuclear) in most cases, but also a married couple with no children and a widowed mother or father. The second most common number of generations in a household was three (36% of all households), a conventional extended family. One-generation and four-generations families comprised 2% and 4% of the population.

One aspect of family structure that the data indicate is that "extended", understood as three generations or more, does not necessarily imply large; there were three and four generation families that had five or less members. Another aspect of the family in Bhalara is that the eldest male is always considered the household head; people identified "mothers of household head" (13 women, or 26% of the households), but never "fathers" (only one case, in a Damai family). This does not mean that woman are never considered the heads of households; in a few cases the head was a woman, usually a young or middle-aged widow with children. Even if a male was gone for over six months to India or to the Terai for employment, he was still identified as the household head (if he was the eldest male).

One very significant difference between the lower caste and the upper caste household is in the number of generations found (or the depth of "extension). Lower caste households have equal numbers of two-generation and three-generation households (47% of each type), whereas the high-

caste household is much more likely to be two-generational (70% of all high-caste households) than three-generational (25%). Thus, even though at first glance the community of Bhalara appears to organize its families as two-generational more frequently than three-generational, the overwhelming preponderance of three-generational households are low-caste. Consequently, the average size of the lower caste household (7.2) is larger than the upper caste household (6.5) by nearly one person.[2] This is a significant finding in light of the model of the "high-caste extended household" prevalent in the literature on South Asia. This is not born out by the data on Bhalara. Rather, the low-caste household is more 'extended' than the high-caste household. While this pattern of household organizational structure in Bhalara may be anomalous, there are several reasons to examine why it occurs. Most important is the existence of a village context different from that presumed in the prevalent model of high-caste patriarchal authority that presumably serves to keep fathers, sons and wives, and their children living together under one roof. This is more the situation in the lower- than the upper-caste household in Bhalara. Let us examine some possible causes for such patterns.

Whatever the complex domestic reasons for splitting a patriline, the fact remains that such a process is materially costly. A high-caste couple who seeks to separate or partition property (and thus cut the patriline) and thus control their share of the household resources can only be successful if the developmental cycle of the core family (the couples' parents and in-laws) can accommodate such partitioning. They must have sufficient property to partition without great risk to those members who remain with the core family, and they must have sufficient resources to build new houses for the stem family. It is often the case that upper caste sons and their wives who have officially separated from

[2] The composition of each type of household has not been fully analyzed, and comparison of intercaste demographic features, while an important project for the future, is beyond the scope of this analysis.

the core family live next door to his parents in quarters that have been simply added on to the central house. In fact, upper caste landholding houses are built to accommodate partitioning arrangements, and are often sprawling composite structures, in comparison to the simple lower caste houses. Thus, given their greater economic resources of many kinds, upper caste households can more readily afford to partition, resulting in many more stem nuclear families in the research population. While conducting surveys, informants acknowledge the partitioning of families when they identify multiple *moe* or families residing within what appears to the outsider as one physical structure.

It is reasonable to argue that poverty keeps the low-caste household "extended" in two ways. First, low-caste families cannot afford the expense of new or adjoining living quarters for its younger couples who wish to partition. As a result, low-caste home structures are small and crowded, with usually no more than one large eating and living space, and a lower adjoining room for livestock. In comparison to high-caste houses, the low-caste house literally seems to be bending at the seams (many were in disrepair, with leaking roofs and crumbling stairs). The people of low-caste are unable to build larger structures for separate couples and their children to reside.

Second, survival of the low-caste household involves shared subsistence provisioning; in the low-caste household, to stay together is to survive. The critical need to pool resources and products by all able-bodied *moe* members ensures the survival of the low-caste household. In this respect, the low-caste household is far more vulnerable than its high-caste counterpart. This is not to say that the products of the high-caste household are not pooled and shared; rather, there is more flexibility for an upper caste couple to choose to <u>not</u> share. This is not the case in the low-caste household. A couple seeking to be separate from the husband's parents would find it impossible to provision for themselves due to lack of land and patron families.

The high degree of lower caste economic dependency on landowners within the *riti-bhagya* system (as will be discussed in the following chapter) is reflected in the infrequency of partitioning of rights in these relations within the low-caste lineage. Like land inheritance and partitioning of land among the sons of a landholding family, *riti-bhagya* rights may also be partitioned among the sons of a *bhagya* man. The low-caste families in Bhalara report that, on average, they have not partitioned their rights to *riti* families for thirty *pusta* ("generation", approximately eighteen years). This implies that the economic situation in a household was not secure enough to risk separating from one another; the family members choose to retain their strength in numbers and the security of pooled *khalo* payments, rather than lose the shared *khalo* payments.

To ask how social relations of dominance are constituted through gender and caste, let us turn to the gender division of labor in the context of the history of landholding and patron-client relations in Bhalara in order to better understand intercaste economic relations and the economic position of the low-caste household.

LABOR, LAND, AND HISTORY: THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR AND THE HISTORY OF SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE AMONG NEPAL'S RURAL UNTOUCHABLES

Introduction

In keeping with an ethos of social hierarchy that is inherent in the Nepalese Hindu caste system, the people of Bhalara construe gender relations through codes of difference and asymmetry between female and male. This is done in several ways. First, by drawing from the same idiom of relative 'purity' found in caste ranking, the culture of Nepal interprets the menstrual and childbirth 'impurity' of women as making women less pure (and therefore more problematic) than men. Second, gender relations are construed through patrilineal interests. To protect patrilineal honor, women as in-marrying brides are construed as potentially threatening to patrilineal solidarity (Bennett 1983). In yet a third way, that of the idiom of 'natural' disposition, the *jaat*, or 'species' of female has certain attributes such as kindheartedness and compassion that, according to the sacred Sanskrit texts, make women fit for motherhood, yet untrustworthy in the 'rational' and dispassionate pursuits of men. These three conceptual orders and their impact on women of lower caste will be subjects of further discussion in chapters four, five, and six.

Lastly, and the focus of this chapter, is the gender division of labor among caste-organized peasant society, understood here as the allocation of persons to different forms of work based on gender, and the cultural values and meanings placed on that work. I will show how the gender division of labor has been historically linked with practices of caste and social hierarchy, and will demonstrate the impact that such changes have had on the labor of low-caste women.

Questions, Data, and Approach

The three main points of this chapter are, 1) due to conceptual reconfigurations within the culture of Bhalara, as well as the nature of their contact with the social dimensions of material life, the influences of gender and caste on the allocation of labor in rural Nepal are different now than in the past; 2) the socioeconomic causes of transformations in the gender division of labor are local, regional, and international; and 3) the significance of labor transformations are found in both the reproduction of caste hierarchy and attempts to undermine it.

In developing these points, the questions addressed include: What are the past and present forms of gender and caste divisions of labor? What is low-caste women's contribution to subsistence, including family farm production and wage-income work? How does their work compare to the work of others, particularly lower caste men and high-caste women? What is the relationship between the organization of gender relations in the low-caste household, socioeconomic change in the community, and the entry of women into wage labor, both in the past and the present? How is the meaning and value of women's work construed through caste and gender, as reflected in the prestige (or lack thereof) of certain forms of work, and the earning capacity of women? How does low-caste women's historical relationship to land, men, and the upper castes impact on the real forms of economic power they wield in the community?

So as to understand the "origins" of the contemporary forms of the gender division of labor, I first present a social history of landholding relations, and a brief description of the development of the local patron-client or *riti-bhagya* system. This provides the economic and social context within which to understand the many transformations in low-caste women's work, particularly those stimulated by ever-

increasing demands being made on the land and those who work it – mostly women, the wives of male landowners, and/or their low-caste female laborers. To understand the position of people of low-caste in the local landholding system and the history of how and why they have come to occupy that position, I collected landholding and historical data on the fifty research families of all castes; conducted interviews with elder informants; and combined these qualitative and quantitative data with observations on demographic, economic, nationalistic, political and social trends common throughout the farming communities of Nepal in general, and their forms in Bhalara in particular. In this context I will analyze social changes involving gender and its constitution in far western Nepal, focussing on the labor roles, experiences, exchanges, and relations of a little understood group, the women of lower, untouchable castes.

SITUATING LOW-CASTE WOMEN'S WORK: HISTORY, PEASANT ECONOMICS AND CULTURE

Conceptual Frameworks

The two main concepts used to describe the gender division of labor and to define women's work within it are "production" and "reproduction". Most feminist scholars and anthropologists interested in gender analysis accept in some form that the relationship between women's reproductive and productive labor is a crucial element of gender relations in society (Moore 1988,53; Bossen 1984; Mies 1986; Mackintosh 1981; Harris 1981). The project of establishing the gender division of labor involves establishing the value system which surrounds it. There have been many attempts in the multicultural study of gender to construct measures and models to determine the value of women's and men's work in society. In Latin American studies, the mutuality of men's and women's labor is seen as a determinant of egalitarian relations in peasant economies (Bossen 1984; Borque and Warren 1981). In South Asian peasant society, on the other hand, the marked hierarchy of gender relations and the devaluation of women's work is attributed to the lack of female inheritance rights

encoded in patrilineal ideology and practice (Sharma 1980; Bennett 1983; Acharya and Bennett 1981).

Social Hierarchy and Low-caste Women's Work

While it is theoretically and comparatively useful to generalize about what constitutes productive labor and its meanings, the definitions of "productive" and "reproductive" work must be culturally contextualized. In attempting to construct general theory, the common assumption that women's work is the same everywhere has been notoriously problematic in economic and social studies of gender. The definitions used here follow a model that anthropologists have applied in various settings, and particularly in a comparative study of upper caste and ethnic peasant women in Nepal (Acharya and Bennett 1981).[1]

Productive work involves the expenditure of energy and resources in such a way that a product is made or a service is rendered. Productive work is further understood here as socially and culturally situated; it is not an abstract, value-free series of (unconnected) phenomenon. Rather, the form and its trajectories of 'social life' depend on the means and social relations of production, significantly as these come to shape the context and social consequences of work itself. For rural Hindu females and males of low-caste, productive work includes agricultural work, artisan commodity production, and service work – done on one's own family farm, and/or for landowning high-caste families – and is directed toward the goal of household provisioning at a subsistence level. "Reproductive" work includes activities directly related to biological reproduction (fertility, breastfeeding), and reproduction of household members and the workforce (childcare, feeding, socialization) (Moore 1988; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Pearson et al 1981).

[1] Acharya and Bennett did not systematically look at women of low-caste, being mostly concerned with high-caste women and women in ethnic groups.

To avoid stripping productive and reproductive work of the social relations that constitute them and that they constitute, a third conceptual aspect of productive and reproductive work included here is its role in the reproduction of the social system (Stolcke 1981; Harris 1981). The social relations that, in a sense, make the work possible, are the same ones that are involved in reproducing the nature and ideology of the social relations of production. The work of social reproduction is expanded, therefore, to include in a meaningful way its social relations and the ideas embodied in those relations, with the understanding that these ideas themselves are part of what is reproduced in productive work. This approach to examining the gender division of labor in Nepal recognizes the embedded nature of gender within the social system, particularly its "patterned inequality" (di Leonardo 1991,31).

Reproduction of the social system can be examined concurrent with productive processes by asking for whom and under what social conditions work is done. Such observations are then interpreted within larger ideological schemes of social hierarchy present in the culture (see Stolcke 1981). Mechanisms and meanings of systems reproduction are critical to fully understanding gender and the social 'whole'. The question of systems reproduction – which, in the case of rural Hindu culture involves the reproduction of caste and gender asymmetry – is addressed in this chapter by examining the value that the culture places on various forms of productive work and the prestige value of that work to the society (Collier and Rosaldo 1981). If, as we often find for women's work in rural patriarchal societies like those of Hindus, the ideological or prestige value of the work women do is inconsistent with the work's instrumental reproduction of the group – in other words, if women are the provisioning farmers but have little right to the allocation of their or others' labor or the fruits of that labor, nor the right to own the land they farm – then gender asymmetry is effectively reproduced through production practices. By seeing what the

culture says about the work, in addition to seeing what the work actually is, we can decide what the gender of the work means. To be obliged to work, on the one hand, only to be then denied the right to own products of that work solely because of one's gender is a practice that privileges one sex over the other.

Thus, work classified as "reproduction" is conceptualized as part of biological reproduction and fertility, reproduction of social hierarchy, and reproduction of persons. The bulk of this chapter addresses productive work, but the final section takes up the issue of reproduction as a lead into Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Time Allocation and General Trends in the Gender Division of Labor: Work vs. Leisure

Addressing the gender division of labor requires delineation of both productive and reproductive or domestic activities done by women and men. In seeking an understanding of women's work within the social relations of production in Bhalara, a cross-caste comparison is also necessary. To this end I collected data on the allocation of time in three categories of work – **family farm production, income-earning**, and **reproductive/domestic** – in **social activities**, and in **activities that took place away** from Bhalara for more than two days. The activities of all members of fifty low- and high-caste households in the survey population, ages 0 to 65, were recorded over a one year period.[2] The time allocation data provide the basis for numerous kinds of cross-gender and cross-caste comparisons of work patterns. In addition to the time allocation data, landholding surveys, surveys on women's work experiences, and in-depth life history interviews provide in-depth

[2] Age and marital status are also significantly related to women's work in general, and in Bhalara, in particular. For example, young unmarried girls generally do less and fewer kinds of work than do new brides. Such trends will occasionally be discussed in this work, but a full analysis of them is beyond the scope of this present study and will be addressed in forthcoming publications. Also, see Peacock (1991) for an analysis of the work of Efe pygmy women in different stages of their childbearing histories.

information on the hiring practices of the population families, and the income-earning, agricultural production, and artisan manufacturing capacities of individual family members.

Following Bennett and Acharya's pioneering use of time allocation survey data to describe women's work in Nepal, the following five categories of activities were used in the time allocation study conducted in Bhalara during 1988-89 (Acharya and Bennett 1981):

Family farm production – planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops; fertilizing and irrigating soil; drying and storing crops; animal husbandry; collecting fodder and fuelwood
Outside-income work – the above, done for others, in which cash or in-kind payment is received; artisan commodity production; entertaining; portering; house-building, maintenance, and repair
Reproductive/domestic – childcare; food processing; cooking and serving; cleaning house and compound; fetching water; laundering
Away – travel to India, the district center of Chainpur, or south to the Terai on business, employment, employment, health care, and other
Social – personal hygiene; relaxation; religious worship; education

The first two categories, "family farm production" and "outside-income work" comprise <u>productive</u> work, while the third category of activities are understood to be <u>reproductive</u> work. Some "away" activities are part of productive work, as when lower castes collect harvest shares from upper caste patrons (the patron-client system in Bhalara is described below), and were therefore coded as outside income work. Otherwise, the categories of away and social do not generally involve productive or reproductive work.[3]

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[3] The following are the coding categories for the time allocation survey data: ANIMAL HUSBANDRY Milching animal; minor animal; Herding/watching away from home; Fodder Collection; Collection and maintenance of hay; Care and feeding in compound; Milking; Other/ AGRICULTURE Tool maintenance, repair, acquisition; Ploughing; Land preparation, stone removal (excludes ploughing); Terrace maintenance; Preparing organic fertilizer (cutting leaves, making piles); Applying organic fertilizer (carrying to field, spreading); Planting seed, sowing; Transplanting seedlings; Weeding, hoeing, digging; Irrigation (repairing and maintaining canals, applying water); Harvesting (preparing drying space, cutting, drying, carrying); Post-harvest operations (storing, threshing, winnowing, husking corn, drying; Kitchen gardening; Crop protection; Other; Activity not clear. The following were also selected in relation to agricultural activities: CROPS – Paddy, wheat, corn, millet, soybeans, lentils, oil/ LABOR Own family; Another family, high caste; Another family, low caste; Parma/Exchange; Other; Not given/ LOW-CASTE ACTIVITIES Manufacturing; Preparation for manufacturing (bringing dirt/mud for pottery, bringing bamboo for basket weaving, obtaining coal or iron for ironsmithing, obtaining material or

In this chapter, productive work is more fully analyzed than the other categories of activities, particularly with regard to working for others. A comparative perspective is used to further contextualize low-caste women's work in relation to gender, caste, and landholding variation. Figure 3.1 gives the most condensed representation of the time allocation data. As we can see, all females work more hours in productive and reproductive work than do their male counterparts.

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thread for sewing, leather preparation); Sewing; Basket and mat weaving; Pottery making; Ironsmithing; Goldsmithing; leather-making; Assisting in manufacturing of above; Other/ ENTERTAINING (Primarily Damai and Baadi) Preparation; Actual entertaining (singing, dancing, playing drums, at weddings, informal); Other/ OFF-FARM AND NONOCCUPATIONAL CASTE INCOME EARNING Professional (teaching, health delivery); Portering; Building construction; Other/ FUEL COLLECTION AND MAINTENANCE Preparation (sharpening sickle); Fuel collection ("going to *lekh* or jungle"); Wood chopping, stacking, drying, sharpening ax; Other/ FOOD PROCESSING At water mill; Pounding rice; Drying and cleaning grains; Extracting oil; Making sour juices; Collecting vegetables and fruits; Other/ HOUSEHOLD CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR (own house)/ COOKING AND SERVING/ FETCHING WATER/ WASHING DISHES/ CLEANING HOUSE AND COMPOUND/ LAUNDRY/ OTHER/NOT IDENTIFIABLE/ CHILD CARE AND REARING Playing with and holding children and babies; Nursing babies; Other/ EDUCATION At school; Studying at home; Other/ PERSONAL MAINTENANCE Bathing, toilet, washing teeth or face; Eating; Sleeping; Dressing/ SOCIAL ACTIVITIES Going to Kholi; Attending weddings and puja; Visiting relatives; LEISURE Resting; Smoking; Talking; Sitting; ILLNESS/ AWAY FROM HOME Begging, collecting *khalo*; Legal work; Employment; Visiting relatives; Visiting *maiti*; Other or unknown; India

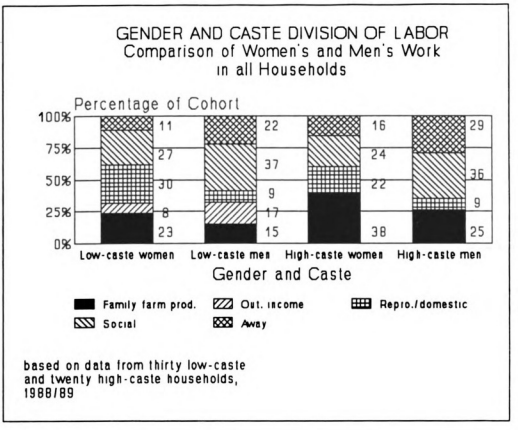

Figure 3.1 Gender and Caste Division of Labor

Condensing the time allocation data in Figure 3.1 into ratios of leisure-to-work (leisure defined in the research as "social") yields the following results:[4]

Table 3.1 Work to Labor Ratio, by Gender and Caste

Low-caste Female	Low-caste Male	High-caste Female	High-caste Male
1/2.26	1/1.12	1/2.47	1/0.97

[4] The ratios were calculated according to the following formula: Social or leisure // Family farm production + Outside income + Reproductive/domestic work.

The group that works the most hours in family farm production, and reproduction and domestic work are the high-caste women. Given that these women rarely engage in outside-income work, high-caste women are clearly the main farmers in the community. Nearly equal to the high-caste women in the relative allocation of time in work and in leisure are the women of low-caste. Both groups of women perform, on average, two to three times as much work in production than their male counterparts and, in the case of high-caste men, nearly three times the amount of work locally. In fact, high-caste men were the only group to spend less time in work activities than in leisure. This is not surprising to the observer who has spent time in a Nepalese village and has discovered that the people most free for conversation and socializing in tea shops and in homes are the men of high-caste. Indeed, women in the research population often had to postpone interviews because of work or childcare obligations, whereas men never did.

Given the relatively equal amounts of productive and reproductive/domestic work women of low- and high-caste perform in relation to each other and in relation to their male counterparts, the data suggest that gender is a strong determinant of the allocation of work in the household. To what extent does caste influence the allocation of work? When we look at the leisure-to-work ratio between the two caste divisions, we find less influence than that of gender. The men and women of low-caste spend more time working than those of high-caste, but only slightly: low-caste people, as a group, spend 1.62 times more hours in work than in leisure activities, as compared to 1.59 times more work hours for high-caste people. The near equivalence of these ratios is surprising in light of the fact that high-caste men allocate more time to leisure than to productive work. Clearly, the low productivity of men in high-caste households is compensated for by its women.

While these data suggest little caste-based difference in the allocation of time for productive work, there are actually significant caste-based differences in the types of work that all people of Bhalara do. Caste is a significant determinant of the social relations within which the work is performed. By focusing on women of low-caste, we can see many differences (and some similarities) in their contemporary work lives and the lives of others. Let us examine the history of Bhalara's rural economy so as to situate the gender division of labor within it.

PATRONAGE, LAND, AND FARMING IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

For the past few hundred years, but prior to the 1960s, the Thakuri ruling lineage was the largest local landowner in Bhalara. Its members cultivated the land through extensive sharecropping and informal tenancy arrangements with other upper caste farmers. Until five generations ago, the people of Bhalara did not have a formal system of keeping land records. Ownership was not authorized through written documents, as it is today. Instead, land boundaries were drawn through verbal agreement among those who had been cultivating the land for the longest period of time. Although land registration was possible during the century of Rana rule in Nepal (which ended in the decade of the 1950s), the general consensus among the largely illiterate people of Bhalara was that a written document had little meaning. They had no way of predicting how scarce land would later become.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, lower caste families did not own land, nor did they need land to survive. Products made by low-caste artisans – leather shoes, clothing, pottery, gold and silver jewelry, bamboo baskets and mats, and iron farming tools – were in continuous demand by the rulers and other farming families. Furthermore, artisans experienced little to no market competition because trade of commodities

other than salt and grains with India and China was not developed.[5] In addition to the commodities produced by the lower castes, services rendered by low-caste guards, tax collectors, and entertainers were important in maintaining the political, economic, social, and ideological base of Thakuri rule. For their services and their products, lower caste families received large shares called *khalo* of the annual rice and wheat harvests.

The exception to these limitations on land registration were the Brahmins who were literate and possessed the resources to travel to Kathmandu and register their land, which they often did. Thus, the Brahmins of Bhalara possess the earliest land records in the area. As they obtained legal control over increasingly larger tracts of land, the Brahmins, like the Thakuri, amassed some of the largest land properties in the area. Eventually, other upper caste villagers became privy to the significance of written documentation and registered their land. Thus, one important structural change to have occurred in the last century of relations of landownership in Bhalara is the reinforcement of patrilineal control over land claims by written documentation. The history of land appropriation by upper caste patrilines disenfranchised low-caste families who did not press their claims to land, and the prohibition against female inheritance of land became inscribed into the quasi-legal code of the area. Women who were informally able to inherit land in the past became formally barred from doing so.[6]

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[5] Salt and grain trade between Nepal, China, and India has a long history that continues to this day (Regmi 1978; Seddon 1987). Tibetan salt traders are particularly welcome travellers through the western region, because no reliable infrastructure connects the west to the eastern sources of such commodities. Even today, Tibetan traders come through Bhalara regularly. They transport salt on the backs of long processions of sheep and goats, and camp at the school or down by the Seti River while trading with local people for grains. Such trade was critical to the people and their livestock of the far western region during the unilateral trade embargo against Nepal by India. For further discussion of trade routes between Nepal and Tibet, see Fisher (1986) and Levine (1988).

[6] Such a process of female disenfranchisement has been described for land distribution in south, west, and east Africa (Newman 1981).

Today, most landowning Nepalese are subsistence farmers, and agricultural production constitutes sixty percent of the country's GNP (HMG 1978; Seddon et al. 1979). In peasant economies, to own land is to have power; domination begins with control over the most valuable resource, land. Those who control agricultural production of certain kinds, particularly wet-rice cultivation, become the dominate groups in an area (Regmi 1978; Geertz 1963; Seddon et al 1987; Stoler 1977; Scott 1976). Agricultural production in Bhalara has developed into, and is now firmly established as, intensive irrigated rice-cultivation, supplemented by wheat, corn, and millet crops. A cultural ideology that privileges farming, *khetko kaam*, as the occupation of most value has developed around the resource of land and the agrarian mode of production in Bhalara. Farming one's own land brings wealth (*artha*), honor (*ijat*), and prestige (*ijat*) to a family. In Bhalara, land ownership by upper castes and inheritance of land by males concentrates power in the hands of these groups, forcing women and lower castes into economic dependency on them.

Scarcity Arrangements: The Land Crisis in Nepal's Foothills and the Importance of *Maatya* Land

Today, the low-caste families in Bhalara are in a constant daily struggle for survival. Their survival depends upon their acquiring land to farm, a goal nearly impossible to achieve. From the advent of nationalist unification of Nepal in the mid-1950s to the present, the material base of traditional intercaste and land tenure relations has eroded due to a severe shortage in arable land and the penetration of market forces into the area. There are three main causes of land scarcity: 1) the population of Nepal has more than doubled from eight to nearly nineteen million people since unification; 2) intensive agricultural production, annual monsoon rains, and natural disasters such as earthquakes have caused steady and pernicious erosion of the

Himalayan foothills[7]; and, 3) land reform has not successfully transferred land from those with plenty to those with none (Seddon 1987; Seddon et al 1979; Bienen 1990; Regmi 1978; Eckholm 1976).[8]

The local scarcity of land exacerbates the problematic practice of excluding lower caste families from acquiring land. Low-caste households are denied access to local land markets through a practice of exclusion that extends over centuries of inheritance traditions monopolized by the upper castes. When asked about the sources of their land, larger landowners revealed that their property was comprised in equal parts by purchases and inheritance (excluding rented land). The research uncovered a surprising finding regarding land acquisition. High-caste families came to own their land just as often through purchasing it on the market as by inheriting it through the ancestral patriline. Significantly, most purchases were made by high-castes from high-castes,

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[7] Of the fifty families in the research population, fifteen lower caste families (52 percent of total low-caste families with land) and thirteen high-caste (62 percent of the total with land) claimed to have lost land in the past decade due to annual monsoon erosion and two destructive earthquakes. Although upper castes generally lose the most land in natural disasters, those lower caste families with land are not close behind. The loss of land due to erosion throughout Nepal's farming foothills contributes to a wry national joke that Nepal's largest export to India, soil, is free.

[8] According to the Nepalese land reform law of 1964, one-quarter of the land that was worked (but not owned) by a family – such as in sharecropping or other tenancy forms – was to be given to that family. The peasant had to obtain a "Number 7" document from the district center in Chainpur (HMG 1973). These documents were in short supply and often unavailable in the centers, and peasants were given substitute temporary certificates in the interim (called *astai nisya*) on which to enter all of the land details. This information could be legally transferred to the "Number 7" certificate at a later date.

Unfortunately the document transferal in Bhalara was rarely completed. Because the Bhalara king was the owner of most of the rented land that low-caste tenants were farming, he confiscated the tenancy certificates from households that were sharecroppers or had plough land, on the promise of returning them later. He never returned the certificates. Whether this was intentional will never be known since the king died shortly thereafter, in 1970, and all of his male relatives live in Kathmandu and claim no part or knowledge in these affairs. A local Thakuri landowner who was a friend of the king's was given charge of his papers and he allegedly confiscated the tenancy certificates while going through the deceased king's belongings. Local people say that he and his five brothers entered the palace after the king's death and took gold, silver, and important land documents, including the temporary land certificates of interest to the lower castes who had faithfully worked for the king. Over the past twenty years several low-caste families have brought land grievances against the Thakuri man, but the disputes have yet to be resolved.

a practice that privileges high-caste buyers over low-caste buyers. Even when a lower caste family has the money to purchase, landowners prefer to sell to other upper caste families for the political and social advantages such exchange ties confer. As a result, lower castes assert that the local land market is effectively closed to them.

In Bhalara today, as in the past, land ownership closely parallels caste hierarchy. Of the fifty households in the sample, upper caste families own 82 percent of all land that is registered. The remaining 18 percent is owned by low-caste families. The average size of the high-caste family farm is 9.01 ropani, more than 4.5 times larger than the average lower caste family farm, at 1.95 ropani. The Nepal National Bank estimates that a family of seven – the average size of an extended low-caste family – needs over three times the amount of land that low-caste families currently own to meet subsistence needs through farming. One way low-caste families meet subsistence deficits and shelter themselves against poverty and hunger is through land tenancy. The most common form of land tenancy in Bhalara today is called *maatya*. *Maatya* land is given as collateral on a loan and may be used for the duration of the loan. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of land by caste among the fifty research families in Bhalara. Landholding data are grouped in five categories adapted from those used by the Nepal National Bank (HMG 1978).

As seen in Figure 3.2, *maatya* land is a critical addition to the farming resources of the lower caste family. By adding small amounts of rented land to their minute parcels of owned land, the size of the lower caste farm nearly doubles from approximately two ropani to four ropani. On the right side of Figure 3.2, we see how critical rented land is to low-caste families. In almost all cases, rented land moved low-caste families into a higher landholding category such that low-caste people worked 32 percent of the total land farmed by the population, while 68 percent was farmed by high-caste families. Clearly, lower caste

subsistence critically depends on rented land. The money and labor lent in exchange for rental property for farming is earned by women and men of low-caste equally, as we will see in the discussion of labor exchanges and work for others below.

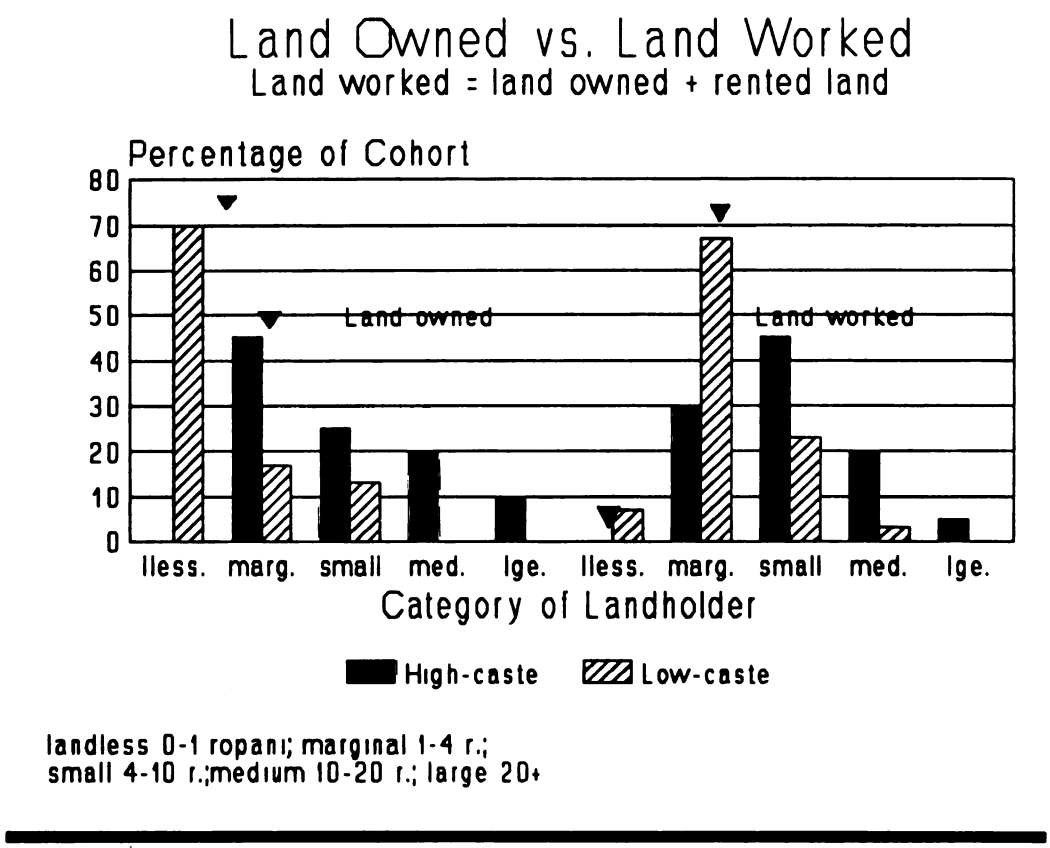

Figure 3.2 Land Owned versus Land Worked

Maatya land tenancy arrangements integrate the remote agrarian community of Bhalara in western Nepal into the vast industrial economy of India to the south. Since the opening of Nepal to India and the rest of the world, lower caste men have been earning money in India and sending it back to their wives who then make loans to high-caste families in

exchange for the use of land.[9] Women are critical partners to these land arrangements.

Although women themselves do not generally travel to India for wage employment, they are essential middlepersons in the *maatya* exchange arrangements: they trustfully negotiate the land in question and its price, they meet their absent husbands' and sons' work obligations, they fulfill new *maatya*-designated work obligations that both parties agree to — in short, they manage all aspects of the arrangement, always arguing on behalf of their children, their families, their situations, and their needs.

There is an established local calendar that governs *maatya* practices. If a loan is not paid back by planting time of either major crop — rice or wheat — the tenant can use the land again that season. By local consensus, land can be reclaimed for planting rice on the last day of Maagh (February 10). The renter harvests the wheat crop for her *moe*, family, then relinquishes planting and harvesting rights to the owner of the land upon payment of the loan. If the owner does not pay back the money owed, the renter can expect to continue planting for another season. The day by which a cash loan must be repaid to a *maatya* renter in order to plant wheat is *Naagpancami*, the last day of either Saun (Ashran) or Bhaadra. The taker of *maatya* land "eats" the rice crop, then returns the land to its owner, the next to plant for as long as she takes no more loans.

In land tenancy relations, as well as in patron-client relations, as we will see momentarily, the extent of the economic dependence of the low-caste household on the high-caste household is great. Eighty-seven percent of the low-caste families in the population rented primarily

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[9] The frequency and use of loans in Bhalara is revealing. Of the 51 households sampled 39 currently had one cash loan and most of those 39 had more than one loan out. 46% of the loans were used in equal parts for livestock purchases and marriage expenses.

maatya land from upper caste families.[10] Thus, not only do landownership relations follow caste stratification but land tenancy relations do as well. Low-caste families also rent small tracts of *haliya* or plough land.

An indication of the demand for land locally is the increase in demand for *maatya* collateral land. As indicated earlier, land purchases are controlled by the upper caste groups, and the lower castes find it extremely difficult to break into the tradition-bound land market. Consequently, lower caste families settle for temporary use of *maatya* land. Over the past twenty years, nearly twice as many low-caste families took more collateral land than took less.[11]

Agricultural Production in Bhalara

The systematic inheritance of land by males insures the structural exclusion of women from ownership of the most important village resource (Sharma 1980), and inheritance through the patriline reproduces male control over the means of production. In contemporary Bhalara, even though males alone have exclusive rights of land inheritance, they are not the primary cultivators of that land. Women are. Certainly, it is difficult to say who the farmers of the past were — men or women. Due to the lack of research, the recounting of the social and labor history of Nepal's agrarian middle-hills is incomplete, and thus questions about the gender and caste division of labor remain unanswered. It is not so difficult to say now; without a doubt, women in areas like Bhalara are largely the farmers. Thus it is that in Nepal, as in many agrarian societies, women are the farmers yet, men own the land (Coontz and Henderson 1986; Deere 1982; Acharya and Bennett 1981).

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[10] Of the 72 ropani of land rented by the sample population - the majority of which is *khet* - 51 ropani (or seventy percent) is *maatya* land rented primarily by low-caste households from high-caste households.

[11] Five of the twenty high-caste families entered into *maatya* arrangements over the past twenty years, as opposed to none prior to that.

Agricultural production in Bhalara prior to the introduction of the caste system was most likely similar to that found in the rest of Nepal's agrarian middle hills. The early Khas people[12] practiced nonintensive cultivation that did not use human-made irrigation techniques, focused on wheat, corn, and millet cultivation rather than on rice cultivation, and probably did not use the lands near rivers – these being later used more adaptively for wet-rice cultivation) (Regmi 1978; Seddon et al 1979).[13] Land near rivers was developed and later owned by the 'immigrants' from India, who brought their social orders of hierarchy and Hinduism with them. Agricultural production in Bhalara has developed into, and is now firmly established as, intensive irrigated rice-cultivation, supplemented by wheat, corn, and millet crops.

The contemporary agricultural system in the Nepalese hills involves low levels of production with little surplus. The two major crops in Bhalara are rice and wheat.[14] Planting seasons and agricultural practices vary locally from lowlands to high-altitude regions called *lekh*. The villages in the study are at relatively the same altitude, and farmers plant according to the following schedule. Rice planting commences in May or June, and ends in July: Rice harvest extends from September to the end of October. Wheat, millet, and corn planting commence in the end of October and extend into November and December, ending in December and January. The harvest of wheat, millet, and corn extends from April and May to June and July.

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[12] The Khas, immigrants from northwestern India, have over the centuries become integrated into the Nepalese caste system as Chetri. Today, there are certain Chetri *jaat* which are identified as descendants of the Khas.

[13] Pre-irrigation production of non-agricultural products like clothing from hemp and cotton indicates that people spent less time in agricultural production than is now the case; although in higher altitude regions in Bajhang, where land is not as scarce a resource and hemp is still processed for clothing, this form of cloth production is not longer practiced in Bhalara.

[14] There are two kinds of rice planted by Bhalara's farmers, irrigated and nonirrigated. Irrigated rice is preferred as a food, but it is more labor and time-consuming to plant, maintain, and harvest, primarily because the seeds are first planted in a small plot and later transplanted once the seedlings sprout and grow to approximately a foot high.

Supplemental grains and foods planted with rice include alley crops such as lentils, soybeans, and mustard. Corn, millet, mustard, pumpkin, cucumbers, and vegetables are grown in separate sections. Other foods planted with wheat include lentils, peas, potatoes, cauliflower, spinach, and other vegetables. Agricultural cash crops, though minimal, include tobacco, mustard for oil, all grains, sugarcane, and *ghyu* (*ghee*, clarified butter).[15] Livestock are also vital to the agrarian economy. Cows and water buffalo provide an important protein source in milk products, and they are the primary source of fertilizer (Bhalara farmers use only organic fertilizer in their fields). Goats are raised for meat and ritual sacrifice during Dasai, and a few families own chickens. The importance of animals to the villagers is reflected in the large number of loans taken for the purchase of animals.

The terraced fields are prepared for planting twice a year. Stalks from the prior crop are burned, and manure-based fertilizer is hauled to the fields by women and ploughed under by men.[16] During all phases of planting outside help is often required. There are three types of labor contracts used in Bhalara: 1) *nimak* is work compensated with in-kind payments and daily meals and snacks; 2) *jyala* is work compensated in cash, and does not include meals or snacks; and 3) *parma* labor which is exclusively female reciprocal labor and is most commonly used during rice-transplanting and harvest where large numbers of workers are needed for intensive work. *Parma* is preferred during planting and harvest because these phases require large numbers of efficiently working laborers who move from one family's field to the next, planting the new

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[15] Bhalara, like the rest of Bajhang, is rice deficient and is subsidized by Nepal Food Corporation which has an office in the district center of Chainpur.

[16] Unlike the field preparations for rice, the manure used for fertilizer on wheat fields is not thrown on the fields immediately but is first carried to the edges of the fields during the few months before the wheat seeds are planted and left there. Farmers explained that it is so hot during the wheat planting season that they carry the fertilizer intermittently before the planting so there will not be alot of heavy work to do during the hot season. I wondered if it was ever stolen; I was told by one woman that it was not. She also said that more fertilizer is used on the rice fields than on the wheat fields.

crop or harvesting the ripened. Labor contracts are made between persons and families who often have already established exchange relations found in Bhalara's patronage system, the *riti-bhagya* system. Let us turn to the features of this system.

THE *RITI-BHAGYA* SYSTEM IN WESTERN NEPAL

Patron-client Structure and Practice

Integrated into the agricultural economy is a traditional patronage system called the *riti-bhagya* system. The *riti-bhagya* system of the past and the present binds low-caste families to high-caste families through economic need and Hindu religious ideology. In exchange for low-caste products and services, high-caste landowner patrons called *riti* regularly provide harvest shares and are expected to meet many other subsistence needs of their low-caste landless dependents, called *bhagya*. Harvest payments, called *khalo*, from landholding *riti* families to low-caste *bhagya* families serve as the economic and moral backbone of the patron-client relationship since they establish the right of each family to ask for services, food, or cash advances from the other in time of need. Thus, the *riti-bhagya* system developed as a South Asian form of feudal economy in which landholding and labor relations followed caste lines. Its Indian equivalent is the familiar *jajmani* system (Beidelman 1959; Raheja 1991). The *riti-bhagya* system was, and is today, fundamentally an economic one.[17]

Up until more modern times, lower caste families worked in commodity and service production for upper caste landowners, and few had little need for land. Throughout the reign of the Bhalara raja many lower caste

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[17] In contrast to the economic arrangement of the *riti-bhagya* system, slavery existed in Bhalara (as it did throughout Nepal) until the second half of the twentieth century. Low-caste people were never forced into slavery, according to Brahmin informants, primarily because of their untouchability. Rather, Thakuri and Brahmins traded poor people of high-caste as slaves to work in and around their homes and fields. According to the Brahmins low-caste were never sold as slaves because "they had their own work to do". The specificity of low-caste labor in the peasant economy, combined with their 'impure' status, prevented low-castes from being sold into slavery.

families worked for the king. Sixty-three percent of the families interviewed said that one or more of their members had worked for the Bhalara raja. Low-caste people who were interested in farming were given small amounts of temporary sharecrop (*adhiya*) or "plough" land (*haliya*) by the ruling family. *Haliya* is a form of land tenancy in which land is exchanged for ploughing the king's (and, later, other high-caste patrons') fields.

Low-caste labor ties to other nonruling landholding families such as Brahmins and the indigenous Khas people evolved as rice cultivation developed, population increased, and agricultural production intensified. Upper caste and landholding families who needed low-caste commodities, service, and labor developed economic relationships with those lower caste families able to provide them. Low-caste families, in turn, relied increasingly on the *khalo* harvest shares from their patrons; though I have no data to substantiate it, it would not be surprising that upwards of eighty percent of the total food consumption for some families was comprised by *khalo* parents that adults (and older adolescents, particularly those married) had earned. Certainly the vast majority of low-caste families maintained patron-client relations with many upper-caste families.

The economic interdependency between low- and high-caste families eventually involved nearly all families in the Bhalara community. To guarantee that both parties meet their economic obligations to one another, a kinship-based dimension to the *riti-bhagya* system developed in which exclusive rights to employment and labor from certain families were conventionally established. In keeping with the patrilineal system of property inheritance, low-caste rights to *riti* and high-caste rights to *bhagya* were passed from father to son for generations. Thus, caste-based economic interdependency developed in such a way that for the last

few hundred years, the rights to *riti-bhagya* relations among the families of Bhalara have been inherited patrilineally.[18]

Inherited Patronage

The *riti-bhagya* relationship is an inherited one. Within the values that circumscribe patron-client labor relations, low-caste laborers maintain rights to employment. Thus, under most circumstances a *riti* patron will not and cannot replace the low-caste *bhagya* with another family of same caste; the relationship cannot be easily terminated. The low-caste family that "eats" a *riti's khalo* is responsible to that *riti*. If a client fails to meet the labor expectations of the relationship, the patron has the right to find another client. For example, a *bhagya* who fails to produce agricultural tools or baskets on time may be replaced by the patron temporarily who will purchase from another low-caste who is not a *bhagya* but who nonetheless produces the same product. A more final solution is for the patron to refuse to give *khalo* to the unproductive client.

Each artisan *jaat* produces a variety of items that all households need. Once completed, artisan products are given either to *riti* or sold to non-*riti*. The goods that low caste people make are necessities for the farming family – tools and storage vessels – and non-essentials – jewelry, floor mats, and clay pipes. The non-*riti* consumer is aptly called the *kinay manchay* or "buying person" because, she or he shares a situation-delineated economic relation with the low-caste artisan – simply, one pays a relatively set price for artisans' products, and the relationship ends there. This single market type of transaction contrasts with the *riti-bhagya* economic relationship which has two main

[18] An aspect of the patron-client system in South Asia that is often ignored by writers on the subject is that both high- and low-caste families require the commodities produced by other low-caste families (for example, low-caste goldsmiths need storage baskets woven by low-caste basketweavers), and therefore all caste groups maintain *bhagya*. However, the vast majority of payments and the longest standing relationships are those between high-caste landowning patrons and their low-caste and predominantly landless clients.

features: 1) continuous negotiations over many material goods, which extend indefinitely in time, resulting in innumerable exchanges between patron(s) and client(s); and 2) guaranteed *khalo* shares.

The bulk of *khalo* payments are in the form of unhusked wheat and rice – the two main crops in Bhalara – but may include other grains such as millet, or lentils and soybeans.[19] Although *khalo* is considered a payment for services rendered, the *bhagya* must still go to the threshing floor or the *riti*'s house to obtain it. This practice is called *maagnu*, or begging (see Cameron 1993 for a further discussion of *maagnu*).

In addition to the *khalo* harvest shares, all of the commodity-producing *jaat* charge a fee called *basho* for their labor and products at the time of delivery. The *basho* charge is the same for both *riti* and non-*riti*, only payment is in grains from the former and in cash or grains from the latter. *Riti* rarely pay in cash. The low-caste person's payment preference varies according to their current situation. If they need food, then grains are requested. Cash, though, is more flexible for low-castes because as a result of their untouchable status they cannot usually trade grains for other commodities, as can the high-castes.

The Right to Produce

Both high-caste and low-caste families are committed to hiring low-caste people from their *bhagya* families for service work, commodity production, and agricultural labor. After all, every family needs a tailor; and any family with land needs an ironsmith to make and repair tools. Due to poverty, though, low-caste payments to other low-caste families are more sporadic and less reliable than are high-caste payments to *bhagya*.

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[19] Because of the scarcity of grain among low-caste families, their *khalo* payments to other low-caste *riti* are in the form of exchanges of services or commodities, rather than grains.

The concept of the right to produce appropriately describes certain inheritance practices in low-caste lineages. The right to produce for certain *riti* families is inherited through lineage males. The right to produce is accompanied by the right to dispose of those production rights – in other words, to substitute one's own production with someone else's. In this, rights of dispensation of *riti* production relations are also inherited by males. Rights of dispensation make it possible for low-caste people to rent or buy a *riti* from another low-caste family. Renting or buying the rights to produce for a *riti* is one method low-caste families employ to obtain cash; 'buyers' and 'renters' of patron rights hope to expand their own and their family's income opportunities. For example, one Damai woman's son purchased a *bhagya* in a nearby village for Rs. 500 ($20) and moved his tailoring business there. The woman is a widow, but she and her youngest son often sew together for their patrons, particularly during the harvest festival of Dasai and wedding seasons. Since he used family resources to "buy out" the other *bhagya*, he is expected to share *khalo* from his new *riti* with his mother and brother.

If production obligations to *riti* are to be altered by a low-caste household, the *riti* lender or seller must inform all the *riti* of the new arrangements. The most common reason for *riti* changes is a male's departure for India. If a man goes to India for a period of time, his wife fulfills the *riti* obligations with the help of her brothers-in-law. Temporary *riti* arrangements such as these are so flexible that with a minimal amount of effort at meeting the patrons obligations even an abandoned or widowed woman can still 'beg' the *khalo*. Assistance of other male relatives may be necessary. However, if after a few years the obligations cannot be met successfully then the *riti* rights must be sold to others; this will be signalled by increasing reluctance of *riti* to give *khalo* to the *bhagya*. Before ties are severed due to unfulfilled obligations, the *riti* may request other substitute forms of labor from the *bhagya*.

Sometimes, though, a landless widow is unable to maintain *riti* obligations. In the absence of a husband and/or other male relatives, Baadi, Sarki, Sunaar, and Oudh women cannot complete production (though Baadi women can still sell sex, dance, and sing). If the work becomes too great, or if the *riti* become dissatisfied, a widow may leave her deceased husband's *ghar* and live with another man. This is a difficult decision because a woman who elopes with another man must abandon her children to the *ghar*. The low-caste have always tolerated widow remarriage since a landless woman can rarely survive solely as a laborer for others. Widowed landholding women, on the other hand, can continue farming. In fact, they often only need someone to plough – the only agricultural job women cannot do. There are many widows, childless or with children and grandchildren, who hire a plough hand twice a year so they can continue to farm regularly, even in the absence of brothers-in-law.

Refiguring "Occupation": Transformations in Low-caste Women's Work

Due to the village economic community – the *riti-bhagya* system – women's and men's productive work is delineated not solely through gender, but through caste as well. Productive work directed toward family-based subsistence for which one gets paid in cash or in kind is meaningfully linked to definitions of one's caste and one's landholding status. For people of low caste, productive work is often labelled by anthropologists as "occupational" because of the artisan commodity and service production contracted by landholders. Low-caste work in agricultural (i.e., nonartisan) production done for either themselves or for others has been ignored or incompletely addressed in the anthropological literature on South Asia, particularly in discussions about caste. The reasons for the overemphasis on the so-called "occupational" work of people of lower castes include the history of their landlessness, their economic dependency on upper caste patrons, the unique qualities of artisan work in the rural peasant economy, and the sometimes invalid conflation of lower caste ritual roles (such as

the barber's traditional role of shaving ritual participants' heads) with their overall subsistence work (such as the barbers who are barbers in caste only and who put their productive energies to work in agricultural or service work, and not in barbering). Indeed, one often finds the terms "occupational caste" and "low-caste" used interchangeably in the literature.

It must be recognized that all work done by low-caste women for patrons – whether artisan commodity or agricultural production – integrates the low-caste domestic mode of provisioning into the social relations of production demarcated by the local *riti-bhagya* system. The *riti-bhagya* system demands not just the artisan work of men, but lower caste female labor of all kinds as well. This point is important to refiguring our understanding of (inherited) patron-client relations found throughout South Asia. Specifically, we need to reconsider the economic dimensions of *riti-bhagya* relations from one of being reproduced solely through the "occupational" work (i.e., artisan and service) of low-caste (male) clients for high-caste patrons, to one in which lower caste female labor of many types is seen as fundamental to reproducing those relations.

Applying the label "occupational" to low-caste work in general is misleading because, while it may accurately describe many low-caste men's work, the term "occupational" does not accurately describe the productive work of today's women of low-caste. Low-caste women's work is not confined to, nor is it necessarily defined by, artisan production. Due to the changes in the gender division of labor, low-caste women now spend more productive time in agricultural than artisan production. This is a distinct and identifiable change from the past, when low-caste women's labor was not significantly different from their male artisan counterparts.

Furthermore, as we will see below, lower caste women's contemporary productive work is heterogenous and flexible. Women are farmers for

their families and other families, daily-wage laborers in agricultural and nonagricultural production, entertainers, and porters. They may or may not engage in artisan production. But the issue of women and "occupational" work is not only an empirical one, it is a theoretical one as well. Given the meanings of 'impurity' often associated with artisans and their products, women's lack of participation in artisan production compels further reflection on the nature of caste in relation to gender.

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF LOW-CASTE WOMEN'S WORK

Situating women's productive and reproductive work in its historical context eliminates errors of presumed gender-based essentialism and biological reductionism (Collier and Yanagisako 1987). When we ask about low-caste women's work in an agricultural setting, we confront two related transformations in the historical and cultural understanding of women's work: first are changes in the forms and quantity of work that women perform; second is the issue of the definition of work and its contemporary cultural meanings. As the kinds of work that women perform change, the meanings associated with that work and subsequently the groups who have traditionally performed that work also change. We find such trends in the history of labor and its meanings in Bhalara.

In her comparative study of the division of labor in four communities in Guatemala, Bossen maintains that the division of labor is "not simply or only a local product but is a product of the dependent relationship society has to the world economy, particularly in the way it affects the economic division of labor and resources" (Bossen 1984). The contemporary division of labor in Bhalara and the trend towards a "feminization" of agriculture are influenced by a combination of interrelated local, regional, and international forces. The discussion below takes into account the impact of local social/caste dynamics, resource allocation and accessibility, and the market (commodities and

jobs) and social ("modernity" and its ideas) influences from India on labor and exchange in Bhalara.

According to informants, low-caste women in the past were involved in more caste-specific commodity and service production than is the case now. Female leatherworkers, tailors, basketweavers, and goldsmiths who were skilled in commodity production worked with their husbands and other adult household members to fill the local demand for their products. But in the contemporary period in Bhalara, low-caste female artisans are, like their husbands, experiencing competition from India- and Nepal-based markets for their commodities. As a consequence, women are shifting their productive activities from artisan to agriculturally related work on their own small rented plots or on the land of patron landowners. Quantitative data on female artisan work are not available for earlier times, but during the contemporary period, women allocated only 8 percent of their time to artisan work, while three times as much time was spent in agricultural production. A nearly reverse situation was probably common in the period prior to the mid-twentieth century.

Low-caste families owned little to none of their own land, and the economic strength of the traditional exchanges in the *riti-bhagya* system precluded the necessity for low-caste households to provision themselves in ways other than artisan production. Thus, according to informants, women of low-caste did not work extensively in agriculture – as they do now. It is certain that some low-caste families did small amounts of sharecrop farming in the past, but they were not extracting profits. A minority of low-caste women worked as agricultural laborers for others, and then only in specific and seasonal work primarily for Brahmins and other high-caste women who were prohibited from such impure agricultural activities as hauling fertilizer and transplanting rice seedlings. Ironically, these 'impure' agricultural jobs are done less often by low-caste women now than are other 'neutral' jobs such as weeding and harvesting; this change is largely due to low-caste women's expressed

displeasure for the socially demeaning nature of such work. In short, if low-caste women did work for other landowners, it was not outside of their patron circles, and was probably confined to work for the local rulers.

There is further evidence that low-caste women did not usually work for non-*riti* high-caste families on a regular basis, and that their current work as daily-wage and agricultural laborers is a recent phenomenon. The majority of low-caste groups came to the Bajhang region with high-caste Thakuri rulers, and the low-caste men and women were obliged to work primarily for these rulers. Only later were *riti-bhagya* relations developed with nonruling families as landownership spread vertically to other castes and agricultural production intensified. As *riti-bhagya* relations expanded beyond the primary ties with the king's family to include other landholders, women's work obligations expanded as well. By the time of the dissolution of the local kingdom and the opening of Nepal's border to India in the late fifties and early sixties, low-caste women worked for their own families or for the local Bhalara king and his relatives, but they had also begun working for other high-caste families within established *riti-bhagya* relations.

Since the 1960s, low-caste women's work has increased in quantity and type. Bhalara women of both untouchable and high caste have experienced an increase in the forms and quantity of work they perform. Over half of the fifty households in the research survey population said that woman's work had increased in the last twenty years. What are the specific changes being experienced by Bhalara's low-caste women? What are the significant contemporary forces of change that have impacted on low-caste women's work? What are the changes in other groups' work roles, and how do these changes influence the work of low-caste women?

The six most significant causes of change in low-caste women's productive work uncovered by my research are the following: male

migration to India; competition between mass-produced and local low-caste commodities and a subsequent decreased demand for low-caste artisan products; decreased supply of raw materials for low-caste artisans' production; decreased formal and informal ownership of land and increased rental of land; relaxed social norms for female behavior; and an influx of outsiders – such as government bureaucrats, law enforcement officials, and administrators – into the area. Each of these are addressed below.

First, **male migration** out of the middle hills to India and southern Nepal for employment is recognized as one of the most influential socio-demographic forces in Nepal's contemporary agrarian society (Thapa 1989). Thapa notes that probably all Nepalese rural families have experienced some form of male migration. Of the 168 males in the sample population, 24 (14 percent) had been away from the home for over six months of the year (7 percent of the entire sample population of males and females). Of these, 19 percent are upper caste men and 12 percent are lower caste.

In Bhalara, the influence of migration is experienced daily in people's adjustments to the lack of employment opportunities and an increasingly absent male work force. An Okheda woman described male migration as the primary cause of low-caste women doing more agricultural work now than in the past. She said many changes began when men started going to India for work in the 1970s: "The women were left behind and they had to start doing the work in the fields that men had been doing before". The flexible domestic unit of production absorbed the labor gap left by the absence of productive males, and it was women who took over much of the men's work on the family farm, including fuel and fodder collection, raising of livestock, and planting and harvesting of crops.

Women whose husbands are in India must take on work for *riti* and non-*riti* patrons so as to maintain their own households. The people of

Bhalara give many examples of work that was exclusively done by men in the past but is now done by women. This work was considered by local people to be impure work for high-caste women, too difficult for all women, or likely to take women away from the home and into 'public' spaces of activity considered improper for women. Such work includes: threshing cut rice and wheat, chopping wood with an ax, carrying rice and wheat in heavy *muri* sacks from the threshing floor to the home, carrying slate for roofing, carrying large bundles of firewood from the jungle, digging fields and breaking clods of dirt in preparation for rice and wheat planting, and carrying manure fertilizer to the fields in a *doko* basket.

Second, over the past two decades, low-caste families have been forced to depend less on harvest payments and other customary clothing and cash subsidies from high-castes because decreased demand for their goods has resulted in lower traditional payments. After the opening of Nepal's borders with India, low-caste commodities have had to compete with **Indian mass-produced imports** that have already replaced many locally-made products. The group whose artisan production is most affected by Indian imports are the Sarki leatherworkers. The sturdy leather shoes and sandals made by Sarki are no longer in demand in Bhalara, having been replaced by rubber thongs from India and Nepal. Sarki products are considered unfashionable and low class in comparison to the shoes and sandals from India. People complain that Sarki leather sandals are useless in the monsoon season (though presumably they were fine in the past). A second *jaat* greatly affected by Indian imports are the Damai tailors. The clothing made by tailors is gradually being replaced by less durable but more "modern" goods from India. Thus, the Sarki and Damai's place in the peasant economy as artisan producers is vulnerable to being replaced by market forces. To keep their *riti-bhagya* ties, the Damai and Sarki women and men must find substitute demands for their labor; otherwise their patrons will cease to support them. As we will

see shortly, the most significant source of labor for the women of these castes are high-caste landowners for whom they are hired to work.

Third, in addition to competition from international market forces, there are internal barriers to low-caste production, particularly recent control over supplies of **raw materials for low-caste production**. The bamboo used by the Parki in basketmaking was always obtained from a famous plateau called Khapted Lekh. To preserve the forest of Khaptad Lekh, a National Park was recently established. The park is heavily patrolled to keep local people from grazing their animals, planting hardy crops of potatoes and millet, and to keep the basketweavers from cutting the bamboo. Basketmakers' access to critical resources has been severely curtailed, threatening their artisan livelihood and their ability to meet patrons' demands. Consequently, high-caste patrons claim they can no longer justify large harvest shares to their low-caste dependents because they are not receiving artisan products in time.

A fourth socioeconomic change to have occurred in Bhalara over the past century is **increasing pressure on land** and diminished land available for farming, as was discussed earlier in this chapter.

Fifth, Bhalara and much of Nepal has experienced **relaxed social norms for female behavior**, thus paving the way for increased female labor of many kinds. Currently, women of all castes, with the exception of the Thakuri and Brahmin castes, do much work which in the past was prohibited for women, resulting in an overall increase in women's work. The only job unconditionally monopolized by men is ploughing. Otherwise, men have not substituted other forms of farm labor, and many men admit that they are now *alchi*, lazy, because of increased leisure time. Other men defend their diminished work on the family farm by claiming that they now travel more on *thulo kaam*, 'big' work, referring to migration

to India, or to the district center (a day's walking distance) to settle various disputes.[20]

Women characterize the changes in their work as a relaxation of restrictions placed on their freedom of travel. In the past they were not trusted to go far away from their husband's home, thereby preventing them from doing work that required travel, such as cutting fuel and fodder in the jungle, grazing livestock in the upper hills, or traveling to the more distant fields to farm. Men say that they restricted women not because the women could not be trusted, but because other men, in contact with nonkin women, could not be trusted.

Finally, the expanding national bureaucracy has penetrated into even the most remote areas of Nepal such as Bhalara in the far west, bringing with it an **influx of outsiders** who reside temporarily in Bhalara. Local people are expected to meet the subsistence needs of these (usually) men and their families. Farmers with agricultural surpluses are tempted by the high cash prices they can receive from these outsiders for agricultural produce, to the subsequent neglect of their low-caste *riti* dependents. The channelling of goods to non-native residents depletes the surpluses that have traditionally gone to the lower castes in the form of *khalo*. Consequently, low-caste women have had to look for alternate sources of food supplies as payment for labor.

The historical trend in low-caste women's work is a movement away from artisan production and towards family farm production and agricultural labor for other high-caste landowning families. Let us now turn to the impact such changes have on the social hierarchies of caste and gender.

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[20] There has not been a substantial increase in professional positions available to men. Granted, there are more dry-goods stores and tea shops, and a few more government and teaching positions. But these are few, and the policemen, the largest group of "professionals", are outsiders.

Low-caste Female Labor and Social Hierarchy

The current work patterns of low-caste women reflect a contemporary arrangement of social relations of production distinctly different from those of the past when, as a group, they were more equally involved in commodity and agricultural production. The forced shift from caste-based commodity production to selling their labor developed out of the sociohistorical construction of low-caste landlessness and the current threat of decreased harvest shares from *riti*. Low-caste landlessness is the rule, rather than the exception, in spite of their longstanding attempts (sometimes radical, other times discreet) to sever economic and political dependence on high-caste patrons by attempting to acquire land. It is, therefore, imprecise to regard low-caste economic roles, women's included, as products of choice based in Hindu ideology that ascribes low-caste *dharma* as service-related labor for landowners. Too often the anthropological approach to caste and economic relations emphasize religious and ideological dimensions over material ones.

Low-caste female labor can be best described as flexible. Women may be asked to do many kinds of work as fits the demands of agricultural production. There is a significant difference in the agricultural work done by low-caste women from that of women of upper caste. Landholding relations separate them such that each woman, while similarly involved in the goal of household provisioning, reproduces opposite ends of the asymmetry of the *riti-bhagya* relations. By working for the women who are married to the men who own the land, women of the lower castes reproduce their position in the social relations of production, a position devoid of ownership and power. Upper caste women, too, work on men's land, but it is that of their husbands; thus, they stand in a position dominant to the women of lower caste, whom they are in a position to hire to assist them in agricultural work.

Ironically, these very same production relations are contingent on gender asymmetry in which it is women who work on property owned by men.

Women of upper caste also work on land that they do not own (it is owned by their husbands), yet the meaning of their labor is to reproduce conditions by which the upper castes maintain their privilege and status through the acknowledged subservience of their wives to males and their patrilines. The difference of social consequence distinguishing high- and low-caste women's work is that women of the upper castes enjoy along with their husbands the privilege and prestige conferred by their high status, whereas women of lower caste do not.

It appears, then, that caste, as an instrument of social differentiation at many levels, structured the forms of women's work more in the past than it does now. Because of such historically based changes in the gender and caste division of labor, we need to ask if the social system is being reproduced in forms different than in the past, or if ideological adjustments are made so as to preserve the social system's most salient feature, caste hierarchy. There are now weak links in the processes by which a perfect replication of caste hierarchy is possible, and these are the direct result of challenges presented by transformations in the gender division of labor. However, the system seems to absorb these changes at the level of gender organization, thus retaining and privileging, for now, the principles of caste stratification.

For example, in the past, high-caste women's productive labor was different from that of low-caste women in quantity and form. Certain agricultural work was prohibited for high-caste women, such as carrying manure (*phoksho haalnay*) and digging the soil (*kheti khardnay*). Low-caste *bhagya* were hired to do this farm work. As social and economic conditions transform in Bhalara, high-caste women now do such work formerly prohibited to them, thus replacing their low-caste female and male laborers. Concurrent with these changes is resistance by low-caste women to perform demeaning work. Low castes cite their rejection of such work as a source of conflict with high-caste people over labor and

pollution issues. To continue to do certain types of agricultural work that the upper castes have traditionally found demeaning subjects the lower castes to continued discrimination and reinforces their low ritual status. Thus, the lower castes resist certain labor that in the past was commonplace, according to elder informants on both sides of the caste divide. Low castes say that, during their past few decades of travel to India, they have been influenced by India's attempts at caste reform. Low-castes return from India emboldened by their experiences there; for example, they claim they are equals with the upper castes and will no longer perform impure work. However, efforts at caste reform are slow, changing minimimally at the level of efforts to acquire land and free *bhagya* from dependent *riti* ties, and not at the level of belief.

How do the people of Bhalara view the transformations in women's work? In general, villagers acknowledged that today's women work more than women in the past. However, the causes given for change in the sexual division of productive labor varies, based on whether the speaker is male or female. According to the men of Bhalara, there are two causes for changes in women's work over the past fifty years. First, they claim women were not strong enough to carry heavy sacks of grain (in agricultural work) or baskets of slate (in construction work) or to wield an ax (in fodder and firewood foraging). Women in the past were limited in their productive work by their physical strength (or lack thereof). What of women today? Are they, too, so limited? When confronted with such inquiries, the men of Bhalara offer little in the way of explanation. To suggest, as I have, that women of today are probably as physically strong, and physically equals, to women of the past (highly more likely than the reverse, given the negligible change in mortality, morbidity and nutrition, and only minimal improvements in health care over the past century) generates agreement from most men.

The men of Bhalara propose a second (and suggestively sound) reason for women's entry into labor of public, agricultural, and productive forms.

If women in the past had more leisure than their contemporary counterparts, this would have created a male concern over women's roles in matters of caste and patrilineal honor. Simply put, men feared the image of a leisured woman specifically because women's free time posed a potential threat to patrilineal honor. During this period, *purdah* was being relaxed for high-caste women, and they were becoming less restricted in simple mobility. Men's fears of women's changing social presence (women being around more often, in public places) resulting from decreased female seclusion was met with a solution that exists to this day. Women began doing men's work – particularly in agricultural production. Whether this was a gradual or an abrupt transformation is difficult to determine. However, within the change itself it is important to note that it is men's control over women that permits men a choice in their level of participation in agricultural production, not the reverse. Women were becoming (or potentially becoming) more mobile, less confined, and more outspoken than in the past. Thus, the primary foundation of the gender system – male ascendancy over women – was reestablished within the changing economic order. In putting women to work on the family farm, the separation of the sexes was maintained. Furthermore, a new conceptual dimension to the gender order was created; as women became the farmers, the land became more defined as a female domain.

DIVISIONS OF LABOR: GENDER, CASTE, AND LANDHOLDING STATUS

The role of low-caste women's labor in reproducing social hierarchy can be examined by asking for whom labor is performed, and what the constraints and expectations are surrounding their labor. This was done during the collection of data in Bhalara by asking if work within the two main types of production, **agricultural** and **artisan commodity,** was done for one's own family, for *riti* families, and/or for non-*riti* landowners. It was found that as labor practices reproduce the household, some work is caste-defined, some is class-defined, and still other work is gender-defined. For example, some Damai and Parki women,

and all Baadi women's primary productive roles are caste-specific. Their contribution to household subsistence is payment (cash or grains) received for sewing clothes, making baskets, or entertaining at weddings, respectively. Since their right to this labor derives from their caste position in the *riti-bhagya* system, we can conclude that these women's work is primarily caste-defined. This conclusion is further supported by two other facts: 1) most artisan production is done for *riti* patrons (a relationship defined by caste); and, 2) the men of these castes also sew clothes, make baskets, and entertain at weddings alongside their wives and daughters.

Other forms of female artisan labor, however, are subject to gender determinations. The degree to which female artisan's work is gender-defined depends on whether men do this work also, and the degree to which the labor is divided. For example, certain forms of agricultural work can only be done by men – like ploughing. Other work is done only by women – such as weeding and transplanting.

In contrast to the gender- and caste-constituted forms of labor that low-caste women are involved in, much of low-caste women's agriculturally-related work derives from their landholding class. Many low-caste women spend the largest amount of productive labor hours working on their own small farm plots or in the fields of other landowners, planting and harvesting crops of rice and wheat. Within agricultural work, we again must examine not only what the work is, but for whom it is done. Agriculturally-related work is more variable than artisan production in terms of labor relations for two reasons: there are many more activities that are agriculturally-related, and there are more families for whom one works.

The demand for agricultural work is steady, though seasonal. During the planting season, for example, a low-caste woman may remove rocks from her fields prior to planting, then help transplant her *riti*'s seedlings,

only to then be asked the next day to gather firewood for a non-*riti* high-caste family whose own women are too busy transplanting to collect firewood. Such female work, then, is largely determined by landholding relations. In the many work situations that a low-caste women finds herself, all of the products of her work are pooled for her own family's subsistence needs.

Figure 3.3 compares five categories of low-caste women's and men's work and non-work activities. We can see marked differences in productive and reproductive roles. Again, low-caste women do more work on the family farm than do their men, but men are more engaged in outside income-generating work than are women (note that some *riti-bhagya* activities are subsumed in this category). The point here is that because of the direction the economy is going, outside income work is expanding for low-caste women as the demand for free labor in agricultural production increases, land available for low-caste tenancy decreases, and traditional *khalo* payments decrease.

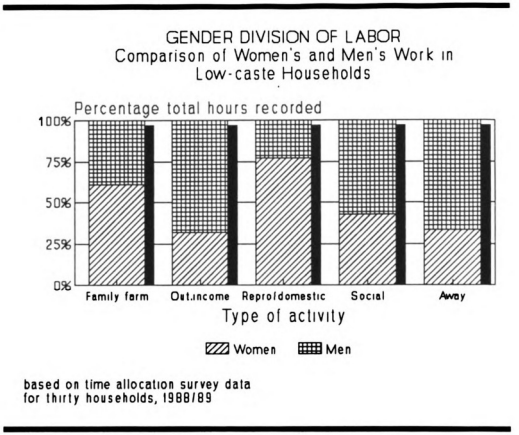

Figure 3.3 Gender Division of Labor, Low-castes

According to the data in Figure 3.3, the most marked difference between men's and women's work is in reproductive activities, where women spend much larger amounts of time than men in childcare, preparing and serving meals, doing laundry, and cleaning the household compound. According to the time allocation data, over 75 percent of reproductive work is done by women in the lower caste household.

To examine the role of the low-caste household's gender division of labor in its most significant social relation – that between *riti* and *bhagya* – work was correlated to its performance for one's own family and for other families (*riti* or non-*riti*). Figure 3.4 compares three types of work of women and men of low-caste – family farm production, *riti-bhagya*, and outside income (which includes some *riti-bhagya*). We can see

in Figure 3.4 that low-caste men spend more time in outside income and *riti-bhagya* work than do low-caste women. Low-caste women, on the other hand, are more often engaged in family farm productive activities on their own and rented land than are men. As we saw above, most of the land they farm is not owned by low-caste families, but is borrowed through tenancy relations.

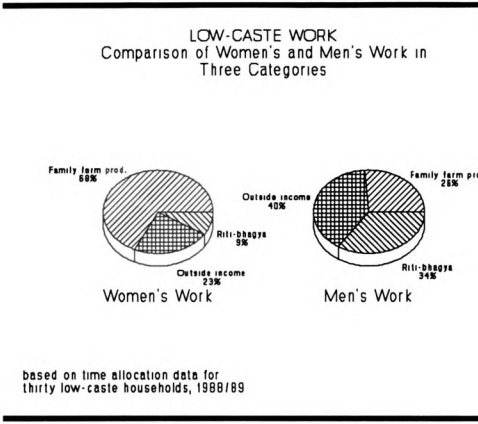

Figure 3.4 Low-caste Work

How does the work of low-caste women compare with their high-caste counterparts? Figure 3.5 illustrates differences in the work of women of different castes. In some types of work we see greater differences than in others. For example, low-caste women spend more time in domestic work than do high-caste women. This is due to the fact that on average, low-caste households have more members than do high-caste households, and

therefore food preparation and serving, laundering, and cleaning take more of a woman's time.

Due to the much larger landholding of high-caste families, high-caste women spend considerably more time farming the family's property than do low-caste women. Instead, low-caste women seem to divide their farming skills between their own land, and the land of others. Low-caste women spend almost as much time in family farm and outside income work (31.4 percent of their time) as do high-caste women in family farm production alone (38.0 percent of their time). For many cultural reasons, high-caste women in Bhalara do not engage in work that produces income (with the exception of a former grade-school teacher who moved out of the area). However, as we will see below, they do make labor arrangements with others.

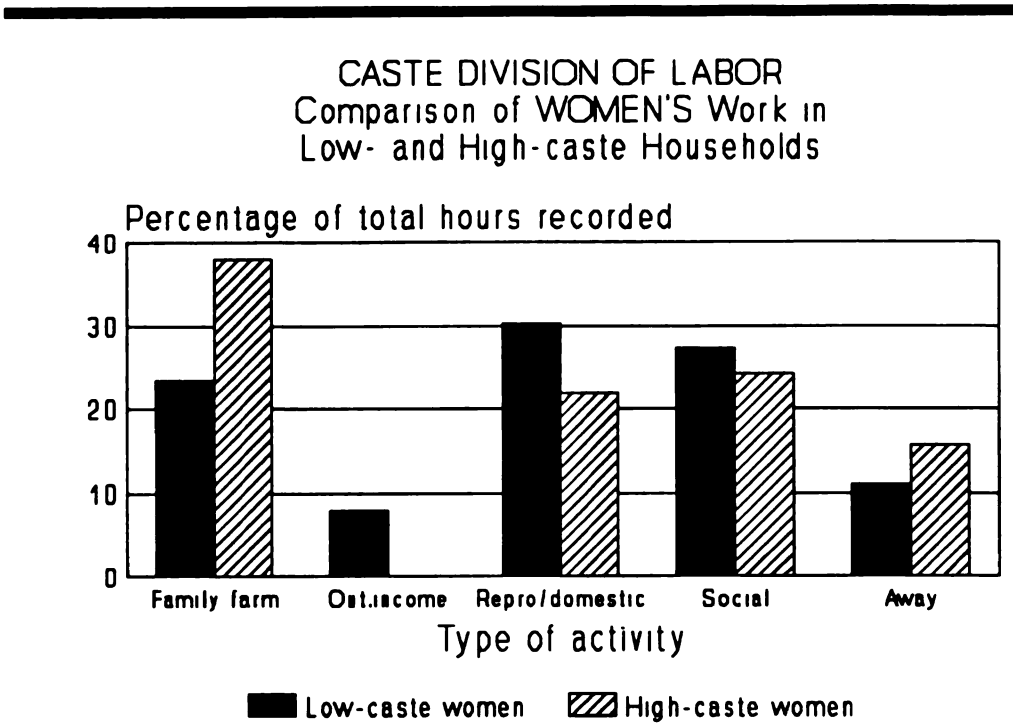

Figure 3.5 Caste Division of Labor, Women's Work

Finally, and interestingly, both groups of women spend nearly equal time in social and leisure activities. The importance of leisure time to socialize and talk with others cannot be overstated. The meaning of women's lives, and the assertions of their power, are expressed and shared in innumerable conversations with other women and men, as they build relationships with their kin, their neighbors, their laborers, and those for whom they labor.

Family Farm Production and *Maatya* Land

An important means of subsistence available to low-castes is to farm their own land. Unfortunately, low-caste people and families come to the current land crisis in Nepal with a prior social disadvantage, that of

being systematically discriminated against in owning land. Increased population pressure, land erosion, and poor government land regulation has resulted in land shortages and continuous shrinkage of the local land market for all castes. Land shortages restrict the upper castes' ability to give as much harvest grain to their low-caste workers as in the past, according to both high- and low-caste informants. Low-caste farmers' struggle for land intensifies daily.

By supplementing their minimal land plots with rented *maatya* land the low-castes of Bhalara improve their household provisioning capabilities by becoming farmers. As in the high-caste household, women of lower caste take on the bulk of farming responsibilities. Survival for low-caste families in the Himalayan foothills critically depends upon women's work in three major areas: family farm production, outside income activities, and reproduction of the household through domestic labor.

LOW-CASTE WOMEN AS HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABORERS

Agricultural Work for Others

One significant difference between the kinds of work that low- and high-caste people perform is that the former have multiple roles in artisan production, farming, and daily-wage labor, whereas the latter are usually farmers only. As farmers, upper castes regularly experience labor shortages that are met through hiring low-caste laborers. As agricultural workers, low-caste family members supplement their own agricultural production and artisan income with cash or grains over and above what they receive in *khalo* from their *riti*. This does not preclude low-caste families from working for *riti* as agricultural laborers; in fact, a high-caste family is likely to hire first from its *bhagya* families, because of their greater dependability (due to their inherited patron-client relations) over workers from non-*bhagya* families. Much of low-caste women's outside income (in cash or in kind) comes from agricultural work they perform for upper caste landowning families.

The demand for low-caste labor within agricultural production comes in the form of informal daily wage work in labor-intensive activities such as planting and harvesting, and on-going agricultural maintenance such as weeding and digging the soil. In Bhalara, the most numbers of workers are hired for the rice crop. Data from forty-six farming families' hiring-in practices during the labor-intensive period of rice planting allow examination of the kinds of work for which low-caste men and women are hired, and the types of payment they receive. The workers hired may or may not be from the sample population; rather, the data reflect how often the families surveyed actually hired workers, and thus show how often low-caste people in the sample population might be hired for various kinds of work.

Untouchable women work in the fields of two groups of high-caste landowners, *riti* and non-*riti*. If their relations with their husband's patrons are good, women prefer to work in patrons' fields because their labor time is an investment in the maintenance of *riti-bhagya* ties which they can draw on in the future. Women are usually paid in kind from *riti*. If *riti* work is not available, low-caste women will work in the fields owned by non-*riti* landowners. For this work they are remunerated with both in-kind and cash payments. As a result of working for large numbers of patron and non-patron families, low-caste women's work is of greater variety and kind than any other group of people in Bhalara.

Figure 3.6 and Table 3.2 present the types of agricultural work for which laborers were temporarily hired for the rice crop of 1989, and compares hiring practices across gender and caste. Information was collected on five types of work: ploughing fields (which also involves simultaneous sowing of seeds), digging irrigation canals, carrying fertilizer to the fields, transplanting rice seedlings, and weeding and digging the fields once the crops are growing. There is variation in the numbers of households hiring for different jobs, ranging from three

households who hired males to help dig canals, to forty-three households who hired female workers to transplant rice seedlings.

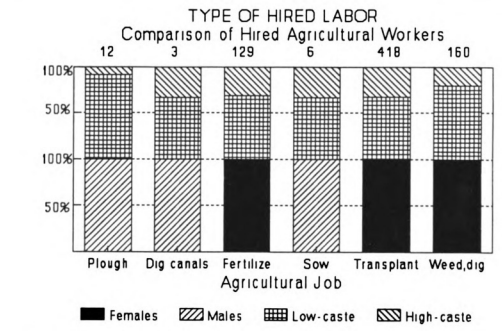

Figure 3.6 Types of Hired Labor

Table 3.2 Features of Hired Agricultural Workers

	Plough Fields	Dig Canals	Carry Fertil-izer	Transplant Seedlings	Weed, Dig
Number of households who hired[b]	12	3	19	43	32
Average # workers hired/household	1	1	6.7	9.7	5
Average # days worked/worker	4.5	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.4
Males (total 15, 3%)	12 (100)	3 (100)	0	0	0
Females (total 707, 97%)	**0**	**0**	**129 (100)**	**418 (100)**	**160 (100)**
High-caste (total 209, 30%)	1 (8)	1 (33)	**40 (31)**	**135 (32)**	**32 (20)**
Low-caste (total 513, or 70%)	**11 (92)**	**2 (67)**	**89 (69)**	**283 (68)**	**128 (80)**
Total rupees spent on Labor (of 4362 total)	300	0	500	2904	658
Total kg. grain spent on labor (of 406.6 total)	46.2	0	29.9	155.1	175.4

a hiring practices of forty-six farming families
b numbers in parentheses indicate percentage of cohort per job

The data reveal clear patterns in gender and caste divisions of labor. First, hiring of agricultural laborers parallels the gender division of labor on the family farm. For example, only men are hired to plough and dig canals, while only women are hired to carry fertilizer, transplant rice, and weed the crops. On the family farm, the allocation of labor based on sex is the same. Second, far more women are hired as agricultural workers than are men (97 percent and 3 percent, respectively). Third, far more low-caste workers are hired than are high-caste workers (70 percent and 30 percent, respectively). And finally, on average, the jobs for which men are hired are of longer duration than are women's jobs during rice planting. This is primarily due to the fact that the ploughing for which low-caste men are hired takes nearly five days to complete, whereas the jobs for which the most

number of women are hired – transplanting seedlings and weeding – take less than half that time.

The Meaning of Gender and Caste Divisions of Hired Agricultural Labor

The hiring of agricultural laborers parallels the gender division of labor within the farming household. Men are hired to do work that only males perform, and the same is true for women. The need for more workers than what the landowning household unit can supply does not provide a context for bypassing the gender division of labor. Women do not plough, they rarely sow seeds (partly because sowing is done concurrent with ploughing) or dig irrigation canals, and thus will not be hired for these jobs. It should be noted that, in light of the argument that males control crops through their control over initiating activities such as ploughing (Mies 1986), three of the female-dominated jobs – carrying fertilizer to the fields, transplanting rice seedlings, and thinning wheat seedlings – are also important to successfully starting the crop. Weeding, though, is an on-going job of crop maintenance for which women are hired throughout the season.

The hired farmers of Bhalara are most often women of low caste. Out of the 728 times workers were hired to help high-caste families plant their rice crop, 97 percent of the time women were hired, and the majority of them, or 71 percent, were of low-caste. There are more female than male workers because the jobs for which women are hired require far more laborers than do male jobs; ploughing is a single-person job, whereas most of the jobs that women perform, such as transplanting, weeding, and carrying fertilizer, require many workers. Clearly, the majority of Bhalara's hired farmers are women. But while low-caste women may be the hired farmers, like the high-caste women who work their husbands' fields, they are not the owners of the fields on which they work.

The largest number of workers were hired to transplant rice seedlings – 418 women or 58 percent of the total workers hired during the rice

season of 1989. Transplanting requires many workers per household and is thus most affordable using reciprocal labor, or *parma*. *Parma* is discussed further below. Nearly all of the farming households hired workers for transplanting rice (forty-three of forty-six), requiring on average an extra ten workers per household. Nearly 70 percent of female workers hired to transplant were low-caste, and the remaining 30 percent of high-castes hired were remunerated with exchange labor on their own lands.

After the rice is transplanted and has taken root, the fields are weeded and dug. Many laborers are hired for these post-transplanting tasks, and as with transplanting, all were women. Weeding is a time-consuming job that is done throughout the growing season. Household women usually complete most of the weeding themselves. Digging the soil to aerate it both before and after transplanting, however, requires many workers. If the family has extensive land and crops, other workers must be hired. During the rice planting season of 1989, thirty-two families hired on average five extra women to weed and dig the soil. The total number of women hired was 160, or 22 percent of the entire population of hired laborers for the sample households. Here again, the vast majority of women hired to weed and dig were low-caste – 80 percent.

Carrying fertilizer to the fields before the rice is planted is the third most labor-intensive job, and is also female dominated. Nineteen households hired, on average, seven women to carry fertilizer to the fields before transplanting the rice seedlings. The total number of women hired was 129, or 18 percent of the entire hired labor force. The ratio of low-caste to high-caste women hired to carry fertilizer is the same as that for transplanting rice seedlings: 7:3, or 70 percent low-caste and 30 percent high-caste. This ratio is large, but not as large as that for the caste of female workers hired to weed and dig: 8:2, or 80 percent low-caste to 20 percent high-caste. The main reason why there are more high-caste workers transplanting seedlings than weeding and

digging the fields is that transplanting requires large numbers of workers for a short period (one to two days only). Consequently, families cannot afford to pay many workers in cash or in kind, relying instead on traditional female labor reciprocity called *parma*. Added to this is the unacceptability for women of high-caste to take money or grains for work they have done for others.

Forms of Payment: Reciprocal Labor (*Parma*), Cash (*Jyala*), and In-kind (*Nimak*)

Data on the relationship between forms of payment and the gender and caste of workers for the rice crop of 1989 are provided in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 below. Table 3.3 indicates that 91 percent of the time high-caste women are hired, it is in *parma* form, with the expectation by the women that they will receive reciprocal labor in return for their work. Thus, the frequency of *parma* labor used in transplanting accounts for the larger numbers of high-caste women for that particular type of agricultural work.

Table 3.3 Hired Female Workers by Caste and Payment Type

Total of Female Workers/ Payment Type/Caste of Worker

	Parma (recipr.)	*Jyala* (cash)	*Nimak* (in-kind)
Low-caste women	50%/65%/70%	7%/89%/10%	15%/90%/21%
High-caste women	26%/34%/91%	0.9%/11%/3%	1.7%/11%/6%

Table 3.4 Forms of Payment for Hired Agricultural Labor

Number of Workers Hired[a]

	Plough Fields	Dig Canals	Carry Fertili-zer	Transplant Seedlings	Weed, Dig
Parma (reciprocal)	1	0	108	300	88
Jyala (cash)	2	0	11	46	8
Nimak (in-kind)	3	0	11	72	64
Free labor	3	3	0	0	0
Haliya (land tenure contract)	3	-	-	-	-

a The data on payment form are based on actual workers hired, or 128, and not on the total number of times workers were hired (i.e., some workers worked for several days, others for only one day for a total of 707 women-hires). The numbers reflect a percentage value increase (percentage of number of workers for whom data are available multiplied by the total workers hired).

An unanticipated finding was the extensive use of *parma* labor for carrying fertilizer to the fields. Over one hundred of the workers hired to carry fertilizer, or 83 percent, agreed to reciprocal exchange arrangements, including women of high-caste. It is surprising that 30 percent of the workers hired were high-caste women who agreed to carry fertilizer for other families since it is considered a demeaning job for all women, and a ritually impure job for certain high-caste women such as Brahmin and Thakuri. These women are generally forbidden to carry fertilizer and must hire other workers to do so. Not infrequently, though, these workers are of upper caste (though, of course, 70 percent of the time they are low-caste); however, they are not paid because accepting payment, too, is discouraged for women of upper caste. Rather, they are promised return labor. But why are <u>any</u> women of high-caste needed for this impure work if women of low-caste are available? The negative value associated with carrying fertilizer explains why larger numbers of high-caste women are employed than would be expected, or than are retained for other jobs. When I asked low-and high-caste female informants about this, they explained that low-caste women are increasingly more reluctant to carry the organic fertilizer of another family. Thus, because low-caste women willing to carry fertilizer are difficult to find, high-caste women reluctantly help each other out in this particular agricultural job.

It is clear from the data that low-caste workers, both female and male, are hired much more often than high-caste workers. The single largest group of hired agricultural laborers is women of low-caste. In all of the categories of work for which labor was hired, low-caste women comprised approximately 70 percent of the labor force. We can conclude, then, that low-caste women comprise the largest pool of free labor of

all other groups in Bhalara. Low-caste women are hired much more often than are high-caste women or men to carry fertilizer, transplant rice seedlings, and weed fields. They must do agricultural work on other families' farms because they themselves do not own enough land to adequately provide for their own families. Thus, it is both their caste – which places them in certain landholding relations with other families in Bhalara, and is the source of their labor availability – and their gender – they are hired far more often than their male counterparts (69 percent to 1.8 percent, or 38:1) – which determines the high frequency with which low-caste women are hired. During the period of research, low-caste women were hired thirty-eight times more often than are low-caste men, and two and one-half more times than high-caste women.

How significant to family subsistence are the contributions in cash and in-kind that low-caste make from their labor for others? Exactly how much of a cash and in-kind contribution to household subsistence do low-caste women make? To answer this we can look at forms of payment and examine gender and caste differences in the value of labor power.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 show the patterns of payment to agricultural workers. The most common form of labor contract is *parma*, reciprocal labor done by women in transplanting seedlings, carrying fertilizer, and weeding. *Parma* is the most common type of labor in general (used in 69 percent of all cases in which work is done for others), the most common form of female labor (used in 70 percent of all instances of hiring female laborers), the most common work arrangement among low-caste female workers (70 percent), and finally, is the most common form of labor used for female-defined agricultural work for which labor is hired. In contrast, *parma* is absent in men's work arrangements. This does not mean that men do not exchange labor – they do, particularly in digging irrigation canals and sometimes in ploughing. But men do not call their labor exchange *parma;* they simply say they are doing the work as a favor, with the unspoken assumption that the "favor", *madat*, will be

returned. Women, however, label their labor *parma*, and therefore expect a labor return quite soon after.

Table 3.5 Earnings of Hired Agricultural Labor

	Cash Payment (Rs.)			In-kind Payment (kg.)		
CLASS OF HIRED WORKER	Gross	**Average of Total Earned/ Worker by Cohort**	**Ave. Earned/ day/ Worker**	Gross	**Average Total Earned/ Worker by Cohort**	**Average Earned/ day/ Worker**
Male (15) [21]	300	**150[22] (2 workers were paid)**	**33.33**	45.9	**15.3**	**3.4**
Female (707)	4062	**62.50 (65 workers were paid)**	**36.76**	360.4	**2.45**	**1.44**
High-caste (209)[23]	437	**62 (7 workers were paid)**	**38.5**	98.6	**0.47**	**0.27**
Low-caste (513)	3925	**65 (60 workers were paid)**	**33.9**	307.7	**0.61**	**0.35**
High-caste male (2)	0	**0**	**0**	0	**0**	**0**
High-caste female (207)	447	**63.9 (7 workers were paid)**	**37.6 (for 1.7 days)**	37.8	**2.52 (15 workers were paid)**	**1.48**
Low-caste male (13)	300	**150 (2 workers were paid)**	**33.3 (for 4.5 days worked**	46.24	**15.4 (3 workers were paid)**	**3.4**
Low-caste female (500)	3615	**62.3 (58 workers were paid)**	**36.7 (for 1.7 days)**	322.6	**2.44 (132 workers were paid)**	**1.44**

[21] All the male workers but two were low-caste.

[22] Only five of the fifteen male workers were paid, two as *jyala* and three as *nimak*; these figures were used to calculate pay rates. As noted above, men who are hired to dig irrigation canals (in this case, three men, two low-caste and one high-caste) do this "as a favor" to help other men, and expect to receive labor help in return in the future. This is not considered *parma* labor, a term usually confined to reciprocal female labor.

[23] All the high-caste workers but two were female.

Due to the structure that Bhalara's gender division of labor places on the hiring of agricultural workers, more women are hired and therefore women earn far more than men in agricultural labor. The majority of female jobs require large numbers of workers, or, put conversely, all jobs for which large numbers of workers are needed are female-dominated jobs. Of these, the most labor-intensive job is transplanting rice seedlings.

Gender and the Value of Work: Cash and In-kind Payments

Prior to the start of work, low-caste women arrange with their high-caste employers the kind of payment they will receive. Either at the time of hire (commonly a day before work commences) or on the morning of the working day, they negotiate a balance between cash and grain payments, *jyala* and *nimak* respectively. Table 3.3 shows that 90 percent of the time when hired agricultural laborers are paid in cash or in kind, it goes to low-caste women. During the period of research it was used a total of 30 percent of the instances in which low-caste women were hired. Unlike high-caste women, cash or grain payments to low-caste female workers is acceptable and common. High-caste women are not regarded by the people of Bhalara as "laborers" as are low-caste women.[24]

Are there differential pay scales, based on gender or caste? The data reveal that there are, and that the gender of the worker determines pay rates more than does caste. Due to the fact that the gender division of labor determines which sex is hired for which jobs, different rates are based on the gender definition of the job. Ploughing, for example, is

[24] There were three high-caste women who were hired seven times for agricultural work during the research period, and were paid in cash and grains, and 15 times when these same three women were hired and paid in grains only. These instances are exceptions that prove the rule regarding the general prohibition against high-caste women working. First, so few high-caste women were hired - only once out of eight times a woman is hired to work. Second, the three women involved were from very poor families with no resident males. Third, they received a combination of cash and grains, and, because of their gender, they were paid in rates equal to those of their low-caste counterparts.

considered a higher paying job than is weeding, regardless of the fact that ploughing a landowner's fields may take up to five days, whereas weeding may take only one (although weeding may be repeated one to two weeks later). The man who is hired to plough another's fields, therefore, is guaranteed work for up to five days, whereas the woman must seek work again the following day, particularly during off-season. A man hired to plough can expect to receive a good pay, particularly if an in-kind payment is made. The people of Bhalara negotiate payments based on the type of work, rather than its duration.

In Table 3.5 we see that men were hired during the time of research to plough, dig irrigation canals, and sow seeds. However, only two low-caste men hired to plough were paid in cash, and each earned Rs.150. Three low-caste men hired to plough were paid in kind for which they received 15.3 kg. each, on average. Both of these payment rates per job are far more than any single woman earned per job. When we consider daily rates we find little difference in the rates paid to men and women, or to high-caste and to low-caste. Still, the male worker earns more as a single individual per job than his female counterpart; a higher value is placed on the work reserved for men, such as ploughing and digging irrigation ditches. The value of the work, reflected in payments based on the job, is greater because men are doing it and not because it is considered more difficult or of longer duration. As a result males' earning capacity is greater in general, and should a male choose to do more agricultural work for others, he is in a position to earn more than his female counterpart.

When <u>in-kind</u> pay rates are considered on a daily basis for the year in question, more interesting findings emerge that reflect ideological levels of hired gender and support the idea that gender, more than caste or job, is considered in the setting of wage standards in Bhalara. To begin, a low-caste male, due to his gender, earned on average five times more than his female counterpart. 65 male workers, working predominantly

at the beginning of the rice season ploughing fields and digging irrigation canals, earned a total of 46 kgs. of grain. Compare this to the 3925 times female workers were hired, yet earned far less -- 360 kgs. of grains, gross. A male worker could have expected to be paid, on average, 15.4 kgs. of grain if engaged in any of the male-dominated agricultural jobs. A female worker could have expected to earn far less, even though (fortunately) she is employed more frequently than male workers during the 1989 rice season. During the 1989 rice season, a low-caste woman earned, as a female, 2.44 kgs. of grain (keeping in mind that many of the representative "women" are actually the same woman). Because she is a woman, there are more employment options available to her both in job type as well as frequency (related, as they are). Female-dominated activities engaged women in planting and harvesting, as well as many maintenance types of work in between. Her per day rate, while not five times less than males, is still far less than half of what a man earned for his daily wages from other peoples' fields (her 1.4 kgs. of grain per day, compared with his 3.4 kgs. of grain per day). These rates clearly show us how often women of low-caste must and do work as agricultural laborers in order to earn as much as would her husband or her son(s), her father or her brothers-in-law or father-in-law if so engaged. In the end, women bring in more cash and grain incomes to the household, but they must work longer and harder to do so in a variety of situations, with a variety of households, and with more daily uncertainty and competition.

The pay rates also reflect the people of Bhalara's preference for paying in grains over cash because of the minimal flow of capital in the area. A man willing to accept in-kind payment will receive more than a woman willing to accept the same, and more, comparatively speaking, than he would receive in cash. Of course precisely because of the minimal flow of capital male workers prefer the exchangeability of cash. But for many low-caste families whose wage employment ensures minimal survival, in-kind payments are preferred. In terms of the nutritional status of

family members from poor households, it is fortunate that women, rather than men, are working for others for in-kind payments since women prefer these forms more than do men (who prefer to receive cash to spend it on themselves in town).

I found that work contracts of many kinds, including agricultural labor, are more likely to be based on the job, with lesser regard given to the number of hours or days it may take. This is particularly the case with male-dominated jobs, including low-caste men's artisan production, building of houses, entertaining, and the work of the Brahmin male priests. Even in the case of a job that normally takes three days to complete takes five days, the male worker is not likely to be paid more than the agreed upon cost, except for per diem meals and snacks. Still, he will be paid more than if a woman was doing the work. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be paid on a daily basis if they are hired as informal daily wage workers. It seems reasonable to conclude that the basis for pay differentials is gender-based, with male jobs receiving more than female jobs, and not necessarily based on skill or educational level, or even the nature of the job itself. It is safe to say that most agricultural and non-agricultural work that I have observed in Bhalara requires strength, tools, skills, and time.

Caste, interestingly, has no bearing on the rates of pay that workers receive, though, as indicated above, caste is reflected in the <u>type</u> of payment for which women agree to work. High-caste women are nearly always hired as *parma* exchange laborers, while low-caste women's labor contracts are more varied. In Table 3.6 we see that no women from the research population's upper caste households claimed to earn income from work for others, even though, as we saw above in the time allocation survey, they are hired by other upper caste families as *parma* laborers. We also see that women who were married more than once, all of whom were low-caste, claimed to earn the least from family farm production, and earned the most from their own labor for others. No women received

income from salaried work, though a large majority of women claimed income from their husbands. Lower-caste women also received income from artisan production or "manufacturing", a field of labor unavailable to upper caste women. Other sources of women's income include gifts from the *maiti* (natal home) that a woman receives during visits there.

Table 3.6 Income Sources for Women

The following are in percentages of "yes" responses.

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
Family farm generates income	83.9	58.8	33.3
Gets income from own labor	0	64.7	66.7
Gets income from prostitution (Baadi *jaat* only)	0	9.8	33.3
Gets income from own salary	0	0	0
Gets income from husband	58.1	62.7	83.3
Gets income from *maiti*	74.2	60.8	0
Gets income from manufacturing	0	23.5	0
Gets income from other sources	6.5	29.4	50.0

Caste, Land, and Payment

Now let us turn to the types of work women perform based on caste, with a look at the different low caste *jaat*. Some low-caste *jaat* do more *parma* labor than others, and still others contribute far more workers to the labor force than some. These patterns of employment are ultimately related to the amount of land owned by the family.

Those families who are landless, marginal landowners, or tenant farmers must supplement their household incomes with *khalo* grain from *riti* (for whom they make artisan products) or from landholding families through daily agricultural work. On the other hand, those low-castes who have larger tracts of land to farm (whether owned or rented *maatya*) occasionally experience labor shortages and must hire other lower castes to work for them. Figure 3.7 shows the landholding status of six low

caste *jaat*, and includes both land owned and land rented, for a total called "land worked".

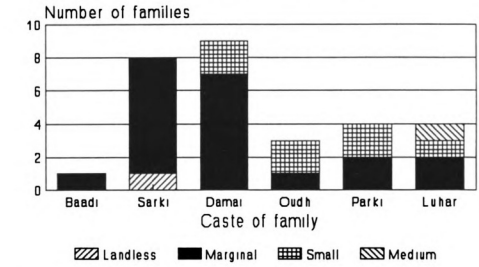

Figure 3.7 Land Worked

We can see that the Sarki leatherworker and the Damai tailors are the largest groups represented in the sample population and have the most number of marginal households. Recalling the discussion earlier in this chapter of the effect of tenancy on landholding status and the ability to farm more land, most of the currently marginal households do not own any land (are originally landless) but have rented enough land from high-caste landowners to farm. These families do not own the majority of the land that they are farming, and could lose it at either of the two post-harvest periods. Following the Sarki and Damai in landholding status are the Parki and Luhar, followed finally by the Oudh who have the most secure landholding status of all of the low-caste *jaat*.

We would expect to find more workers coming from those households and *jaat* poorest in land and largest in numbers. This is indeed the case. The poorest *jaat* in the area are the Sarki, and they contributed 27 percent of the workers from six low-caste groups. Following the Sarki are the Damai and the Luhar, both contributing 20 percent apiece. Most of the Damai families are just as poor in land as the Sarki.

The Luhar women are an exception to the direct association between poverty and frequency of daily wage work in agriculture. There were as many Luhar women hired as Damai women. Yet the Luhar families are some of the wealthier of the low-caste families. How do we explain this? If we look at the kind of labor agreement these women make, we can see that Luhar women contribute the second largest number of *parma* workers from among the low-castes (26 percent). These workers agree to work reciprocally, and/or, in the case of low-caste women working for high-caste families, they will accept some other form of service in the future to secure their land tenancy arrangements. These families are in need of securing good favor with their high-caste patrons because they want to keep the land; thus, the Luhar women will agree to a *parma* work arrangement as preferred by their employers, even though they may not receive work in exchange.

The poorest low-caste families, while also interested in good relations, are in greater need of grain payments to feed their families. Thus, we would expect the female laborers from these families to request cash or in-kind payments more frequently than the other groups. This is the case. As stated above, the Damai and Sarki households are the poorest in Bhalara. Both the Damai and the Sarki women contributed the most number of *jyala* and *nimak* workers combined. As a result, women from these groups earned the largest percentage of the total cash and grain payments made to low-caste female workers during the rice planting season of 1989. Damai women alone earned twice that of any other cash paid female workers, and Damai and Sarki women combined earned over

eighty-percent of all grain payments made to women.[25] These grain payments, usually in rice or wheat, are brought home in the evening to constitute the main meals during the next few days. Parki women also received a large percentage of the grain payments.

Parma Labor and Transplanting

The practice of transplanting rice seedlings is a female job and a *parma* job par excellence, a job performed by large groups of women throughout the day. Early in the morning groups of women from neighboring villages gather at a designated landowning household and are fed the morning rice or wheat meal. Laughing, singing, and sharing bidis and tobacco, the women, with their children following close behind, walk to the small brilliant green plots of rice seedlings that by day's end will be redistributed across the hillside. The seedlings are carefully dug out of the rich black wet soil and tied into bundles. The women place the bundles in their *doko* baskets and then walk together to the wet barren fields where the seedlings will be transplanted. The women, dressed in their brightest clothes and jewelry, form a long colorful line at the edge of a field and bending at the waist, begin to slowly traverse the field. They pull seedling bundles out of their basket, separate one small and fragile seedling away, and press it gently into the soft, moist, fertile soil. Stepping carefully around the seedlings, up to their calves in mud, one or two individuals standing upright to straighten their scarves, to wipe sweating faces, or to call out to bystanders or children, the singing and laughing women advance across the field, leaving small, frail, wisps of green in their wake. When one field is finished, the women proceed to the landowner's next field, or to another family's fields. By the end of the day the terraces are transformed from a guilt of brown with an occasional splash of bright green, to a smoothly dotted pattern of green and brown.

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[25] Okheda women also frequently accepted cash and in-kind payment but none of their families were in the research population and therefore I have no information on their landholding status.

Parma labor in its quintessential form consists of a large group of women transplanting rice seedlings in the monsoon season. Stories are told, old songs are sung, and new songs are composed during the day, and for the days following. Upwards of fifty-percent of the *parma* women come from landholding families themselves, and can expect those for whom they have transplanted to return the labor by helping transplant their own crops. In addition to being female-dominated, *parma* labor is circumscribed by caste restrictions. High-caste *parma* workers do not give exchange labor to low-caste *parma* workers because they must avoid contact with the seedlings of low-caste families. Rather, low-caste households who need help with their transplanting and other agricultural work (as most do at planting time) seek *parma* help from other low-caste women. These women, in turn, can expect labor back, or remuneration in cash or in kind. Since most low-caste families are poor, they generally remit their *parma* workers with exchange labor. Thus, the *parma* workers on low-caste fields are likely to be only low-caste women, and are paid in labor exchange. The *parma* workers in high-caste fields, however, are both high-caste and low-caste, and a variety of remunerations will be made – cash, grains, and future labor.

What of the low-caste women who do *parma* work on high-caste fields? In the research data, there were many hired low-caste women whose work contract was classified by the hiring family as *parma*, though as stated above, they are unlikely to receive reciprocal labor in return. Though much of this work was classified by the hiring family as *parma*, I suspect that the low-caste women are either *bhagya* of the landholder, or have informal but semi-dependent work relationships with landholders, perhaps related to land tenancy. In either case, the woman will not get paid, nor will she receive reciprocal labor from the high-caste family. Rather, her labor is in exchange for some other service the high-caste family is providing, such as lending her family land or money, hiring her husband as a *haliya* worker (a plougher), or providing some other material goods to the family. Since women's labor is rarely called "free

labor", or something done as a "favor" for another family (except between friends, it which case it is ultimately *parma*), the hiring families interviewed chose to call the low-caste women's work *parma* if there was no agreement of either cash or in-kind payment.

Gender, Ideology, and Farming

What does the gender division of hired agricultural labor tell us about the ideology and practice of subsistence farming? Although it may appear that men control the initiation of a new crop through their monopoly over ploughing that without men the crops could not be planted, the people of Bhalara do not think of the gender division of agricultural labor in this way. First, it is difficult to say which acts inaugurate the planting season, but it is certainly not simply or only ploughing. Long before the ground is broken, seeds must be sorted and new seeds bought if the household supply is inadequate. The Brahmins must consult their almanacs for auspicious planting days and inform their patrons. The availability of family workers are determined based on these dates. If men are away from the household, they are called back to the area via letter correspondence that may take weeks to complete. If workers must be hired these arrangements are made. Thus, the planting season is initiated through a series of actions of discussion, negotiation, and worker and material preparation.

The freeing of low-caste female labor into the community does not occur in a hospitable job market. Employment opportunities for low-caste women outside of agricultural production do not exist. Within agricultural production, low-caste women's labor is becoming increasingly competitive with women of upper caste as caste-based work restrictions on high-caste women working in many areas of agricultural production that have existed in the community for generations are relaxed. In the past, women of high-caste would not carry fertilizer, or transplant rice seedlings, or do much of the other work associated with farming because their mobility was restricted through now outdated *purdah* limitations. Many people say

that in the past men were the farmers, not women, as is now the case. Combined with these social changes are demographic changes. There are many more people to feed, but also many more women to farm; within high-caste households, land pressures force an involution of labor and consequently the average small farming family is less generous with its hiring and payments than was true in the past. For example, the average high-caste small farming household in Bhalara keeps production costs down by using its own female labor force. Only when necessary will small farmers hire outsiders, and then preferably in a *parma* arrangement.

Low-caste women's option of selling their labor within the community is limited. In spite of this, the single-most important provisioning role of these women today is in agriculture and agriculture-related production. Low-caste women spend over two times more hours in agricultural activities (including animal husbandry) than their male counterparts spend in manufacturing. Outside of *riti-bhagya* arrangements, low-caste women are a labor pool for other landholders during peak agricultural and other labor shortage periods.

LOW-CASTE WOMEN'S WORK IN ARTISAN PRODUCTION

The most well-known economic relationship between low- and high-caste families is found within the *riti-bhagya* system. With the exception of only four relatively recently settled families, all low-caste families in the sample population have semi-permanent low- and high-caste *riti* for whom they produce those goods and services specific to their caste in exchange for harvest shares, *khalo*.

Women from *bhagya* families have two economic roles in fulfilling the responsibilities and maintaining the inherited ties to their husband's *riti*. First, women from families who regularly produce artisan commodities for the community (about 40 percent of the low-caste sample population) may fully or partially participate in artisan and service production. Second, low-caste women work as agricultural and non-

agricultural laborers for their *riti*, as has discussed above. Let us now turn to the kinds of work that women of low-caste perform in artisan production.

Women from *bhagya* families who regularly produce artisan commodities for the community themselves participate in those production processes. Damini (women from the Damai tailoring *jaat)*, for example, are such active seamstresses that some women receive sewing machines in their dowry. The level of women's participation in this form of commodity production is relatively high. However, there is variation in degrees of artisan production by women. Luharni (women from the ironsmith, Luhar, *jaat*), for example, do not pound iron into tools as do their husbands, but they may pump the billows, or gather other raw materials for farm tool production. Women in all artisan castes negotiate production timetables, deliver finished goods, make labor arrangements, manage orders of goods, and collect payment for products from *riti* and non-*riti* alike. Many times throughout my four years of residence in Bhalara my high-caste landlady would request a good or service from the wife of a male *riti*, and though the wife did not herself make the good, she placed the order and often delivered the product. Overall, low-caste women allocate 9 percent of their productive labor time into artisan production.

Women's supplemental commodity production work involves such activities as collecting raw materials for production or delivering completed products to *riti*. I refer to this work as supplemental because it is work that is essential to the production process. Table 3.7 describes the gender division of labor in artisan production. As we can see, women and men may have either identical types of work, or supplement each others'.

Table 3.7 Gender Division of Artisan Activities

CASTE	MALE	FEMALE
Baadi potters, entertainers	collect, mix clay. pound clay. shape vessel parts. dry. fire. decorate./ dance, sing, drum.	carry, mix clay. shape pipes. carry fodder. deliver goods./dance, sing, solicit clients for prostitution
Sarki sew leather goods	skin animal. tan hide. design and stitch goods. deliver.	collect raw materials. tan hides. design and stitch goods. deliver.
Sunar gold- and silver- smith	collect materials. sell gold, silver. design, create jewelry: fire, hammer gold into sheets, silver into pellets; make wax mold; melt gold into mold, pound silver into shape; shine, decorate, deliver.	pump billows. deliver.
Luhar ironsmith	collect, recycle iron scraps; fire, pound iron into tools. deliver.	pump billows. deliver.
Parki weave baskets	collect bamboo. split into strips. design. weave. deliver.	collect bamboo. split into strips. design. weave. deliver.
Oudh mason	collect rocks, clay, manure, wood; break rocks, carve wood; measure, construct wall, house, steps.	-
Damai tailor, seamstress	buy cloth and/or notions; sew men's, women's, children's clothing. deliver.	buy cloth and/or notions; sew men's, women's, children's clothing. deliver.

The *riti-bhagya* structure guarantees its own patrons; thus, active solicitation of non-*riti* occurs only if the low-caste family has insufficient income from production and excess labor potential, or if the production process itself provides a surplus of goods that can enter the general non-riti market, such as pipes made by Baadi or certain types of clothing like hats made by Damai.

Production of commodities is usually done at home where the tools are kept. The potters' wheels and molds, the ironsmiths' billows, hammers, and hearths, the leatherworkers' tanning pits and chemicals, and the basketmakers knives and softening materials are not mobile, and therefore it is impractical for the work to be done at the patron's home. Some low-caste artisans, though, do work at the patron's home for

the duration of the production process. The Damai, for example, are mobile with their sewing machines, carrying them in a basket to a *riti*'s house to sew clothing for the family members. That way, the members can be fitted properly throughout the sewing process. If an artisan works at a *riti*'s home, she will be given all meals that day in addition to semi-annual harvest shares. Goldsmiths also work at patrons' home so that the patron can oversee the use of the family's gold. And the Oudh masons must, of course, work at the patron's home.

There is partial organization of labor within a low-caste hamlet in the case of sons and their wives who produce for the same *riti* as the man's father. On the other hand, there are families who have recently or in the past divided the *riti* among the sons and are working separately.

In the temporary or permanent absence of male commodity producers in the low-caste household, women must make arrangements to find replacements for her husband's or son's labor from among her relatives. Low-caste women describe this as a challenging job because they cannot alienate their in-laws with too many labor requests, yet they must responsibly maintain their longstanding relations with high-caste patrons. Most times women find substitute laborers for the work that they cannot do; via labor substitution the woman can retain rights to harvest shares, daily wage labor, economic crisis assistance, food shortage assistance, and livestock exchange.

However, there are limits to women's ability to meet all economic responsibilities of the *riti-bhagya* system in the absence of male householders. For example, in order to retain *haliya* plough land, someone must plough the *riti* landowner's fields. Only if the fields are ploughed before planting can the low-caste *haliya* family cultivate the land lent to them by the landowner. However, due to the prohibition against women ploughing, women must find another male to plough. Low-caste women say it is difficult to find a male willing to plough the

fields that her husband is responsible for ploughing. Thus, in the husband's absence, women often lose rights to *haliya* plough land. If a woman cannot find a substitute plougher, the landowner turns the *haliya* land over to someone else and she loses its produce until her husband returns or another male relative takes over.

The lowest *jaat* and those groups considered the most impure have the highest frequency of female participation in craft production. The Badini and Damini spend more of their labor hours in production specific to their caste – pottery and entertaining, and sewing – than do the other low-caste groups – Parki, Okheda, and Sunar. The exception to this are the sarki *jaat* who do not produce crafts as frequently as the other groups due to commodity competition from India.

Women in the lowest untouchable *jaat* – the Baadi, Damai, and Sarki – are trained in commodity production by their parents, and later their husbands. Like the education of some high-caste girls, artisan training that low-caste girls receive is expected to increase her value as a wife. A significant difference between low- and high-caste girls' training is that the former's training is used in income-generation or production, whereas educated village girls from Thakuri, Brahmin, Giri, and Chhetri families will work in the fields and in the home and rarely will they become gainfully employed through their education. Low-caste women use their skills in production throughout their lifetimes unless the demand for their products decreases (as in the case of the Sarkini), until the time of old age when their children and grandchildren take over production.

What is of interest here is that inheritance of skills is limited to the lowest groups, with the exception of Parkini. Women from the higher untouchable groups – Sunar, Oudh, Okheda, Luhar – are not trained in production skills by their parents. Furthermore, unlike those *jaat* who receive training before marriage, these higher *jaat* marry exogamously,

but within their "tier" – Sunar marry other Sunar, or Oudh, Okheda, or Luhar, and vice versa. In contrast, Sarki, Baadi, and Damai marry only other Sarki, Baadi, and Damai, respectively. Thus, there is an association betweeen *jaat* exogamy and lack of training for women. This association appears problematic, though, since it would be theoretically counterproductive to train the daughters of a family that desires to corner the market (or at least compete in it). Put another way a trained daughter can actually compete with her parent's production since the market is semi-open. Furthermore, a daughter's skills are unlikely to directly or continuously benefit her parents. The explanation for training daughters lies in the help they can give their parents in the future, even after marriage, as well as the survival necessity of such training. The *jaat* poorest in land are precisely those *jaat* who train their daughters.

Among the untouchables, the upper groups own and/or farm more land than the lower groups. This indicates a preference for farming over dependence on *riti* (and success at acquiring rented land). Such landowning patterns suggest that these groups are less interested in commodity production than in being an independent farmer. A partial measure of the demand for *bhagya* artisan products and labor is the number of villages that the various artisan *jaat* serve. These data are given in Table 3.8, and reveal that the groups poorest in land – Baadi, Damai, and Sarki – serve more villages than the other groups.

Table 3.8 Distribution of Riti-bhagya Relations

	Baadi	*Sarki*	*Damai*	*Oudh*	*Parki*	*Luhar*
No. riti families served (ave.)	?	7.3	8.5	48[a]	11	35.5[b]
No. villages served (ave.)	4	5	4.5	1	2.7	3.7

a Only two families reported 90 and 6 families, respectively.
b Only two families reported 70 and 1 families, respectively.

Some low-caste women have debts of work that have accrued because they have "eaten grain", *naalo khayeko* prior to working. The grain is taken in an emergency situation, and is paid back through extended periods of labor that may last well over a year. Kunti, a partially deaf and unmarried forty-year old Okheda woman worked full-time for Thakuri landlady during the period of research.[26]

THE VALUE OF LOW-CASTE WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE WORK AND THEIR ECONOMIC POWER

The gender division of labor among low-castes and between low- and high-castes indicates that women in low-caste households are critical to the agricultural economy of Bhalara. Through agricultural and artisan labor, women of low-caste make critically important contributions to family subsistence, and the local agricultural economy. In this last section, let us look at how labor transforms into economic power for women of low-caste.

[26] There is a second impoverished woman being cared for by the Bayal Pata Thakuri, but the arrangement is quite different because she is high-caste. This Thakuri woman from Haat works in other Thakuri families' fields for grain payments because her sister-in-law (a Chhetri) is very greedy and will not give her enough food. The husbands of both women are absent in India much of the year and the second sister-in-law who lives next door to the first has taken charge of the fields. She claims her husband was given a larger share than Kalakar (his half brother) and refuses to share with her sister-in-law. So the Thakuri woman works in Bayal Pata's fields and they give her grain. She does not work in anyone else's fields.

Economic Power in *Riti-bhagya* Relationships

Through traditional artisan labor and hired agricultural work, low-caste *bhagya* women are critical players in meeting the responsibilities of the relationship with their upper caste landowning *riti*. The *riti-bhagya* relationship is vital for low-castes because of the overall subsistence it guarantees in times of need. Hence, one dimension of low-caste women's economic power is her labor within the context of the *riti-bhagya* relationship.

Maatya Land and Low-caste Family Farming

A second source of women's economic power lies in her efforts to acquire land for her family to farm. In all untouchable groups that seek land to own and that currently rent *maatya* land and (this excludes only the Baadi) the value of women's work and her power within the household is high. This situation for women of low caste is distinctly different than her upper-caste counterpart.

First, women in lower caste households contribute to the acquisition of *maatya* and *haliya* land, unlike women in the high-caste household. As you will recall, *maatya* land is rented for a given period of time, and *haliya* land is land lent to a family who contributes a male plougher to the lending family. A portion of the money lent to high-castes in exchange for *maatya* land collateral is earned by women of low-caste working as daily wage laborers. The remaining money comes from low-caste men's work in India. A low-caste woman's husband is able to migrate to India for employment only if his wife (or other senior women) are willing to manage the family farm and meet *riti* obligations. Low-caste women must also cooperate in the acquisition of *haliya* plough land; while their husband or son is ploughing another's fields, the woman must take on additional household and agricultural labor during his absence.

The difference between upper- and lower-caste women's economic power lies not in the actual ownership of land per se, but in who contributes

to its permanent or temporary acquisition. Here it must be recognized that *maatya* land is fundamentally different from the land owned by high-castes, land which high-caste women do not help to acquire since it is patrilineal land. *Maatya* land is not inherited so there are no disputes over its inheritance among brothers; it is in every way land that a low-caste household temporarily acquires for its own use. And it is land obtained only after much work. *Maatya* land's value for its renters, primarily lower castes, is high. In a related way, then, the value of the work that went into the acquisition of *maatya* land and that will go into its productivity is also high. Low-caste women are responsible in large measure for that work.

Given that well over half of the land worked by low-castes is not owned by them but is rented *maatya* or *haliya* land, conflicts common to upper castes over inheritance, partitioning of property, and the beliefs and ideas about the threat of affinal women to disrupt the patrilineal system of land inheritance (Bennett 1983) are only partially (if at all) shared by low-caste families. Thus, the value of untouchable women's labor and the lack of inheritable land among low-caste families occurs at the expense of beliefs that would otherwise restrict women's independent economic activities and power.

When we compare low-caste women's work to that of low-caste men and high-caste women, we see from the kinds of work and for whom they work that low-caste women occupy a unique and specific labor niche. Low-caste women do a variety of work more frequently for others than do men or high-caste women. With the rapid socioeconomic changes occurring in Bhalara, in particular the decline of arable land, increased male migration to India, and decreased demand for low-caste commodities, we find that low-caste women's labor is the first to be freed into the rural labor market. As land declines further, the material base of *riti-bhagya* intercaste relations deteriorates, and capitalism penetrates into the rural setting, we can expect this labor trend to continue.

THE CULTURAL IDEOLOGY OF GENDER AND THE VALUE OF LOW-CASTE WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE WORK

Perhaps the most common characteristic of women's work cross-culturally is their monopolization of reproductive/domestic work. It has long been recognized through an array of cultural milieus that women consistently do most, and perhaps all, of the cooking, cleaning, childcare and childrearing, laundering, and caring for the sick and elderly within the home – when compared with men. Accounting for this phenomenon theoretically has been a thorny process. Below I discuss some of the important attempts to reconcile this pattern with feminist concerns about universally equating women with domestic work. Earlier in the chapter I conceptualized reproductive work as part of fertility and biological reproduction, reproduction of social hierarchy, and reproduction of the person (the cultural person). Here I address the last two processes.

The Search for Determinants

Scholars fear that too much focus on the relationship between domestic work and women could reduce the discourse on their social being to an essentialist association of "female" with domestic work. Still, feminist anthropology progressed through a decade of work that tried to link the universal subordination of women with another 'universal fact', the monopolization of domestic work by women. Theoretical models proceeded forthwith.

The marxist-feminist model of exploitation concludes that women's association with domestic work defines her social position as subordinate to males (Coontz and Henderson 1986; Deere 1982; Leacock and Safa 1986). The radical feminist model proposes that patriarchal forces, in various forms such as patrilineally organized peasant groups to state ideology and bureaucracy, determine that regardless of the type of work women do, it is devalued because of patriarchy's systemic subordination of women (Bennholt-Thomson 1981; Borque and Warren 1981; Stolcke 1981). In both models, researchers seek to get away from the issue of

reproductive work and focus on productive work instead since, in their models, productive work would always be more valued than domestic work. The result was an uneasy and ambivalent approach to understanding the nature of the relationship between women's domestic work and larger social processes.

The ambivalence toward's understanding women's work in reproduction is that it perpetuates a problematic essentializing of women's 'natural' association with the family and childrearing. Collier and Yanagisako state, however, that it is not the nature of the work that is problematic – we should not assume that reproductive work is inherently degrading or devalued everywhere – but the search for single determinants that never manage to steer clear of biological reductionism (Collier and Yanagisako 1987) which is problematic. The approach I take here is to look at a range of factors that impact on women's reproductive work in Bhalara, and to examine the social and cultural significance of women's work in domestic labor.

Female Exploitation, or the Cultural Construction of Gender?

As in so many cultures in the world, women in Bhalara monopolize reproductive work – childcare, childrearing, cooking, and cleaning. This is in addition to their work in agricultural and artisan production, as was discussed above. And as has been asked for what we generally regard as productive work, we can ask of reproductive work the same: What are the types of domestic labor that women of low-caste perform? How does the culture of Bhalara justify the lack of men's role in reproductive work? What is the relationship between reproductive work, caste, and gender? Does the direct association between gender and reproductive work replicate itself at the level of caste?

First of all, reproductive work appears to escape from the confines of caste, such that the division of labor is more directly influenced by gender than by caste. The role of gender in defining the division of

labor within reproductive work is demonstrated in two specific ways. First, women of all castes do far more reproductive work than do the men of all castes. Second, all women do equal amounts of reproductive work among themselves; low-caste and high-caste women alike spend nearly equal amounts of time doing very similar tasks that are reproductive in nature.

In the marxist model of exploitation, this division of labor would be regarded as a clear example of (men) capitalizing on women's unpaid labor. However, one of the problems with the exploitation model is that its argument rests on the presumption that the products of reproductive work are not transacted and are therefore relatively useless in human social exchange – put another way, the products of women's reproductive work cannot bring them social prestige. In fact, it appears at one level that there are no immediate 'products' of reproductive work, at least as we have come to materialize the concept of 'products'. Thus, according to the exploitation model, reproductive work cannot engage itself into the social sphere as can productive work.

I suggest that understanding female reproductive work requires a different approach, one that looks at how the products of that work are, in fact, engaged in transactions, albeit of a sort unfamiliar to material exchange processes. What is transacted, exchanged, at the end of reproductive work is an idea, specifically, the idea that 'women do this'. Strathern (1988) calls the process of reproducing an idea through practice the "rhetorical construction of the product" (155), a process which lies within the multiple relations from which 'woman', as the plural person, is constituted. Precisely because the culture defines the person through her relationships, women engage in domestic work that subsumes the cultural principles and features of those relationships. This is not an argument for essentialism. It is a cultural argument that states that in Bhalara, women come to stand for each other, the plural 'woman', by virtue of the relationships they have with others. Cultural

constitution of a general idea of 'woman' is part of a practice in which, as Ortner and Whitehead have stated, "gender, sexuality, and reproduction are treated as symbols, invested with meaning by the society in question, as all symbols are" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981,1).

In conclusion, it is not the case that reproductive work is not 'valued' in Bhalara; quite the opposite, it is valued because it serves the gender paradigm's goal of differentiating between male and female. Reproductive work is ultimately valued because it is 'what women do', and is thus analogous to ploughing, which is 'what men do'. These sorts of beliefs about the proper role of men and women in Bhalara are enhanced in women's exclusive control over reproductive processes.

Honor and Caste

In addition to the positive value of reproducing the culture's ideas of women's work roles, particularly in reproduction, a second matrix of values, found in Bhalara's system of prestige, is relevant to the question of why women (and not men) do the bulk of reproductive work. Is there differential prestige associated with reproductive work? Do women and men share equally in the prestige associated with the reproductive work of women? Prestige, as we see in the next chapter, is defined in Bhalara as honor, wealth, religious merit, the ability to stand on one's own, and, in the case of patrilineal ideology, the ability to make claims over the work of women. Honor in Bhalara inheres more on groups – such as the patriline, the family, the caste – than on single persons. Success in negotiating any of these domains brings prestige to the family, and a man's patriline, via the person. As was indicated earlier, the people with prestige are the 'big' people – high-castes and males.

There are two forms of honor that men gain through women's reproductive work of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. The first is the claim, as Collier and Rosaldo put it, that "wives daily services allow them [men] to enjoy the freedom of never having to ask anyone for

anything" (quoted in Collier and Yanagisako, 1987,45). To the extent that honor in the peasant community of Bhalara holds this attribute of 'autonomy' – the ability to stand on one's own – the wife contributes to male (patrilineal) honor in her service of domestic labor. The second form of prestige derives from the first. Men, through the work of women, are able to feast guests and family, and gain high esteem in the community. In Bhalara, the invitation to dine with a family is an act of sincere friendship. such invitations are inevitably extended by males, with the understanding that wives and mothers will cook.

Does male prestige, gained through women's domestic work, accrue to all castes? The prestige that a man gains through his rightful claims to his wife's domestic labor applies to both lower- and the upper-caste households. Men and women of all castes agree that such work as cleaning, caring for children, cooking, washing clothes is women's work; men of all castes come to expect these services from their mothers and wives.

However, the second form of prestige – that associated with feasting guests – is more available to the upper caste household than to the lower caste one. There are two reasons for this caste-based differentiation of prestige. First, low-caste people's ability to feast others is limited by a lack of resources. Because of their landlessness and their economic dependency on upper castes, men of lower caste do not have the material resources to feast guests (except at weddings). Furthermore, as a result of lower caste untouchability, not all guests will enter their homes to eat. Without exception, the guests of lower castes are other lower castes.

In conclusion, the degree to which a man's honor resides in the domestic services of his wife are limited by caste and class in the lower caste household. The result of lower castes' dependency on upper caste *riti* is to diminish men's use of women in their prestige practices in the low-

caste household, thus placing higher value on the productive and reproductive work of lower caste women vis a vis upper caste women. Let us now turn to the ideology of honor, and its relationship to gender and caste in Bhalara.

IJAT AND LAAJ, HONOR AND SHAME: THE DISCOURSES OF HONOR AND SEXUALITY, AND THE BURDEN OF WOMEN

WIFE AND HUSBAND: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Introduction: Honor, *Dharma*, and Caste

The Nepalese household is a space of persons and ideas through which gender and caste are mutually organized, and their meanings are mutually framed by the concept of honor. In this chapter I explore caste and gender meanings within the *moe*, household by tracing the role that honor plays in directing the relationship between its central adult members, the wife and husband. I illuminate those moments and practices when gender meanings and caste meanings join to mutually articulate and give meaning to one another, and when the meanings of gender and caste separate into autonomous and non-related associations. We see in the discussion that follows that gender differentiation occurs within the contexts and meanings of the wife-husband relationship, particularly those with reference to sexuality. That female and male, as symbols, become most coded and reified in the context of sexuality is understandable given that in its assertion of difference, gender marks the boundaries of resistance to becoming engulfed one into the other, female into male, male into female. I call the cultural assertion of gender "gender reification". Interestingly, what we often find is that at those moments of gender reification when 'male' and 'female' are forced into forms that the culture recognizes as legitimate, caste difference is suspended. Women act and speak as collective 'woman', men as collective 'man', regardless of caste identity. These moments of gender differentiation are most powerfully experienced and expressed in the context of sexuality and conflict, and in the idioms of *dharma*, religious duty, and *paap*, transgression of religious duty.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the role of the concept of honor in western Nepal's culture. First is the general observation that honor, *ijat*, is a central cultural concept in Bhalara through its associations with the social structural organization of patriline and caste as these find expression in the collective of household members. Honor is thus a 'social' concept, bearing articulation with structural determinants. We find that behavior associated with a person's honor is dialectically related to one's lineage and caste. A person acting with honor enhances not only personal reputation, but also the honor of the household and its members, the patriline, and the local reputation of the caste. And, members of an honorable patriline, household, and/or caste have an advantage in that their behavior will be more readily evaluated as honorable than those from a lesser status.

Still, while honor is articulated through certain social structural categories such as caste and gender, unlike those categories, honor is an achieved, not an ascribed state. While one is born into one's caste, family, patriline, and gender, one is not automatically ascribed honor through these facts of birth. Honor has to be earned; it is an active, not a passive principle. This is evident in the measures of honor which include wealth in land, produce, and people. Household members must work to get honor.

Because honor is achieved through the efforts of individuals, and is reflected back into the collective, we can say that honor is articulated at both the level of the individual and the level of the collective. It is possible, for example, that extraordinary efforts of a single individual can bring great honor to the entire household and family, and such exceptional individuals are remembered for generations.

The final feature of honor, *ijat*, that is of interest here is its exceptional association with women. It would not be an exageration to say that the honor of the collective depends upon the honor of its women. In the absence of honorable women (or, put another way, an abundance of dishonorable women) prevents a collective – be it a household, a patriline, or a caste unit – from claiming *ijat*. This feature is played out in many forms, including the fact that men's dishonorable behavior can be more easily excused than can that of women. The people of Bhalara understand the problem of honor to be a problem of women.

Honor thus has the same cultural relationship to patriline and caste, one of meaningfully directing people on how to act according to an assumed vested interest in the social unit. *Ijat* is not the behavior itself, but, like all cultural symbols, it is a nexus of ideas that are separable from the behavior. As such, honor is not one of the features by which caste or patriline are necessarily defined, but neither is it incidentally related to caste and patriline. Honor is a feature essential to these units, though not definitive of them. Indeed, one can be a dishonorable Brahmin, or an honorable Baadi, but one is not such through birth or occupation or descent, but through one's actions. Honorable behavior will enhance the collective unit, but it does not define the unit. Rather, as is demonstrated in this chapter, the relationship between the structural units and the cultural concept of honor is the reverse: social 'facts' of birth (caste, gender, patriline) heavily define what will be judged honorable behavior. Thus, honor, *ijat*, is of cultural, rather than structural, value to the social system of Bhalara. Certainly, it is a primary interest of patrilineal and caste members to keep their 'structures' intact, to protect their reputations and to guard their property. This the patriline and the *jaat* accomplish through the symbol of honor, *ijat*.

The meaning of honor in Bhalara derives from five primary sources. First, patrilineal, caste, and household interests involve a public appearance of solidarity, independence, and harmony achieved through the honorable behavior of all family members. Collective honor may be expressed in Bhalara in either idiom of patriline or caste. This is not to say that patriline and caste are one and the same structural unit. But the patriline, as a social (kinship) phenomenon in the Hindu context is a Hindu patriline; the rules and rituals that govern and construct patriline, such as marriage, are construed through caste ideology. Patriline and caste do not work at odds with each other, they cooperate. Patrilineal and household honor, *gharko ijat*, work for caste, and caste honor, *jaatko ijat*, works for the patriline and the household. In the context of the patriline, household honor exists as a quality and state requiring human attention. Patrilineal honor situates itself in the *moe*, household, through the avenues of kinship, sexuality, conflict, commensality, and birth.

A second dimension of honor involves giving, sharing, and generosity. As we will see in the passage below, the act of giving is highly valued in western Nepal, and throughout South Asia. The quality or quantity of the gift is of less significance to the achievement of honor (and merit) than is the act of giving itself (though certainly villagers do not hesitate to recite the attributes of various gifts they have received). The gift should also be given without hesitation and with sincerity, although in the case of intercaste begging relations, the giver often hesitates for long periods. The generosity of the Nepalese in Bhalara was extraordinary given their lack of possessions or wealth. In balance, though, I soon learned that an admirer of one's goods expects to be given the goods at some later date, and I resorted to keeping lists of the people to whom I was expected to present a specific gift upon my departure.

Surprisingly, the literature on caste and family in Nepal and India has little to say about honor, but when honor is mentioned it is usually in the context of giving, or the patriline. While Bennett exhaustively details the architecture of the patriline and the roles of women in upper caste groups, she does not systematically develop the concept of honor, *ijat*, (neither the Nepali word nor its English equivalent are found in her glossary or index) even though much of what she addresses involves patrilineal honor (Bennett 1983). Bennett's is not the only study to neglect honor in what are analyses that lend themselves to the development of the concept. Raheja grounds her study of dominance among Gujers in India in the removal of inauspiciousness through the act of giving (Raheja 1988). Yet *izzat* (which she translates as prestige), as one aspect of dominance, is absent from her discussion through her neglect to outline the clear connections between caste and patriline, and auspiciousness and honor. Unless the Gujars of India are different from all other Hindus, no Gujar would argue against honor being achieved through the act of giving; part of the reward of 'gifting' is honor and prestige.

Two notable exceptions to the dearth of analysis of honor among South Asian Hindus are Madan's study of Kashmiri Brahmins (Madan 1965) and Sharma's study of Brahmins in north India (Sharma 1980). Both these authors discuss how honor is an issue of concern to both caste and patriline, and, as in Raheja's work on auspiciousness, involve sharing and giving. However, with these authors' exclusive focus on upper caste groups, one might conclude that honor has little to do with groups of lower caste in South Asia.

This, however, is not the case. Among the low-castes of Bhalara, sharing and giving are central contexts in which *dharma* is done, and honor and merit are achieved. To not give is *paap*, and *paap* brings dishonor to the *moe*. This is illustrated in a passage from a life-events interview with Jamkhola Damai. In this passage we are discussing her understandings of

dharma and *paap*. The narrative begins with her assurance that god knows how to judge the acts of people fairly. [M=Mary; J=Jamkhola].

J: Of course god knows [god's 'knowing' just is].
M: But what does god know? And how can women come to know?
J: Well, god knows ... if a poor person comes begging at someone's apartment, a 'saint' or a holy man [*babaji*] or a holy woman [*mataji*], and you don't give to that person, then that is *paap*.
M: So that is *paap*, to not give.
J: Or if someone comes by while you are eating, you have to give that person something to eat even if you have not eaten. Even if you go hungry and can only offer some grass you have to give even that.
M: That is also *dharma*?
J: Yes, that is also *dharma*.
M: To not give is *paap*.
J: Yes, that is *paap*. If anybody comes, an ill person, or a person comes and says 'Sir, I am naked and I need some clothing, please just give me even a rag', but you send him away without giving him anything, that is also *paap*. Isn't it?
M: Yes, it is.
J: Even if you can't give them something now you have to tell them that you will give them something later.

Clearly, neither the quality nor the quantity of the 'gift' is significant to *dharma;* the act of giving is what brings honor, through *dharma*. Let us turn to a third source of the meaning of honor, that of its relationship to *dharma*, duty.

In the passage above, Jamkhola Damai spoke of giving to others as an aspect of *dharma*, doing the correct, moral thing. A person who consistently acts according to *dharma* is not only a religious person, but a person with honor. Thus, honor and duty, *ijat* and *dharma* are related ideas for the people of Bhalara. Honorable acts are framed by people's prior meanings of religious duty; one way to achieve honor is to follow religious precepts, and by following those precepts, one acts with honor. The broad indexing of honorable behavior to *dharma* is the subject of the next section.

A fourth meaning of honor involves the value of modest behavior, *laaj*, in front of those who are socially higher in status than oneself. These people include elder affinal men in relation to women, and upper castes in relation to lower castes (see Abu-Lughod, 1986, for parallels in the Muslim practice of veiling as a form of modesty in front of those with

higher status). While women in Bhalara do not permanently veil themselves throughout the day, they often wrap a fold of their sari or head cloth around their mouth and nose when in the presence of elder affinal males. Brides are expected to show the most modesty during their weddings when they completely cover themselves with the end of the bright red and gold wedding sari.

The final dimension of the meaning of *ijat*, honor, involves sexuality in which avoidance of indiscrete sexual behavior, cross-sex intimacy out of the context of marriage, and cross-sex or cross-generational sexual references and innuendo are regarded as context-specific behaviors modified by conventions of modesty, *laaj*. Honor related to the sexes generally exists in the context of sexuality and modesty.

Thus, the values associated with honor include those of generosity, sharing, honesty, modesty, and sexual discreteness. They also involve the independence of the patriline and its ability for self-provisioning and reproduction, its strength against outsiders. Honor is framed by prior understandings of *dharma*, and people's place in the social universe. Lower castes have less ability to achieve certain forms of honor due to their lack of economic autonomy. This is expressed in the passage above in which the lower caste Damai woman emphasizes the act of giving over the quantity given. The extent to which honor is an aspect of the ethos of the low-caste household and patriline will become apparent in the remaining text. In later narratives we find that lower caste worship brings merit to the worshipper, and honor to the *moe*. Furthermore, in their relationships with upper castes, the people of lower caste seek to preserve their *moe* honor. Let us now turn to how the relationships between gender, caste, and honor are framed in the context of *dharma*.

Dharma and Caste

The concept of *dharma*, variously defined as religion, duty, and order, is core to Hindu ideology and popular Hindu culture (Allen 1982; Daniel 1984; Fruzzetti 1982; Khare 1976; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Kolenda 1982; Madan 1982). Implicit in the concept of *dharma* as duty is the concept of relation; for example, one has specific duty to others based on kin relations. Thus, the following discussion of women's relations with husbands and family, as these acquire symbolic meanings of honor, must begin with an examination of how the people of Bhalara understand *dharma* in the context of caste and gender.

The people of Bhalara assign a transcendent religious feature, and a descendant feature – the specifics of birth, such as gender and caste – to the concept of *dharma*. One's birth determines one's gender and one's place in the caste system, both of which are dictated through the laws of god and karma. The local understanding of *dharma* extends this phenomenon of preordained order to include action and behavior related to one's birth. Thus, *dharma* is understood as 'duty according to one's social place'. 'Social place' can mean caste, gender, socioeconomic status, political status, or position in the life cycle. In this study we are concerned with caste and gender.

The social ordering or 'placing' of the otherwise dis-order of persons and objects in the world is conceptualized within the categories of *jaat*. Besides the *jaat* associated with caste rank (recall the earlier discussion of how caste and *jaat* are often used interchangeably), there is the 'female' and the 'male' *jaat*. A common linguistic contraction that joins the specifics of birth and its duty of place is *jaatidharma*, the 'duty of one's place'. *Dharma* presumes a level of 'species' or *jaat* difference in which delineated groups are assigned specific duties and responsibilities. The systematic order of the (social) universe is possible, it is believed, through this division of duty. In Hindu society, these differences are brought to bear on the constitution of

caste hierarchy, and their 'natural' inevitability justifies their continued existence (Dumont 1970). Caste and gender associations with *dharma* allow any group to see its duty as specific to itself, 'us' in distinction to 'them'. It is important to note that these definitions are not inherently hierarchizing or ranking; rather, they are essentials of difference. However, once worked through contemporary caste and gender realities, these differences are readily appropriated into a hierarchical structure.

The religious basis of *dharma*, as understood locally, is 'duty that produces religious merit'. People of different castes understand *dharma* and duty differently. For example, Brahmins conceptualize the question "What is your *dharma*?" differently from untouchables. The former would answer "Hindu", understanding the question to mean "What is your religion?" People of low-caste, however, would answer "To pray to the gods and to sew clothes [or make pots]". In other words, low castes do not conceptualize *dharma* as metaphysics, but rather *dharma*'s meaning comes from the low-caste position in the caste hierarchy, a position associated with occupation. By sewing, making pots, or firing agricultural tools, the people of lower caste practice the *dharma* associated with their caste, and consequently achieve merit. Each caste, in turn, thinks of the other's *dharma* differently. For example, if the high-caste were asked the *dharma* of low-caste, they would respond "to serve", *sayog garnu*. Low-castes, on the other hand, do not see their *dharma* as to "serve" others, but as doing work related to their caste. On the other hand, how do low-caste view the *dharma* of upper castes? If low-caste were asked the *dharma* of upper caste, they would say "To farm [or to be priests]".

Lower castes define their religious beliefs in the works of god and *dharma* in counterdistinction to those of the upper caste. Following is a passage from an interview with Jamkhola Damai. Jamkhola says that her way of worship and pleasing god is a silent, private way, in contrast to

the visible and vocal worship practices of the Brahmins. In the narrative we hear core beliefs and ideas about the inevitability of *dharma* originating from the work of god and from one's efforts. The narrative begins with Jamkhola describing caste exclusion. [M=Mary; J=Jamkhola].

M: Why do the Damai do this, do not go into others' house? Why do the Brahmin not let them?
J: We are lower than them, we are lower than Brahmin. Damai play their instruments while a shaman 'sits' for a possession (*jaat* basnu), before a wedding travels and arrives. But then when they ask us to come and sit and eat, we do not go because we are lower than them.
M: Do you think you could ever be at the top?
J: No. It would be possible in India, but not here.
M: How?
J: Well, in India they say 'we are all the same'. They do not say anything about this idea of top and bottom. We can all eat at the same table. We can sleep and sit on the same bed. Here in the hills they say 'these are Damai, these people are Baadi'. They have separated out/divided up the different castes. There [in India] there aren't these ideas of top and bottom. That is why in India it doesn't exist.
M: Now you are Damai. What are you after you die?
J: Damai.
M: Oh ..
J: Who knows what happens after? What god will make?
M: What do you think, what is your belief?
M: Well, what will God make? Some become insects, some become ants. Some may even become snakes. And some become people. If they become a person then god will make them either at the top or at the bottom.
M: And so will you become Damai, or can you become another caste?
J: Another caste is also possible.
M: Yes?
J: Yes.
M: How is the work that one does now make possible another caste? Can it happen because you do really good work now, worship god, you make god happy, and then your caste will be different, god will make you another caste? How does it happen?
J: God will make it. That Brahmin who does puja, who washes in the morning and in the evening, who says god's name in the morning and in the evening, after she dies ... she may still become an insect.
M: Even if she did such good work?
J: Yes. That person who is poor, who doesn't have enough food, nothing to wear, who must beg, who is poor, whose house has no food. She may also become big. After dying.
M: Really?
J: That is also possible. That work is in the hands of god. Whether one does good or one does no-good. That person who is now Damai, after she dies god may once again make her a Damai. This is the work of god's hand.
M: It is the work of god.
J: Yes. Now they say I am Damai. But I cannot say that I will necessarily become at the top after I die.
M: Can you ask anything of god, or not? For instance, can you ask god to make you at the top?
J: No, you can't. What can you ask of god? You are a person, so because of this, 'it' is god, and so you can't talk to god. You have to know your own truth, [*satyama baseko*. *satya* means honest, true, right, exact, real, correct, virtuous, upright]. If everything you do is of truth, correct, if you have a strong god, then that god will show itself to you. Whoever is impure but doesn't acknowledge it, if there is something you don't do for someone else, these things are not good. But if you

don't eat certain foods, if you have good thoughts, if you don't laugh with anyone, don't talk, and you do worship of god every day, and you fast, if there is an honest god, god may reveal himself to you. If I was doing puja to god now and I told people, but then I met with my husband inside and had some pleasurable time with him, then what would be truthful or honest about that? The thing about honesty and truth is very special. You can't really say anything to anybody. Those who are honest with god will have god's vision. And then s/he will give you what you want, is what we say."

In the passage above Dharu emphasizes the inevitable effects of birth on one's social position, and the importance of doing good work without caring for the consequences. In particular she notes the importance of honesty and truth, contrasting these with the insincerity of high-caste worship.

Dharma and Gender

Like caste, gender is differentiated through the idiom of *dharma*. *Dharma*, with its implied 'natural' or inevitable order of things, creates a presupposition of social order relevant to the sexes, which, in the context of adults, is located in the wife-husband dyadic relationship. *Dharma*, or duty, of adult males and females is relevant in dyadic form, as wife and husband (vs. their plural form as 'woman' or 'man'), and in their collective form as person (in the narrative above Jamkhola describes her relationship with god in gender-neutral terms).

A woman's adult social personhood depends upon the existence of a husband. Few Nepalese women remain unmarried (though many remain widows). The dyadic relationships that constitute the adult female person in Bhalara include the roles of mother, wife, and worker. Correspondingly, each of these implies a husband – the mother of a man's children, his wife, and the worker for his *riti* and/or on his land.

The inevitable order of society made possible through the dyadic unit of wife and husband intersects with the core Hindu concept of the inevitable order of the world, *dharma*. The *dharma* of women is drawn in relation to the husband (and vice versa). Worked through other

dimensions of Hindu society, such as patriline, *dharma* confronts a relationship of asymmetry in which the husband's rights and privileges are qualitatively and quantitatively greater than the wife's. In fact, the husband is believed to be, and is treated as, the equivalent of a god by the wife. The deity status of the husband and the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife means that the wife provides many services and acts of deference to the husband. These include drinking his foot water (the feet are considered to be the least pure part of the human body), eating after he eats, and touching her head to his feet. Such acts of deference convey the meaning that even the husband's impurity is pure for the wife. Strict deferential behavior is considered the wife's *dharma* vis a vis her husband.

One form of deferential behavior that made research challenging was women's avoidance of speaking the husband's name.[1] Women routinely refer to husbands indirectly through kin relations – "tell the father of my daughter", or "the son of my mother-in-law" or "the person of the *ghar*" – or as *mero shrimaan*, "my husband". Maintaining formality in their relationship effectively marks their relationship as one absent of status ambiguity with little illusion of equality. By avoiding her husband's name, a woman, in effect, submits to the system of inequality of rights and privileges. She recognizes that he has rights and privileges that she does not have, yet she retains her own position in the system by her behavior. By accepting and practicing within the rules of the game, the wife effectively acts according to her *dharma*.

The people of Bhalara believe that to violate one's *jaatidharma* is to *paap laagnu*, to transgress, and in so doing, to cause a condition or state of unholiness resulting from non-meritorious acts. Among the many possible acts that would classify as *paap* women listed cheating others, murder, and not providing enough food for household members. We can see

[1] This section benefitted from discussion with Professor David Dwyer, Dept. of Anthropology, Michigan State University.

in the last example that *dharma* is a ruling precept in the family as well as in society.

The Hindus of Bhalara admit that it is difficult in the life of the householder, *grhsta*, to avoid sin and impurity. In the process of working to provide for the family and reproducing the household materially and biologically, the householder generates impurity from farming, sexual intercourse, commensality, earning money, and bad thoughts in the heart (the *man*) (Bennett 1983; Marriott 1968; Madan 1982, 1985). Embedded in the complexities and conflicts of everyday life in the family, one generates *paap* and impurity. The conceptual link between honor and impurity is manifest operationally at the level of the household and the family, and primarily in gendered forms: in relations between wife and husband.

The family of *dharma* is the family of convivial and cooperative relations with one another, prospering from the 'right duty' and 'correct behavior' of its members. Indicators of the honor of a family are its wealth, prosperity, and number of sons, taken as signs of blessing from the gods for *dharma*. When conflict develops, the *paap* diffuses throughout the household, among its members, and into the public arena of gossip and comment. *Paap*, transgression, therefore, threatens honor by placing the family in a weakened position within the community. *Dharma* and *paap* are integrated into the *moe* through the idiom of kinship. It is possible for a parent to take on the *paap* of a child's incorrect behavior, for example, if that behavior is consistently disruptive to the well-being of others. A Sarki woman said she was just as responsible for her son's treatment of her daughter-in-law as the son: "It is my *paap* if my sons do not treat their wives well". The ethos of *dharma* and honor are reflected in parents' responsibility for their children's behavior. Only good relations among kin can share a space with honor and *dharma* in a family, patriline, or *moe*.

The concept of *jaat* merges with that of *dharma* in the domain of gender. The concept of *jaat*, in association with gender, means 'male' (*lognay jaat*) or 'female' (*aimai jaat*). *Dharma* and *jaat* merge in the concept of *jaat*idharma, the inevitable features and duty associated with one's *jaat*, whether it be 'female' or 'low-caste'. Let us look at the duty of gender, the *dharma* of gender. The *dharma* of women differs from the *dharma* of men, and in drawing on and demonstrating those differences, women differentiate themselves from men. Women believe they have 'bigger' *dharma* than men ("The *dharma* of women is 'bigger' than that of men.") because women abide the principle of *patibharta*. Women define the concept of *patibharta* as "having only one husband". Since "husband" is a euphemism for "one with whom you have sex", the connotation of *patibharta* is that a woman should not have sex with anyone other than her husband, before or after marriage. An important dimension of a woman's *dharma* embodies the right conduct of *patibharta*. Violation of *patibharta* is paap: "If it [the principle of *patibharta*] is broken then no *dharma* is possible". Men, on the other hand, can have as many "wives" as they choose – "wife" used euphemistically for a woman with whom one has sex. It is only a violation of *dharma* for a man to have sex with ("to become a wife with") a woman outside of his caste or someone he has called "sister".

The gendered presence of *dharma* in the household serves to not only differentiate male from female, husband from wife, but it does so in a manner that protects the patriline by restricting the sexual relations of one of its categories of people – its women. As we shall see, though, the meaning of the restriction of *patibharta*, and other issues of sexuality, are constructed differently for women of low- and high-caste. Thus,the *dharma* associated with one's sex is frequently construed through caste in the context of sexuality.

Women are cynical about men's ability or willingness to be sexually faithful to one woman, but women are confident in their own ability to

resist the temptation of another man. One woman said "Men cannot have such a law [*patibharta*] applied to them because they could never keep it". I asked her how women feel when their husbands have affairs. She said:

Men have no concern, and women cannot control them anyway. Even if they find out they probably won't do anything because of the social [*samaaj*] risks, and the family risks. A woman doesn't want to be left alone. Take my husband, for instance. We were living in Shimal Lekh after we were married. He married again just two years after marrying me. So he had two wives. But even then, many nights he didn't come home. Who knows where he was?! Some have said he would go with Kalakar's father to visit the Giri women in Seralagau. He went here and there. That Giri woman is no longer here. But of course I could not say anything.

Women feel that because of their moral strength they can resist *paap* and act according to *dharma* more consistently than men. When women talk about their responsibility to *dharma* they are implicating the honor of their actions as well. Thus not only does the patriline place a greater burden of honor on its women than on its men, but women draw on the symbol of honor in their discussions about *dharma*. However, the capability to abide *jaati*dharma is not formulated as an essence of all women since a woman can be 'weakened' by economic need. A poor woman who needs to provide for her family may turn to prostitution. In comparison to men, though, women consider themselves morally stronger.

The precept of having only one "husband" finds reinforcing expression in many domains. The villagers of Bhalara believe that if a woman has sex with too many men she becomes unable to bear children because "the place where the baby stays" during pregnancy is thought to get *phutyo*, "broken". One retired Badini prostitute told me this happens because "the penis of some men is very long", so long that, in the ribald humor of this toothless woman, "the liquid [*jole*] comes out of our mouths"!

Because of their own attention to the righteous human action of *dharma* that is associated with cross-sex relations, and what they consider to be men's lack thereof, women express distrust of men over matters sexual

in nature. Women feel that they alone are capable of remaining faithful in marriage, not due to some innate willingness or altruism on women's part, but rather due to the merit of their actions, their adult social identity, and the honor of their family. Women say their *dharma* is more difficult than men's, implying that in matters of obedience to in-laws and husbands, and in matters sexual, they must resist the temptation to violate *dharma*. Men are more likely to have other "wives" than are women to have other "husbands", and though this angers women they feel powerless to prevent it. Thus, women see themselves as acting more honorable than men, and men, as central figures in patrilineal ideology, regard the greater codification of women's behavior as placing the burden of honor on women.

The people of Bhalara talk about relative social status in terms of 'big' (*thulo*) and 'small' (*saano*). High-castes, men, and educated people are 'big', lower castes, women, and uneducated people are 'small'. When determining how important or honest or 'big' a person is, the people of Bhalara say they "look at the person", *maanchay lai hernu*, to view the markers of honor — caste, wealth, honesty in the eyes, good family. I often asked women how they feel about their position of being "smaller" than their husbands and having to behave deferentially. Women say that it is okay, that is "the way it should be", or "just the way things are". Like caste and patriline, certain social facts of one's gender are inevitable. It is women's *dharma* to obey their husbands. The inevitability of women's duty to their husbnads is captured in the concept of *jaat;* it is the *jaat* of women to be smaller than men. There is no enthusiasm or desire for this position, but neither is there outright resistance; rather, the women are stating a simple fact, an axiom of social being. Women see their social inferiority to men as something unlikely to change, and they use the opportunity of discussing their 'position' vis a vis men to, in the common Nepalese *chalan* (custom) of playing on words, make a joke. In reference to sexual intercourse, as one woman said "Well, women are on the bottom, and men

are on the top. It cannot be any other way"! The sexual metaphor reflects an inevitable social fact.

A second idiom women use to explain men's 'bigness' vis a vis women is that a husband is a god in relation to the woman – but exclusively in relation to a woman. A husband is also a man, and therefore a mortal in relation to other mortals, not a god. Nepalese wives do not attempt to resolve this contradictory or dual nature of husbands; rather, they acknowledge that acceptance of the husband's deity status is beneficial to themselves and their family's honor, yet the husband's often imperfect mortal actions are not incompatible with his status as provider and source of the wife's spiritual wholeness. Like the immortal local gods, who may be benevolent or malificent, and with whom one has a personal and emotional relationship, the husband can potentially disappoint the wife. Bennett finds that women in eastern Nepal are privately skeptical about the deity status of the husband (Bennett 1983).

The ideology of women's *dharma* bears social and economic consequences. Women regard their service to husbands they may even dislike as their *dharma*, their duty. It is difficult to alter the relationship with the husband through explicit means such as divorce, yet a man can always take a second (or even third) wife. A woman suffers if she does not serve her husband well. She risks gossip by her in-laws, lack of support from her husband for her and their children, and fear of daily ostracism from a family she must live with the rest of her life. Violating or resisting *dharma* generates shame, *laaj*, a public judgement of the woman's behavior, and a private experience of remorse and self-blame for lacking as a wife, and as a mother.

The public social reward for fulfilling *dharma* is *ijat*, honor. *Ijat*, is located in meritorious action, and, like its opposite *laaj*, shame, is publicly achieved and exhibited. The woman who acts according to *dharma*

brings honor to the patriline, the household, and the caste. The discussion that follows demonstrates the relationship between female honor and the patriline. To sum, gender differences in *dharma* are located in the space of the *moe*, household, such that wife and husband have differential ability to produce honor. Women claim their ability to generate more honor than men because the burden of *dharma*, in the context of *patibharta*, is greater for women. 'Bearing' the honor of the patriline is women's *dharma*.

One afternoon while talking to an elder woman about men's extra-marital affairs, she wryly stated "Only women have *jaat* [caste], men do not". Men who have sex with women other than their wives – and according to women there are many of these men – do not act with honor. What is significant here is the connection she draws between honor and *jaat*; to her they are conceptually linked through sex, and therefore one level of their conceptual association lies in the difference between legitimate and illegitimate sex. Men who have sex solely with their wives have honor, and *jaat*. Thus honor approximates *jaat*, and men's honor is to act with fidelity towards one's wife.

Caste, Women's *Dharma*, and Hierarchy

Through examining caste and women's *dharma* in the *moe*, household, we see that the low-caste household is less caught up in building patrilineal or household honor through its women than is the high-caste household. I suggest that the differential ethos of household honor in the low-caste versus the upper caste household, is less an issue of degrees and more an issue of meaning. High-caste honor is constructed through its female members, and to that goal, the high-caste meaning of 'female' is constituted. It is not that upper caste women have more or less honor than their lower caste counterparts; it is that in differentiating themselves from those of lower caste, upper caste women draw on their honor. Thus, honor simultaneously is a matter of gender and a matter of caste. While on the one hand, honor and *dharma* culturally differentiate

male from female, honor and *dharma* also culturally differentiate low-caste women from high-caste women. That the discourse of differentiation comes from the high-caste camp ("Low-caste women do not have honor, but high-caste women do") speaks more to its own attempts at domination and reification of its dominance than it does achievement on some delineated scale of discrete units of honor. By using honor to separate the sexes, the high-castes also succeed in separating the castes. The value of *dharma* and honor to caste and patriline interests of domination is such that separation and difference are transformed into hierarchy.

The *dharma* of women (and men) is further differentiated by caste. The *dharma* of upper caste women as 'female' is defined solely in relation to the husband. High-caste women have no *jaatidharma* beyond serving husbands. Low-caste women, in contrast, have *dharma* specific to *jaat* and occupation. Low-caste women say their *dharma* is primarily to work for their families, and secondarily to serve their husbands, make commodities, and farm. Women's *dharma* in relation to husbands differs according to caste in several ways. Women of low caste generally agree with the idea of having one husband exclusively, although they do not use the Sanskrit term *patibharta* for this principle, nor do they see its transgression, found most commonly in the practice of second marriages and widow remarriage, as *paap*. A second significant difference in low-caste women's relationships with husbands is the lack of consuming the husband's impurity, rather than consume it, as does the upper caste wife.

Low-caste women draw on their practices to differentiate themselves from high-caste women. An older Damini told me that unlike high-caste women low-caste women do not regularly touch the feet of their husbands in the morning when they awaken. Nor do they eat food from their husband's used and 'polluted' dinner plate. Low-caste women do show a modicum of respect towards the husband. For example, they will not eat before the husband has eaten, and they do consider their husbands to be gods to

whom they show respect and obedience. Still, "if the husband dies," the Damini said, "we [low-caste women] can remarry." And they do remarry.

A high-caste woman's *dharma*, in relation to her husband, continues after his death. A widow sheds her bright clothing and jewelry for the white robes of mourning, and she restricts her food. *Pandey bujo* refers to foods that widows should not eat. These include onion, garlic, meat, cucumber, tomato, lentils, fish, and spinach. My informants say these restrictions are for the *dharma* of the woman, and are not done out of love, *maya*, for the deceased husband. A woman's decision to follow these food restrictions is not based on whether the husband was cruel or kind, nor is it based on the quality of the relationship between the two people, they said. Rather, it is based on a woman's own decision to fulfill her *dharma*. In contrast to high-caste women's mourning practices, low-caste women also wear white clothing for a period not longer than a month, and they do not follow the food proscriptions.

From the discussion above we see that conjugal duty is directed toward reproducing the ideology of the patriline and *jaat* through the idioms of *dharma* and honor. In the distinctions made between the upper and the lower caste households we find differences in patrilineal and household codes of honor that involve the wife in relation to the husband. Through the symbol of honor, and its alternate meanings for the two groups, they mutually differentiate themselves from each other by differentiating their conjugal relationships. In other words, structural differences of caste become praxis in the different meanings of honor. We see this process occuring in the context of conjugal duty related to sexuality, as we see in the following section.

GENDERED BODIES, POWER AND SEXUALITY

Introduction

Stolcke notes that, regarding the study of (social) gender and sexuality, "probably the most important first step in studying sexuality

is to differentiate it from gender, and to explore the articulation between them" (Stolcke, quoted in Caplan,2). Such an inquiry requires asking when and how sexuality and gender are independent cultural entities, and how and when they are not. Problematizing the cultural study of gender and sexuality in this way expands the notion that what may be sexual in one culture is not in another, and the degree to which a culture inscribes its definitions and concepts of gender with sexual meanings is an issue of comparative research (Ortner and Whitehead 1981).

To what extent does sexuality articulate with gender, and what does that articulation tell us? For example, when Nepalese men hold hands (actually, they hold each other's little fingers) and wrap their arms around each others' necks while walking or sitting, they are enjoying and expressing friendship and affection, and not sexual interest. Such behavior in American culture, however, would be labelled (homo-)sexual because it is contrary to masculine heterosexual identity and male friendship. Such behavior among American females may not be labelled (although age makes a difference) one way or another. This example illustrates how sexuality articulates with gender in one culture (American, since the behavior is read differently depending on the gender of the actors) but does not articulate in a second one (the Nepalese, since female friends do the same thing as the male friends, and the behavior is interpreted the same way).

A counter example is that in American culture males and females may hold hands and put their arms around each other even if they are not lovers or spouses; the bodily contact is not necessarily understood (by the people involved or society) as expressing sexual desire. In Nepal, however, it would be labelled sexual and is forbidden because any public display of affection between males and females is prohibited. The determination of what is sexual must be gained from a cultural account.

To quote Patricia Caplan (quoting someone else) "Our heads, it has been said, are our most erogenous zone" (Caplan 1987,2).

The body, in its constructed meanings and commonplace understandings, serves as a metaphor for other domains, and other social domains draw from the body's salient properties in meaningful inference. This will be seen in the following discussion.

Sex and sexuality is not a domain of human behavior that escapes or is denied reference or mention in Bhalara. But it is difficult to systematically discuss people's beliefs and meanings about sex and sexuality with them. Women are expected to act shy about sexual topics and not discuss them even with one another, and men are not supposed to talk with women about it. Thus, I have little data on men's views about their own sexuality. Once alone, women's conversations about sex and sexuality were frank. Women spoke of positions, preferences, fluids, experiences, duration, and men's penises. I am not interested in the aesthetics of sexuality, or the particulars of the sex act among the peasants of Bhalara, or the psychology of sexuality. Rather, as was done in the previous section regarding the ethos of *dharma*, of duty between wife and husband, I examine how sexuality acts as a mode of discourse and as a metaphor for relations between the sexes. Four forms of discourse that draw from the sexual metaphor, and discussed below, are caste, work, gender antagonism, and agriculture. Clearly, much about gender relations in the *moe* turn through the medium of sexual relations.

The normative understandings about sexuality are that sexual intercourse occurs exclusively with a spouse, at night, and when all others in the common sleeping room are presumed to be sleeping[2]. Newlyweds are given

[2] An informative conversation about sexuality and gender began when a Badini woman told me and some other women a story about a couple from eastern Nepal (and hence, libertine, in their view) who were living in a nearby village. A Baadi boy spied them through a window having sex in the afternoon, and the wife was on the top. This account was so extraordinary to the people of Thalara that it was used to contrast with their own sexual customs - men on the top, and only at night.

a private room – often a grain storage room – if one is available. Given the prescribed separation of the husband and wife during the day, and the social proscription against public affection between husband and wife, sexual relations provide their time of closest intimacy, and is seen as almost contradictory to their daytime, public roles. A Badini woman expressed this contradiction: "Even though during the day a husband and wife may say they do not like one another, in the night time, when they go through the door together, they like each other alot. They like each other so much that one is on the top and the other is on the bottom. That is how much they like each other"! Here the Badini also expresses a sense of intimacy that the wife and husband enjoy. Most people consider intercourse enjoyable, and they value having sex for *majaa*, pleasure. As one Parki woman put it, "Of course that 'work' [*kaam*] is for pleasure. Everyone believes that, and they do it for pleasure. Children are only secondary. Maybe there will be kids, maybe not. Usually there are. But people here do that work for pleasure mostly, rather than to have kids." [3]

Although sex is thought to give pleasure, and is a form of intimacy between people of the opposite sex who have few other opportunities to be physically intimate, sexual behavior and discourse are hidden, emerging as innuendo and metaphor, or in safe settings. The culture of Bhalara values public pleasure over private. Sharing of food, tea, stories, cigarettes, and alcohol allows the circulation of pleasure to many. One need not be denied pleasure of most forms simply due to temporary lack of resources. Sex, on the other hand, cannot be shared with others in a public way, and is self-centered, according to the ethos of public pleasure.

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[3] It should be noted that sexual relations in Nepal are, normatively, heterosexual. There was no discussion of homosexual or bisexual relations, although I was once asked by a friend in Kathmandu about homosexuality in the United States and I have recently heard of a lesbian organization in some of the urban centers in Nepal.

In answering the question of what is considered a culture's sexual meanings, we run into problems of context, and who we are referring to. While there are shared ideas regarding what is proper or improper sexual demeanor, the problem is complicated by the fact that some members of the culture do not regularly adhere to the codes of behavior expressed in the shared meanings. This does not mean they do not understand or know about them; rather, they do not subscribe to them in all cases. The obvious example are the Baadi prostitutes who earn money through sexual relations with men other than their husbands. Another example are other women of lower caste who say they can remarry if widowed, or may leave their husbands if unsatified or abused, without longterm repercussions. Going back to the example of the Badini, the husband and wife relationship has meanings different from those associated with the relationship between Brahmin couples. In Bhalara, the wife's sexuality and reproductive capacity are largely conceptually conflated. In other words, most discussions of sexuality include issues of procreation: whether children will be born from the union (as in the Badini's words), the contribution of each parent in the formation of the child, illegitimate children, sexual intercourse after menstruation so as to conceive a son, or hiding one's pregnancy because it indexes sexual intercourse. The conflation of sexuality and procreation derives from a set of concepts that state that sexual intercourse is exclusively with one's husband (of the same caste); the 'logical' outcome is pregnancy, hence reproduction.

Herdt provides useful conceptual tools for understanding a culture's sexual epistemology and its processes of culturally (linguistically) constituting sexual identity (Herdt 1981). He suggests that a culture will tend to slot its idioms of sexuality into a category of fertility and procreation, or into a category of sexual pleasure. In Bhalara, the process of polarization of gender roles, idioms, and meanings elicits a bulk of procreation-based oppositions. From what I could ascertain, the

following dichotomies constitute the people of Bhalara's understanding of the features of female and male roles in procreation:

1) females contribute the 'space' or 'room', *kota*, for the fetus to develop; males contribute semen from which 'bone' (*haad*), and blood develop;

2) females contribute the moral uprightness of the child; males contribute the capacity of speech and intellect;

3) females go through predictable periods of (menstrual) change marked as 'impure'; males do not go through marked periods of somatic change;

4) females are "on the bottom" in sexual intercourse, a position used idiomatically in other contexts to designate social inferiority; males are "on the top", a position of social ascendancy;

5) because females are "on the bottom" they do not have to "work"; males are responsible for the "work" of sexual intercourse;

6) females' capability for procreation occurs at menarche, and only at menarche (she is then called *taruni*); males reproductive capability occurs in a less punctuated temporal mode, being gradually recognized as *taruna* through various physical changes such as increased height and facial hair;

7) females' achievement of reproductive capability is ritually marked; male's is not;

8) the development of a female's procreative capability should be later than her husband's (since marriage occurs so often before menarche); boys' development is assumed to occur before the wife's since his marriage marks the assumption that he is able to have sexual intercourse.

Sexuality, Power, and the Body

In Bhalara, we find that ideas about proper, subservient female conduct involve the body, and thus implicitly entail concepts of sexuality. For example, women do not sit cross-legged, as do men; they squat on their heels. One Damai woman explained why:

"Women should not sit cross-legged. If we do men will insult us. They will say 'oh, you are talking with *hakims* [officials] lately to sit like that'. Or they will say 'oh, so you are now a Badini'. We should squat, especially when eating rice. When we eat bread, though, we can put one leg up and one rested down in front of us. Only *thulo manchay*, [big people], sit cross-legged".

Posture and physical behavior convey a meaning of one's relative status. In the passage above women are contrasted with the *hakim*, the 'big' important, significant person, usually a man who holds a socially valued position. Hakims are teachers, policemen, contractors; or the 'big

person' may be a shaman or a Brahmin priest who sits cross-legged when in trance or when performing puja. Most upper caste men, when socializing, sit cross-legged. The people who do not are those with lesser status than the upper caste male – all women and most people of lower caste when in the presence of high-caste people. Such people may not adopt the cross-legged position; attempting to do so implies, as the passage above indicates that they are trying to be someone they are not.

The quality or capacity of the person that is publicly expressed in a sitting posture is power. There is one group of women who sit cross-legged any time they please – the Badini prostitutes. The Badini have exceptionally more power of certain forms in relation to their husbands than do other wives. The conceptual identity drawn between men of power and women of power is founded on a dichotomy between legitimate authority, and illegitimate or hidden power. Female prostitutes and professional men, Brahmins, and high-caste males have the choice to sit as they please. However, the women in this scheme gain power through illegitimate means by selling sex. By controlling the product – sex – and its price, Baadi prostitutes exercise power over many men in Bhalara. The power of the prostitute is sexual in relation to all men because of her ability to manipulate male desire to her own gain. The Badini's power is economic in relation to her husband because she controls the vast majority of material resources in the Baadi household through her income earning (to recall, the Baadi do not own or farm land, by choice).

One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that if a woman has power in relation to her husband, she has power in relation to all other males. Conversely, it is not simply not sufficient, but it is a social contradiction that a woman who has power over others of lower caste status – as do all high-caste women – can have social power over her husband and other men. It is caste status that is operant in the power differential between a Chetri woman and a Damai man; the former has, in

all circumstances, more power and status than the latter. But her caste status depends upon her subservience to her husband; thus she can never have more 'public' power than the husband. A Badini, on the other hand, the woman who can sit 'like a man' is conceptually similar to a man. This is possible not through a caste-based hierarchy, but through a gender-based hierarchy in which she has equal or more power than her husband.

The semiotics of body posture is quite interesting here. The cross-legged position is open, comfortable, relaxed. Women of upper caste sneak such a posture after a long day of work, or when talking with other women. Sexuality is also being regulated in this example because of how the Nepalese view women's legs. An adult woman's legs are considered erotic and should always be covered. A cross-legged posture makes them more apparent, draws attention to them. In addition to the status codes and proper female comportment apparent in the codification of body posture is a third trajectory of meaning that draws an inference between the (sexual or erotic) body (legs) and the physical pleasure of food. The semiotics of body posture involves food and eating such that a woman can be relaxed while eating wheat but must assume the more formal squatting position when eating rice. The differential status of foods is confirmed through different eating postures.

In the confines of marriage and the family, and in the context of the social ideals and values of the community of Bhalara, who controls the knowledge of sexuality? How do villagers of Bhalara say girls come to know about sex? How do boys come to know about it? Are there different gender-based standards regarding access to sexual knowledge? A Sarkini conveyed the community's standards about sexual knowledge:

"We do not talk about this with other women very often, not with our mothers or mother-in-law or sisters, or even our friends. How does a new bride know what to do? She does not. On the day a bride arrives at her husband's house for the first time, we give the new husband and wife a separate room to sleep in that night. Often someone will lock the door from the outside so that the two can't escape. They must stay there together all night, and they must have sex. Everyone is hoping they

will, and we are happy that they are doing that work. Some girls have a very difficult time because it hurts them alot and they cry. Sometimes the girl bleeds, but not always. But she cannot escape. The boy teaches her what to do since he probably already knows and is not shy to talk about it. As you know boys aren't shy about these things. That is how she learns, from her husband. It's pretty easy".

The narrative above includes the community's cultural values regarding the impropriety of conversations about sex, the male's greater knowledge about sexual matters, and the image of the trapped bride in the wedding chambers. First, and somehwat surprising, sexual discourse among related women is forbidden. Girls and women do not discuss sex with their relatives, nor do they talk about sex with their friends. Ideally a woman learns about sex from the husband. Second, the assumption of greater male knowledge about intercourse ascribes to grooms power over sexual intercourse (which later in the marital career may be contested), and, by extension, a claim to the use made of the female body. These standards imply a culturally prescribed ideal of female ignorance about sex. In fact, most girls actually do know about sex since they may see couples having sex in the communal room in which all family members sleep, they watch births, they hear older women's talk, they see livestock mate, and they have sexual experiences before marriage, though at risk. Third, the couples first sexual experience together is a public affair. They are "alone" together, but in a room that everyone else is watching. Misogynistic features of the wedding scene are that it is painful for the girl, causing bleeding, but the community is pleased because it heralds the start of the couples' sexual life together. The social body traps the couple, locks the door, and forces them to be together lest the act never be performed. The couple is forced into the service of the social body, to reproduce it. Sex is not pleasurable, at least not for the girl. The boy is thought to already have experience, and so this scene evokes an image of a girl learning, through forceful and violent means, a duty. Such images are portrayed in many other peasant and foraging communities (Pina-Cabral 1986).

Discourse associated with sexuality is constructed as hidden, restricted, and kept silent among women. If behavior associated with the expression of sexuality is restricted, it reflects the need to control sexual reproduction. In the rule-bounded organization of caste hierarchy, the need by each caste, through its men and women, to control sexual reproduction is extensive. This does not mean, however, that the language of sexuality is non-existent; quite the contrary. In its suppression in its 'own' domain, it reappears in many others. This is the focus of the following section in which we see the language of sexuality metaphorized onto the language of other domains.

Metaphors of Gender: Culture and Agriculture

I now turn to a domain of human activity that resonates metaphorically with the sexual. This is the domain of work, specifically peasant agricultural production, which all people of Bhalara are, in some form or another, engaged in or dependent on. A set of meanings derives from the sexual division of labor in Bhalara, and these meanings conform with people's general understandings about sexual relations between women and men. I will focus on the ploughing of fields because gender cross-over in this work is rare; men plough fields, women do not. Unlike other gendered work domains, such as washing dishes (female) or irrigation ditch-digging (male) or transplanting rice seedlings (female), where the other sex may be found working on occasion, ploughing of fields by women is taboo. This is indicated in the idiom that if a woman ploughs a field she will grow whiskers and become a man.

In ploughing, the worker is male and the animals are male (bullocks). The wooden plough is a long (over eight feet), linear, forceful tool strapped to the shoulders of the animals (bullocks are trained to be left-pulling or right-pulling). The man stands behind the animals in a position that alternates between straddling the plough and jumping off to direct the bullocks' pulling. The bullock is made to plough by the man's angry, taunting words and sounds. He shouts insults at the bullock, threatening it if it does not go forward. The plougher yells, grunts, and yelps in an almost humorous (though no one would dare laugh) cacophony of pre-verbal sounds that reverberate throughout the valley. The animal submits to the man's power over him.

The verb "to plough" also means to compel someone to do something, sometimes against their will, and at least with force. Through the efforts of the man and the bullocks, the ground is made fertile. The land, the soil, is female, to the people of Bhalara, which is why, according to their notions of the place of the sexes in society, a woman cannot perform the first acts to make it fertile. Only a male can plough

the furrows into which he later sows seeds. Unlike the female, whose fertility (whose ability to reproduce by bearing offspring) is direct, the male cannot come to fertility directly, but only through the use of a tool, the plough. Maria Mies has discussed male's indirect relationship to 'nature', in particular nature's regenerative and reproductive processes, as opposed to female's direct relationship, as a universal(-izing) aspect of gender opposition, conflict, and hierarchy (Mies 1986). Whether we need to proceed to Mies' level of etic theoretical generalization or not is debatable, but it is clear that agriculture provides for the people of Bhalara a mode of active metaphorization and linguistic referent for gender relations. Males and females alike draw on the features of agricultural production – the dry land, the malleable and dark fertile soil, the boisterous and stubborn ploughing bulls, the precious seeds, the wet and frothy irrigated spaces, the brilliant, lush rice seedlings – as symbols of male and female.

Males' relationship to the land is to alter and transform it, to disrupt its natural form. Thus ploughing, like other processes that involve the disruption of a substances' natural state (gold- and silversmithing, for example), is a impure form of work that Brahmin males are forbidden to do. The impure, agitating act of ploughing is one cause for the Hindu householder's inability to achieve complete purity (Hinduism calls on the farming householder to renounce the householder's life in the last life stages).

Women, on the other hand, do not alter the land. Rather, they make even and placid the surface of the land that the male, through his ploughing, has left uneven and stormy. The women go through with hoes and shovels and break up the clods of dirt and rock that the plough has left in its wake. Women also regenerate the soil by adding fertile substances to it, such as organic manure and burned stalks. They water the home vegetable gardens, and care for the animals that will contribute fertilizer. Women

also 'work' the soil, but in a less radically interfering way. Women slowly and patiently dislodge with their hoes and toss into their baskets the obstacles to the land's fertility – clumps of weeds and hard rocks.

From the above descriptions we should not be surprised that the verbs "to plough", *jotnu*, and "to work", *kaam garnu*, are euphemisms for sex. Women and men often say that pregnant women must continue to 'work', though they are not referring to farm work, they are referring to the 'work' of sexual intercourse. One man explained the consequences of not working while pregnant: "Women have to keep working when pregnant. Those who keep working will not have an inverted [*ulto*, backwards] baby, but those who stop working may have an inverted baby". He and the other men laughed at the pun.

Women and Public Insulting

From the discussion so far it may appear that there exists no public forum for the explicit use or representation of sexual ideas. For the most part this is the case. However there is one form of public performance (spontaneous though it may be) that not just uses explicitly sexual language but also is under the purview of women – public insulting, *gaali garnu*. I discuss public insulting here because this extreme form of social control occurs after the most grievous violation of the peasant moral economy – the destruction of another's crops.

The farmers of Bhalara do not build walls around their large fields. Crops must be protected against hungry, wandering livestock, porcupines and other wild animals, and theft (particularly of corn). Most crop loss (outside of landslides) occurs through the first means: someone will become negligent about watching their animals and one wanders into a rice field and eats until restrained. This is very upsetting to the farmers because it is nearly impossible to extract reparations from people who exist at the subsistence level or below.

The form of sanction against villagers who neglect their livestock is to be subjected to exceptionally harsh, unrelenting, loud insulting by women. To do this women stand at the edge of their courtyard and begin yelling with rhythmic, sonorous cadence. They raise and lower a bent arm in the direction of the trespasser's home, as if to better 'hurl' the insults in that direction. The insulter shouts in a monotone, raising the pitch and key precisely at the end of her insult phrase for added emphasis. The sound resembles the praying of a priest, yet the content could not be more different.

Who are the wrongdoers and what do women say to them? Regardless of caste, women usually insult other women – either the offender herself, or the mother of an offending child, or the wife of an offending man. There are two main types of insult, those that accuse the offending woman of incest, and those that wish death on the significant males in her family. In the first type of insult they accuse her of various forms of incest. The insulter yells "You are the wife of your son!", "You are the wife of your father!", or "Your son is your husband!". The second form is to curse everyone in her family, but particularly the males, with death: "May your son's hand rest on wood!" (alluding to the funeral pyre), or, "May you wear white!" (the color of a widow's clothing). This could last five minutes, thirty minutes, five hours, or five days (with breaks, of course), depending on the severity of the offense and the anger of the insulting woman.

Families are humiliated by these insults, but most have been subjected to them at one time or another (including me for having built an outdoor latrine next to someone's fields). Most also have subjected others to insults. Men do not interfere; in fact, they pretend to not hear anything. Men tend to disregard this form of harassment, but women do not; since women do the bulk of agricultural work and are therefore considered the farmers in Bhalara, insulting, as a form of social sanctions against transgressions, is meaningful in two respects. Women

insult other women – an acceptable means of punishing others – regularly, which serves to control the behavior of those family members who are in charge of the livestock.

What is of interest here is the language used in the stylized insults – the language of incest. Not simply is incest a harsh violation of the social code, but to accuse another of being incestuous is as close as non-family members come to bringing the subject of another person's sexual life into the public gaze. The effectiveness of this socially sanctioned form of punishment derives from its challenge to the social assumption of proper female (in this case the offender, or a female relative of the offender) conduct in ways that should not elicit comment. Someone shouting accusations of sexual misconduct at the top of their lungs for the community to hear is troubling to the offender, and hence an effective means of social control.

Cultural Stereotypes of Low-Caste Women and Sexuality

During the research I found that confirmation of stereotypes found in the literature about South Asia's lower caste women – particularly their presumed greater sexual appetities and promiscuity – were conflicted in the views of upper castes, some of whom refuted the stereotypes, and some of whom confirmed them. The contradiction is partially methodologically based – it is not surprising to find that different phrasings of a question can elicit different responses from informants. It is difficult to confirm the data on dissimilar sexuality because of the sensitivity of prodding villagers on issues such as whether they thought lower caste women were more promiscuous than upper caste women. Indeed, the issue is not so much demonstrating the veracity of such beliefs, but rather eliciting beliefs themselves. The manner in which questions are answered or information freely given can itself show how different groups of people think differently about themselves and others. Such questions about caste and sexuality are grounded less in fact than in myth of a cultural kind.

Furthermore, I wonder how much of the stereotype about women of lower caste is constructed in the mind (and writing) of the anthropologists rather than the natives; the fact that women of lower caste will remarry if widowed or unhappy sets them apart from women of upper caste, the group most often designated as the standard-bearer. Let us examine the contradictions and inconsistencies in the literature and in the field.

According to Allen (1982) and Sharma (1985), the cultural stereotype of low-caste women in South Asia is that they are freer and more sexually available than high-caste women. One explanation for this difference is economic. According to Sharma the economic vulnerability of lower caste people in general makes their women vulnerable to exploitation by upper caste landlords (Sharma 1985). In exchange for sex the woman receives economic benefits. A second economic explanation is proposed by Allen who says that because low-caste women are active income earners whose income-earning capacity is recognized, their economic autonomy produces greater freedom in most domains, including sexual (Allen 1982). In Sharma's model low-caste women are victims, whereas in Allen's they are powerful within a matrix that denies them religious and certain kinds of social power, but permits them economic power and connects to sexual freedom.

Allen's model is more applicable to the lower caste women of Bhalara than Sharma's model for several reasons. The women of low caste in Bhalara are not sexually exploited by upper caste men, as Sharma's model suggests. In Bhalara the presence of prostitutes does not serve to support or replicate the argument made by Sharma that a specific class (such as lower caste women) would be exploited by high-caste men because of their economic vulnerability. The Badini are, of course, low-caste but their short history of selling sex is due to the lack of other economic options available to them.

Secondly, we find that the women and men of Bhalara hold differing views of low-caste women's sexuality. In the following narrative of a high-caste woman, the stereotype of low-caste women is refuted. I asked her if she thought high-caste men would have affairs more frequently with low caste women than with high-caste women. She thought not.

"No, I think it is easier for high-caste men to have affairs with their own caste. After all, if a woman from a mixed caste affair becomes pregnant, both of them can be arrested. So as long as there are high-caste women available – and there are! – then the high-caste men will choose them. I wouldn't say that low-caste women are more likely to have affairs than high-caste women; both of them are equally capable. This society is corrupt anyway. Everybody does 'that work' with everybody else – sometimes with the elder daughter-in-law, sometimes with the younger daughter-in-law. Why some men make their own daughters pregnant. That happened in one Chetri family not far from here. Of course the mother kicked them both out of the house".

A second upper caste woman provided even more insight into the relationship between caste and sexual promiscuity. In her mind they were not related. I asked this woman about the incidence of affairs between low-caste and high-caste, but I phrased it in terms of honor. "Is it correct that low-caste women don't have as much honor as high-caste women and therefore they are not afraid of the social sanctions against having affairs with high-caste men?" She replied:

"That is not really correct. Everybody thinks their own *jaat* is 'big' – everybody says 'we are big, bigger than you'. So the affairs are not based on [limited by] caste. Really, men will take wherever they can find it. It is not a matter of caste since they could even have a Brahmin girl if she was willing. That is what happens in this hill society. Low-caste women, then, will refuse to go with high-caste men easily not because they are not concerned with honor. They too think themselves to be 'big', as big as Thakuri".

In this narrative women view male sexuality as different from female sexuality. According to her and other women, men are nondiscriminating about who they "go with". Interestingly, marriage and sexuality are not linked in the context of honor. Low-caste women are considered to have just as much concern as upper caste women about honor, and therefore sexuality outside of marriage is an individual matter and not a caste matter. Put another way lower caste women's decisions about sexuality are not influenced by caste; rather, those decisions come from the individual, decisions unmarked by caste.

We find in Bhalara that upper caste women harbor anxiety about the sexual power of low caste women. One afternoon a group of high-caste women were listing the differences between them and low-caste women. The differences they mentioned included kinds of marriages, the fact that the low-caste women are in service to others, and that low-caste widows may remarry. All of a sudden someone joked: "And another difference between us is that lower caste women sleep in the nude. We do not"! From a practical standpoint, it is probably not the case that lower caste women sleep in the nude since to do so would invite attack by the many bedbugs in most houses. Implied in the high-caste women's discourse about low-caste women, though, is that women of low caste are more seductive and sexual than upper caste women. If so, then they may be resented by women of upper caste for two reasons: lower caste women may compete with them for their husband's attention, and the power that Hindus associate with sexual energy – the power to seduce, to control, to manipulate, to cause illness – means that the low-caste are considered sexual, they are also powerful. In playing up the sexual promiscuity of lower caste women, upper caste women may make claims of superior moral positon, but they also reinforce their own position of subservience to the will of their husbands. Furthermore, women of upper caste would be sustaining the notion that factors related to caste are responsible for lower caste women's vulnerability, factors such as poverty and lack of political voice that the upper castes are implicated in perpetuating. In playing down the greater sexual availability of lower caste women, as did some informants, all of the factors mentioned above are played down. The essential determinant of sexual behavior moves from the structural position of caste (and its concomitant economic and political vulnerability) to that of the personal desire of the individual.

Other cultural factors are at play in the views that the upper caste have of lower caste women and sexual values. From the perspective of upper caste people, the primary role of low-castes is to serve others.

That this service could also be sexual is imputed in high-caste people's assumptions about lower caste service to them, even if such services are never sought, and if people of lower caste would never regard such services to be part of their duty. Second, the economic autonomy and social freedom of low-caste women may be threatening to high-caste people, as equally or perhaps more to men than to women. High-caste women are not prone to criticizing or even commenting on the sexuality of lower caste women, but high-caste men do comment and discuss. They make continuous reference to the lives of the untouchables – derogatory statements about how many children they have and the "kinds of food" they eat. Revealing their own anxieties about sex, men of upper caste imply that lower caste men are weak because of too much sex (see Freeman for similar accounts, 1979).

IDIOMS AND ACTS OF GENDER CONFLICT

"Birds have no house, and women have no belief".

In the following themes of women's and men's attitudes and images of each other, we find again the issue of the household, its honor, and its reproduction. In striving to control members of the opposite sex, women and men, husbands and wives express their anxieties and desires in relation to household and patrilineal concerns. The negative qualities of women (from men's perspective) are negative because they threaten to dismantle *moe* cooperation and lineal solidarity. The positive qualities of women convey opposite meanings of being caring for the household's honor and its members. In both positive and negative characterizations of the sexes, each differentiates itself from the other. What I regard as gender's assertion of autonomy and difference (in other words, when caste as an issue is suspended) occurs at the moments of elevated dyadic presence, the wife and husband in the household as a dyadic pair. The oppositional qualities of male and female are asserted so as to make the possibility of joining as a pair in the reproduction of the household

possible. Each sex desires the ideal of the other, striving as household adults are to an ideal of household reproduction.

Gender Conflict and Antagonism: The Unpredictable Female

Mistrust between the sexes in Bhalara is pervasive, as would be expected given the lack of communication between women and men, the vulnerabilities of poverty and economic insecurity, the threat of illness and death, the inability to control family size, and the many pressures of living within the large extended family. In fact, men express their distrust of women – in particular that they will take off with some other man – in several idioms. One of the simplest yet poignant is the one above, where women are compared to the bird who builds a different and new house each season. Women, too, do not keep the same house; they stay with their fathers until marriage when they move in with the husband's family at the *ghar*. Men express fear that women may even leave the *ghar;* men feel vulnerable that women will leave them for another man. As a result of women's unpredictable nature, from men's perspective, they cannot be trusted, they "have no belief".

This nature of being 'prone to flight' that women possess, according to men, is found in a second saying that further associates women with nature. Here, that women have no *jaat* of permanence is metaphorically associated with other objects in nature and animals whose species' features are icons of distrust.

> The things you cannot trust are:
> Trees that stand by rivers.
> Animals that have claws.
> Animals that have horns.
> And women who go to another's house.

Recalling that *jaat* means 'species' or 'natural category', the saying implies that it is the 'species' nature of women to not be trusted, particularly when they go to "another's" (man's) house. The saying admonishes women to not leave their husbands.

In yet another saying, women are contrasted to the king:

"Never tell lies to the King. Never tell the truth to women".

Here, the male king, as sovereign leader of the people, is assumed to have the people's interest in mind and should, therefore, be told the truth of what is happening. If one fails to tell the king the truth, the community's welfare is at risk. In contrast is the woman who does not have the community's interest in mind and who therefore does not share the value of keeping important information confidential. She is more likely to want to share it with her friends. Thus, one should not trust women with the truth, so the saying goes. Also implied is that, from men's perspectives, women do not have the interests of men or the collective in mind, but rather those of other women and children.

According to men, why cannot women be trusted? What is the source of their inability to keep a secret? Men cite a physiological difference – the Adam's apple. Men say that secrets told to other men are stored in the Adam's apple, and that men can, therefore, show great restraint in divulging another's secrets. Women do not, of course, possess an Adam's apple and therefore cannot keep secrets well. One man used an example to illustrate: "If I murdered someone and did not tell anyone except my wife, I can be certain that before long the police will be after me because she will have told everyone."[4] In other words, the wife cannot distinguish between what should and should not be told, and as a result is not able to keep the husband's interests in mind. The wife would, in effect, be his worst enemy. When asked why women want to tell secrets to other people, men say it is because they work with other women in the fields all day, or are talking with them at the water tap. Because they

[4] This example was repeated by other men, only some told it in the form of a folktale.

want these women to be their friends, *saati banaunay*, they divulge everything (according to men).[5]

A second gender-based physiological difference, whiskers, is cited by men as evidence of, and the reason for, the behavioral differences between the sexes. Men have whiskers and women do not. Whiskers are a metonym for males and male identity. A boy is considered to have reached maturity, *paripakwa*, or 'ripeness', when whiskers grow. Men laugh alot when talking about whiskers, and they use whiskers to construct visual boundaries between men and women: "If a woman ploughs a field, she will grow whiskers." And if a woman plays a flute – the symbol of Krishna and his seduction of the milkmaids – she will grow whiskers. The assumption is, of course, that women would never want whiskers, that they would never want to be anything but women, a *jaat* distinct from that of the male *jaat*.

Most students of South Asian popular culture have realized that women as wives cannot find an ally in Hindu doctrine, particularly the Laws of Manu (Dowson 1972). It is noteworthy that Hindu dogma regards wives in a manner similar to the local popular view of women by men. After hearing so many men talk of their mistrust of women, I asked the local Sanskrit scholar, Sasriji, the theological basis for mistrusting wives. The Laws of Manu, he explained, say that men should not believe women because, in his interpretation, "what women say today will change by tomorrow. Women change their minds continuously". This is because of their nature, their

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[5] The theme of women connecting with others, in this case with other women, reminds us of Carol Gilligan's work (1982) on the psychology of women in the United States. In her research she finds women valuing connection between themselves and others over other values such as objectification of human experience in order to make a 'moral' decision. This form of connection Gilligan regards as part of a moral order that women possess different from men. The Nepalese men's views of women seem to highlight women's desire to connect with others, though they see this in a negative light (as has much of the history of western moral thought regarding women) because it is destructive to the community. It is important to note that these are men's views; women do not necessarily agree with them, though they would say that friendships are important to them. But women would not see themselves as untrustworthy; quite the contrary, they see themselves as the only ones who are trustworthy.

swabhaab. The nature of women derives partly from their body, *sharirik*, and partly from their disposition, but both of these are constituted by 'nature', they are a given characteristic of the female *jaat*, caste or 'species'.

According to Sasriji's lesson, one defining feature of women is that they are kindhearted or merciful, *komal* or *dayaalu*. This is not necessarily a negative characteristic but it causes women to change their minds, according to Sasriji. He explained the consequences of being kindhearted:

"It is good to be kindhearted, but not all of the time. One must examine each situation and then decide how to act. Women cannot do this, they cannot examine the situation. It is more likely that women will make mistakes in judgement because of their kindheartedness. The problem with women, the reason we cannot trust them, is that even though what women may do or say may appear correct, it is likely that there will be a bad effect of their decision in the future. This is not true for men."

The reality is, of course, that women make many important decisions regarding the family, the farm, and work. But aside from this now all-too-familiar discrepancy between theory and practice, what we have in the narrative above is a justification for the greater value placed on men and their actions, be these decisions or deeds. The research shows that this is a view held mainly by men; women do not hold this view of themselves, nor would they, therefore, agree to it as a basis for male dominance. Furthermore, like caste, women's position is one into which she is born. The language of *jaat*, 'nature' and 'disposition' above essentializes the female in a way that is inescapable; her 'nature' cannot be changed.

When I asked men if they thought women were better than men in anything, they replied "Being greedy. Women are better than men at being greedy". This is not due to their concern for the welfare of family, though, but because they have insatiable appetites for food and sex, according to popular male culture. The symbol of the evil, greedy woman is the *rakshina* or witch. Her feet are turned backwards (thus making her tracks

unidentifiable) and she seduces men for sex and eventually kills them by drawing the life out of them. The association between sex and food as things desired by woman is found in the characterization of the witch as someone who takes all the good food for herself. For example, a woman who takes milk for herself but does not share with guests or family is jokingly referred to as a *rakshina*.

It is in the quality of kindheartedness that men recognize the uniqueness of females. Men believe that women's hearts, *man*, are more open than their own. That women cry more often than men is proof of their *daayalu*, kindheartedness. This kindheartedness is necessary for raising children because it allows one to understand the needs of another person. Men admit they are less capable of doing this than women. Men say they will search their hearts, but they will not cry. They ask "What benefit, *phaida*, is there in crying?". Again, practice and theory do not mesh. I have seen many Nepalese men cry in a variety of situations. But here they express what they consider a positive quality in women, and one which men do not possess.

Men contradict their own views of women's untrustworthy nature. Most if not all men give their earnings to their wives to save and spend as necessary. Men say women are much better at saving than men. It is their 'nature' of greediness that contributes to this female quality of thriftiness, I imagine, yet it is also valued and respected by men. Women are also the holders of the keys. Once a daughter-in-law has proved her loyalty to the patriline, the mother-in-law gives her a set of keys to the storage rooms, the trunks, and the house itself. Thus, women are seen as competent in the protection of the home.

Gender Conflict and Antagonism: The Fickle and Lazy Male

If it is accepted that sexuality and sexual discourse are mediums through which the social order is reproduced, challenged, recognized, or contradicted, antagonism and conflict between the sexes is frequently

played out in sexual reference. The sexes remain physically separated because of sexual innuendo. The theme of women, honor, and honor's bearing on the household appears in the boundaries drawn between men and women.

In Bhalara, physical separation of the sexes is common. Both women and men avoid gatherings of the opposite sex because they could become embarrassed by what is said. The threat of sexually-related taunting and teasing keeps men and women separate. For example, women often talk about bodily functions such as menstruation or childbirth with the intention of embarrassing a man, who promptly leaves. Men fear intimidation by women's teasing and ridicule; they know that women use these verbal weapons to humiliate men. The sexual antagonism between men and women is expressed, as we will see below, in contextualized discourse that carries the power to influence. An important point here, though, is that while masculine identity may be threatened in such a situation, male honor is not. Women, on the other hand, risk their honor to stay in the presence of a group of men. Simply being in the presence of (unrelated) men one's age is forbidden, as if men have the ability to harm a woman's honor.

Women do not trust men to be alone with a woman because they suspect he will have sexual interest in her. When I told an Okheda woman that I would be living alone she offered to come and sleep near me. This, she said, would prevent any man from coming and trying to threaten me. When she said this she used a gesture of sexual intercourse and exclaimed "If any man tries, I will cut that 'thing' off"! Everyone laughed. The frankness and antipathy expressed by the Okheda woman's protection of me was surprising since I had always lived alone in the past and had never been warned of such problems. I also think it was this woman's attempt to connect with me by including me in a group – the group of women – who she believes have certain forces (men) they must fight against.

Women refer to the penis when characterizing negative views of men. While discussing my own indecision about having children with some women I was told I should not expect my husband to help with childcare since men are irresponsible and helpless when it comes to children. "You will have to do all of the work because men do not know how to do anything. There is a saying here, that all men know how to do is *mutnay*, urinate! It is the truth (*Saachi kura ho*). They think only of their own desires (*itcha*), and they never think about anyone else."

Women associate male desire with nature (natural functions). In the passage above, the verb *mutnay* has a double meaning: to urinate and to ejaculate. Women feel that a man's penis symbolizes the selfishness of men with regard to their families and their relationships with others. The penis and the act of releasing something from the penis – urine or semen – are linked with selfish motives and simplistic thought and ideas: "They think of nothing else". Childlike male behavior derives from what women consider to be natural acts, to urinate, and to have sexual desire. And because men are so innately stupid, according to the woman, they cannot even be expected to take care of children. Thus, women's association with children does not mean they are closer to nature, as Ortner would have it (Ortner 1974); on the contrary, women are alone the ones with knowledge to deal with children's needs. Childcare is a process involving attention to the needs of someone other than oneself. Men lack the ability to care for someone else.

Prostitution

Sexuality escapes from the confines of marriage and procreation in prostitution, extramarital affairs, and pre-marital pregnancy. My interest here is to describe how the men and women of Bhalara differently view prostitution. I am not interested in the practice of prostitution or its association with temples (which it is not in Nepal, although this has been described extensively for India by Marglin,

1985), but in the discourse about prostitution and how it reveals gender and caste differences.

Separation of the work place and the home exists in Nepalese peasant society, but is not as marked or extreme as in American culture. The American "home" is a domain of relaxation, and the work place a domain of competition and wage earning. This marked separation in American society can partially account for our negative view of the prostitute as one who merges what should be separate spheres, work and pleasure, money for sex. In Bhalara these spaces are merged – the "work place", which is one's fields and one's home, is an extension of the home rather than a separate sphere. Throughout this text I have been arguing how the ethos of work in the fields is not conceptually demarcated from the ethos of work and domesticity in the home, or the ethos of the family, but these are merged domains. Earlier I argued the conflation of sexuality and procreation for the Nepalese wife. In Nepal, the Badini prostitute earns a living through sex and other forms of entertainment, but the Nepalese criticize prostitution because it contradicts the cultural expectation that sexual intercourse should be for procreation. The fact that Badini earn money is not as problematic for the people of Bhalara as it is for Americans since the Badini *jaat* allows that their *dharma* include earning money through entertainment, prostitution being one form of entertainment (for men).

In a conversation I had with three upper caste men about their views on low-caste women and sexual availability, they said the following about prostitution. As we walked the trail from Piket to Kholi, I asked the three local male teachers – one Brahmin and two Chetri – if they thought women of low caste were more available for sexual relations outside of marriage than women of high caste. At the time we had been following a Badini, and that is how our conversation began. They said it was more likely that a man would have sex outside marriage with a low-caste woman than a high-caste women.

The two main reasons they gave for why low caste women (excluding Badini, who practice prostitution as an occupation) were more likely to have illicit sexual relations with men included a caste-based and an economic reason. First, they said that the lower caste are "begging castes, that is their role in society, their economic situation. This results in their making themselves available to men." This explanation claims a link between caste status and prostitution. Women are prostitutes because a prior behavior – begging – creates a context in which other (socially unacceptable) behavior occurs.

However, there is, theoretically and from the view of people of low caste, a difference between "service" and begging. Service is part of their *jaat*, but begging outside of the customary *riti-bhagya* relations is a result of economic need. In which practice does prostitution lie? These men do not make the distinction. The low status of being of a service caste predisposes a woman to prostituting behavior; a direct conceptual link is made by these men between caste-based service behavior and illicit sexual behavior. This became clear later when they discussed the relationship between honor and economic need. The men said that women of low caste were not as concerned about honor "because they are beggars. To have affairs is not honorable, but they [low-caste women] are not so concerned about honor". Here, the men conflate the (dis)honor of illicit relations with the (dis)honor of begging. The begging behavior resulting from <u>economic</u> need and not <u>caste</u> status, is linked with honor; it is not honorable to beg, to ask. This is an important point since caste theory assumes that it is caste, and not economic status, that is more directly associated with honor. Caste status, when combined with economic need, results in prostitution.

The men also said that any woman, Brahmin or Baadi, may ask for and accept money if they have non-marital sexual relations with a man. One of the Chetri men said that "the women who ask for money are poor and they need it". Thus, one's caste status does not have to be low to be a

prostitute, to "ask for money". One simply needs to be poor. Still, this meaning was conveyed solely when justifying why Brahmin and other (of their) women might "ask for money". The economic justification was used in the service of caste honor regarding their women. It was not used to justify why low-caste women might be prostitutes; instead, these upper caste men saw the low-caste 'behavior' deriving from prior behavioral 'flaws' – namely begging and serving.

The Brahmin said that all Badini, at some point in their lives, are *bayshya*, prostitutes.[6] These men then asked if there was prostitution in "America", and I told them yes. They thought prostitution was *naraamro*, "not a good thing" for a community.

Women's views on prostitution are less (economically) analytical (e.g., women who are poor are prostitutes) than moralistic. They see prostitution as "bad" work, as not dharma work. This was explained one afternoon while I was sitting with some women at my apartment. We saw Hira Damai walking with Lal Bahadur from Haat. The women remarked on how close together they were walking, and their open affection towards one another. They told me Hira is a prostitute from Kuch. Her husband, who abandoned her, is in India. Hira owns no property – no fields and no home. She lives with a friend. But she earns enough money through prostitution to buy nice saaris. Kithi, a Chetri woman who sells kerosene and is a very sharp, industrious businesswoman, compared her clothing with Hira's: "Look at my clothes, which are all torn, but her's are so nice and new". I asked her which clothes were better. She said "Mine are because my work is *dharma*; her work is not *dharma*". The products of work – items purchased, items made, crops harvested – have

[6] He also discussed the Baadi prostitutes in Nepalgunj, where one of the largest communities lives. Nepalgunj is a large Terai city on the Nepalese-Indian border with large government, service, and bureaucrat populations, i.e., many men who are away from their families. The Baadi have an established place of prostitution where men can go for sex. The man claimed that he himself never went to the Baadi community, but that he heard they received from Rs.5 to Rs.150 ($6) per customer.

value derived from the kind of work done. The outward appearance of Hira, dressed in a colorful silk saari, is wealth. But she obtained these clothes through work that is non-meritorious, that is against women's duty in society. Kithi's clothes are torn and old, but she valued them more because she obtained them through meritorious work.

From this passage and other conversations with women, we can see that women's views on prostitution relate to religious values, whereas men's relate to economic status. The women do not acknowledge that there are few economic options available to Hira. In their view her impoverished state does not justify her choice of work, as though there may be other options available to her. The option, as these women see it, would be remarriage. Through a man she can become legitimate. Seen through women's eyes, then, prostitution is not something a woman is forced into through economic need. This contrasts with men's views on prostitution, in which poverty and begging are linked to prostitution.

It could be argued that there is another psychological dimension to high-castes' stereotype of lower castes' greater sexuality. Given the anxiety about sexual matters in contemporary Hindu society, the low-caste function as an object of transference of high-caste sexual anxiety. The renunciation of sexual desire is a idealized goal in Hinduism. But this last stage of Hindu life passages, the *sannyasin* or "forest dweller", is theoretically not available to lower caste persons. Thus, in the hegemonic ideology, the low castes remain forever in a desiring stage of life.

Commensality and the Household

To be members of a *moe* means to eat together, to share substances (Marriott 1976). In the daily flow of events and people in Bhalara, time is marked by periods of commensality, when household members come together to eat. To be married also means to eat together, to share substances. Weddings involve feasts and complex networks of the giving

and receiving of food. During a wedding power moves between families on plates – leaf plates, silver plates, brass plates. To feast is to gain power; to not feast is shameful. Poor low caste families justify taking money for their daughters' weddings (the subject of the next chapter) to feast their wedding guests.

In Bhalara the cooking hearth is the central space of commensality where family comes together two or three times daily to eat, exchange information, share stories, recreate past events, and plan for the future. The hearth is feminine in that women always cook and serve food (except Brahmin men who, due to purity concerns, cook for themselves).

The hearth is a symbol of the health and longevity of the *moe*. The people of Bhalara say that when someone in the family has gone away for a short or a long period, *chulo boko raakhna hudaina*, "the cooking hearth should not be left hungry". The saying refers to the hearth on which rice is cooked, *chulo*, as distinguished from the hearth on which bread is cooked. The meaning is that a woman should not become lazy, since she is the main cook, and not neglect her family in the absence of a husband (since he is the person most likely to be away). A "hungry" hearth symbolizes two situations. First, the small food offering made to the gods before each meal is absent, neglected. Second and more significantly, a "hungry" hearth signifies death and the period of fasting that a family must observe after a family member's death. Therefore by keeping the hearth "full" or lit is to keep people alive, and the people of concern are those with whom all meals are shared, members of the patriline. Thus it is women's responsibility to keep the family alive.

Rice, constituting the bulk of the morning meal, is preferred to the evening's wheat bread, *roti*. Rice is a higher status food than wheat and is cooked in an environment of ritual purity. A woman must replace the clothes she has worn that morning with a clean skirt and she cannot

leave the cooking area until the food is cooked and family begins to eat. A wife eats after her husband, ideally, though lower caste women say they do not always wait for their husbands because they must return to their own household, field, or income work.

In the winter, very little commodity or farm production takes place by the time the rice meal is served, and so rice marks the first commensality of the day. There is a sense that the day has not really begun until rice-eating has occurred. And indeed, "eating rice" is a linguistic marker for stages in the day. "Have you eaten rice"? is a common greeting in the morning and early afternoon. "Yes" denotes a normal situation,"No", something unusual. During heavy agricultural production periods in the summer and fall, a great deal of work is often completed by the time the first rice meal is taken. During this period, there are usually three meals instead of two. The first early morning meal is bread made fresh that morning or leftovers from the night before. Yet this is not considered the true first meal and is not a linguistic marker in the way the rice meal is.

Behavior following rice-eating is different than that following wheat-eating. When the rice is finished, one quickly leaves the area and goes outside to wash one's hands and rinse out the mouth to remove the *jutho*, impurity, of the food. Often the person remains outside to warm in the winter sun. After finishing the evening wheat meal, though, family members wash out their mouths and hands through a window and remain inside to talk around the fire.

Thus, the meanings that coalesce around rice include formal preparation, ritual purity associated with the beginning of the day, first commensality of the family and patriline, formal and proper eating behavior and conduct, high status, and cleanliness. The meanings that coalesce around wheat are informal preparation associated with evening and the end of day in which people have come in contact with the outer

world and impurity, last commensality of family and patriline, informal eating behavior and conduct, and relaxation.

The metaphoric and euphemistic relation between eating and sexual intercourse is common to many cultures, and the association has achieved nearly metonymic status. Eating is the behavior par excellence of fusion, joining, transforming, sustaining, reproducing. The Hindu marriage ritual, the ritual that legitimizes human sexuality and directs it to certain ends, involves symbolic eating. For those peoples who must regulate sexuality to build social boundaries, such as Hindus' necessity to regulate caste boundaries, eating is a root metaphor for family and caste commensality. We should expect, then, that to publicly break those boundaries would involve an eating event staged in a format contrary to normal and acceptable caste commensality. This is exactly what happens. The symbolism of food and eating penetrates many domains of caste, gender, and society in Bhalara. When a man wants to break the rules of caste by marrying a woman of lower caste he shares a meal in public with her. In Bhalara's recent history, there has been one such incident. A Thakuri man wanted to marry a Damai woman. The community was appalled when he ate a meal of rice with the woman in a teashop, under the critical gaze of the community. Then the couple eventually moved to India, leaving behind his three sons and first wife who remain ashamed of the incident.

The conceptual association between eating and caste bears the assumption of normalized (intracaste) sexual intercourse between married adults. Those who eat together should be of the same caste, much as those who have sexual relations. Indeed, through commensality between people from castes properly associated, and, in the case of married couples, people having legitimate sexual relations, caste purity and exclusivity are reproduced. Acts of intercaste commensality, like the Thakuri above, oppose the proper reproduction of caste groups and households, and are

signs of illegitimate sexuality. In society's view, the marriage is not legitimate, nor are the children of such a marriage.

The ongoing processes of bonding between wife and husband (and other family members) include filling and emptying, gain and loss, planting and harvesting, eating and sex. The regulation of the social order is accomplished by the appropriate (and auspiciously aided) transferal of substance (Marriott 1976). Through these processes bonds develop between 'like' persons. To be sure, these are not neutral processes but are often problematic and conflictual within popular Hindu culture. These processes create and recreate realms of meaning and differentials of power through practice. For example, sex is dangerous for men, it can cause illness. A common folk illness in South Asia is lethargy and fever attributed to semen loss. Thus, power locates itself at the margins of these processes. Women control the flow of food, men control the flow of semen. Women gain power over the products – food – of a process they do not own –land and agricultural production– while men lose power and strength through a process they nonetheless have ideological power over – sexual intercourse.

Wife Abuse

Wife abuse is a common practice and a common topic of discourse in Bhalara. Most men feel they have a right to beat their wives, and many women say they have been hit at one time or another by a husband. The beating of a wife is often justified by men through concern for household patrilineal honor. Wife beating is a common physical threat used against women to control them. Women say they are not free to come and go as they like because they are afraid their husbands will beat them. Often the beatings occur over work and farming issues. For example a woman from Piket was struck several times with a sickle by her husband who claimed she was not working hard enough, although he himself spent the meager family profits from farming on alcohol. Other causes for beatings include the discovery of a lover, talking to a non-related

male, and travel without the husband's permission. A woman jeopardizes family honor by engaging in these practices, and is punished for her transgressions.

Most beatings take place at night when a woman is too exhausted from the day's work on the farm and domestic work to defend herself. It is a rare man who will publicly say he does not and never has beaten his wife. In fact, men in groups encourage one another to beat their wives if necessary. Few cases are reported to the local police since Nepalese legal codes require a woman to obey her husband and his decisions; a woman would have a difficult time in court since the law does not protect her nor the pursuit of her own desires. Instead a woman seeks support from her *maiti*, where she may go to stay for a few days or even weeks. The *maiti* does not usually intervene in marital disputes, though. Those most likely to affect the situation include older sons and supportive in-laws.

In four years I have seen two severely injured women who had to take time off from farming to heal. I asked one of the badly injured women if she would tell the police, and she said "What can I do? If I tell the police or anyone else he [the husband] will just get angry and beat me again".

Women attempt to counteract the abuse of wives by talking with the man. Husbands who physically abuse their wives do not escape chastisement by other women. Mistreated women make their situation known to older women who will take it upon themselves, in the presence of the offending male, to tell him of their disappointment in him, and remind him of his duties to his wife. Women do this, they say, because they know of their own *dukha*, suffering, at the hands of their husbands. They implore these men to remember their *dharma* and pay attention to the needs of their wives.

Conflict and Separation of Wife and Husband

The fate of children are the greatest limitation to a woman who wants to leave her husband. Children are considered the property of the husband's patriline and a woman would have to fight to gain custody. Children's material fate in such situations depends on their gender. Sons can still claim inheritance from their fathers regardless of whether they stay at the *ghar* or move with their mother. But a daughter's informal inheritance is uncertain. If she stays with her father she can expect some support in the form of dowry. But if a daughter moves with her mother she has less claim to support from either her mother's *ghar* or her mother's *maiti*.

Rights of inheritance for the children of a woman who leaves her husband are, therefore, uncertain. To illustrate, let us look at Dharu's case. Dharu is of Damai *jaat*, has been married at least twice (she hedges on divulging the nature of an alleged third relationship) and currently lives with her brother in Gugai. Her first son, Chakray, has rights in his father's *riti* in Kot, but her second son's inheritance is uncertain. He would have to live with his father in Bisket, separated from his mother, in order to prove his loyalty to his father's family before he could inherit. Many people see Dharu's marriage choices as detrimental to her children's inheritance rights.

Dharu's financial security is also uncertain. Her brother, Tela Bir, provides well for his family because they have many *riti*. She said that he was planning to "write a paper" for her giving her inheritance rights in his *riti* after his death. When I asked him about this he replied "*ka aba*", essentially, "who knows"? This is a source of tension in the *moe*, household, because there are many daughters-in-law who have the interests of their own children in mind, children who have a stronger inheritance claim than Dharu. To illustrate the uncertainty of a woman's life after divorce, part of the life-events interview with Dharu is included here. The conversation is of interest because it demonstrates

the significance of the loss of children through remarriage, and at its structural level shows Dharu attempts to evade the history of her multiple marriages. The interview was conducted near Dharu's first *ghar*, and her son Chakray's village, Kot; he remained at his deceased father's home. We are discussing the possibility that Chakray may stop by. [M=Mary; W=Dharu].

M: Do you think your son will come here today?
W: He has come before but today he will not come since I have already come.
M: What happened between the two of you?
W: [They] make fun if they see me.
M: Do the two of you ever meet?
W: Yes, we meet.
M: So you meet.
W: He bows when he sees me, and says "shalom". I consider him to be my most precious son. But if he asks me to go there where he lives then I will not go. I do not like it there. I do not really feel good about that place.
M: This town isn't good?
W: Here is not good.
M: In Kot?
W: That place does not make me feel good. But over there I feel good.
M: Yes, at your home?
W: My brother has made things pleasurable for me. My nephews are nice to me. There is nothing that is not good. Whatever clothes I have I can just wear. My [second] son is there, and I have one baby bull. I have a daughter-in-law [her nephew's wife]. And that one sister-in-law [the one accompanying her] is really nice to me. People there listen to what I say, they do what I tell them to do. I never feel bad or troubled. Kot is a rough place. I never feel good about the place.
M: And you do not have a husband?
W: He drowned in a stream.
M: I see.
W: Over there is a canal. There was alot of water. In that stream he drowned.
M: In the Thalari stream. How many years ago?
W: Many years ago. I was pregnant at the time.
M: How many years ago? Two years ago or twenty years ago?
W: It has been twenty years.
M: Have you always lived in Gugai, or did you live in Kot also?
W: Long ago I was born in Yuwati [?]. We had been moving around alot when I was born. Then we stayed there for two years. After that we moved to my *maiti*. M: You stayed in Kot for two years after your husband died?
W: Yes, I stayed there.
M: Then you moved to Gugai?
W: Yes I moved to Gugai after that [This is factually incorrect, but she is answering in the affirmative to everything I say because she does not want to reveal the past].
M: Did your brother call you to stay with him?
W: Yes.
M: He invited you to live with him?
W: Yes, he invited me. I was having trouble finding enough to eat and clothing to wear. So I went there and stayed. I drank milk there [she refers to the place she returned to, her natal home, as the place where she was nursed by her mother. The metaphor expresses how she is nurtured in the present, too].
M: I see.
W: Like that, I went there. It was an important decision. After that I stayed there. [confusing]

M: Yes, yes ...
W: [confusing]. My son asked me to return but I did not say anything.
M: How many sons do you have? Only one?
W: One who was born here. Another was born at 'another's house' [a euphemism for having 'remarried' and gone to live with another man]. I had gone to Biskhet [a nearby village, where her second husband lived, though she did not say this], and after this another son was born. After that 'he' [her second husband] died, in India he died.
M: You had gone to Bisket?
W: Yes ...
M: With a 'second' man?
W: Yes ...
M: Your first husband ...
W: My first husband ...
M: How many children did you have with your first husband?
W: Just that one [referring to Chakray]. That was his second marriage, to me. His first wife died.
M: Where were you first 'sent'?
W: I was first sent there.
M: Kot.
W: Yes.
M: After that you were married a second time?
W: No, only once.
M: You have one son from your husband?
W: Yes, that is it. The first is him [again, Chakray].
M: You never had another child? None died?
W: No.
M: Just one, and he lived. That is all?
W: Uh ...
M: Another?
W: There was not another one. 'It' died and was gone.
M: How many died?
W: That one's father [referring to Mangalay's father].
M: His father?
W: Uh ...
M: Oh. But I do not understand about the man in Bisket. You went to Bisket, right?
W: Yes, I went there.
M: When?
W: Many years ago I went.
M: Why?
W: I went there. And there a son was born.
M: I see, with another man.
W: Yes, I went with a second man, and he also died.
M: How did he die?
W: He died in India.
M: Did he get sick in India and die? So from Kot you went to Bisket and from Bisket you went to Gugai.
M: I stayed in Gugai.
W: Did Chakray get angry when you went to Bisket?
W: Yes he got angry. He said I just abandoned him and took off.
M: You did not abandon him?
W: No.
M: I see.
W: Today, too, he asked me to come. But I will not go. How can I go, even though he wants me to? I am too shy [*laaj laagcha*] to go.
M: It would be embarrassing. It must have been difficult for you to come today because of being embarrassed.
W: Yes ...
M: For you, right?
W: Yes ...
M: I see ... your son is a very nice person.
W: Yes ...
M: Why doesn't he go there?
W: Yes, he talks very well.
M: Yes.

W: He controls the conversation well. He will probably laugh if he hears someone say "Your mother never came here today".
M: No. He ... um ... yesterday we talked while on the way back from Gugai.
W: Yes ...
M: He was waiting for me because he had heard something. He waited and waited at the tea shop to meet me. We met some distance from here and he returned to Bhimal Dhaada [the community water tap in the village] with me.
W: Yes ...
M: He asked me where I was coming from. I told him Gugai. I met your mother, I said. Tomorrow she may be coming to Bayal Pata, I told him. I asked her to come many times, but she has not come. Because it is close to my departure time she has agreed to come. So that was about all we talked about. He did not say anything bad.
W: Yes ...
M: I said to him "Tomorrow your mother will come here, and maybe you will come to see her, Chakray-ji". All he said was that she probably would not come. But who knows what he will do? How many years has it been since you have met?
W: Me?
M: Yes ...
W: Many years.
M: It has been many years since you have met?
W: Sometimes I go to see him. But I have not gone to his house.

From this passage we get a sense of avoidance and embarrassment. Dharu wants to see her son, and he clearly wants to see her. But she is afraid that people will 'laugh at her', and he is shy because he says his mother has abandoned him. The conflicts between mother and children that develop due to her lack of rights in children upon separation, divorce, and/or remarriage are profound.

Dharu is not the only woman in Bhalara to be in this situation. Six out of eighty-eight (6.8%) women were married more than once, and they were all of lower caste. Several other women were not living with their first husbands either because they were widows or they had returned to their *maiti* due to dissatisfaction in their marriages. The reasons for remarriage were given with equal frequency: widowhood, mistreatment by husband, and the husband took a second wife.[7]

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[7] The Nepalese Legal Code stipulates that a man may take a second wife only after being married ten years and having born no children with his first wife. This code is regularly violated on two counts; men do not wait ten years, and they will remarry if they have only daughters, thinking that a new wife will produce sons.

In this chapter I began with a discussion of the relationship between honor, (*ijat*), duty *(dharma)*, and *jaat* (as a delineator of caste and gender). I demonstrated that *jaat* and patriline appropriate gender to their interests of household and patrilineal reproduction via the symbol of honor. At times the gender differences are emphasized with reference to caste – for example, the view that upper caste women's honor is greater than that of women of lower caste because the former, unlike the latter, do not remarry. At other times, gender does not implicate caste in its assertions of difference, but reifies gender differences with particular emphasis on the wife-husband relationship. In domains of sexuality – antagonism and conflict, intimacy, joking, insult – we continue to see the subtext of honor played out. Next I turn to the legitimate ordering of sexuality and conjugal honor, the rituals and relations of marriage.

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ON THE EDGE OF THE AUSPICIOUS: THE PRACTICE AND MEANING OF GENDER AND CASTE IN RURAL NEPAL'S LOW-CASTE HOUSEHOLDS AND SOCIETY

By

Mary Margaret Cameron

Volume II

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Anthropology

1993

Introduc

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DEMYSTIFYING THE GIFT: SELLING DAUGHTERS AND OTHER THEMES IN LOWER CASTE MARRIAGE

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Introduction

There is no discourse of social involvement and relationship more common to the people of Bhalara than kinship. Whether working in the fields, pounding steel into iron, washing clothes, caring for children, eating, or relaxing, people talk about *pariwaar*, family. The symbolism of kinship plays a major part in people's conceptualizations of social life. I now turn to the main features of kinship in Bhalara, emphasizing the meaning and practice of relatedness as this pertains to lower caste women, their marriages, and social hierarchy. The relevance of characterizing the kinship system in Bhalara is to further show how the hierarchies of gender and caste have certain similarities and differences, and how their practice and meanings constitute and are constituted by their interrelation.

This discussion proceeds from the expanded understanding of gender and kinship presented in the work of Collier and Yanagisako (1987). They take the position that the so-called 'domestic domain' is not one of universal value and function, does not exist in opposition to a 'public' domain, nor does it rest on the mother-child dyad being regulated through male authority (see Collier and Yanagisako's critique of Fortes and others on this point 1987,4-5). Rather than assuming dichotomous spaces of public and private, the authors focus on the meaning and practice of kinship. The data from Bhalara support Yanagisako and Collier's model of kinship relation in that the regulation of women and children by men in the lower caste household does not exist, and the relationship between mother and children is not manipulated by male authority as earlier theories of kinship assert.

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Structural Features of Kinship and Descent in Bhalara

In detailing the regulation of kinship and descent among Hindus we meet the conundrum of language. In discussing kinship we must discuss caste. The tendency to use caste terminology imperfectly leads to two problems when we try to impute its role in regulating kinship organization. First is the fact that Nepali-speaking Hindus do not use the word "caste". What we think we mean by "caste" they mean either *jaat* or *varna*. English-speakers often use caste and *jaat* interchangeably (as I have done) when in fact they are referring to *varna*.

Into the word "caste" English-speakers have imported the meaning of what to Hindi and Nepali speakers is *varna*, and not *jaat*. As you recall from the first chapter, the *varna* are the four most encompassing categories or levels of caste hierarchy; indeed the "system" would be more accurately designated the "*varna* system" rather than the "caste system". Yet, the Nepalese' commonplace understanding of *varna* is rarely denoted by the word *varna*. Instead, Nepalese say *jaat* to refer to what English speakers commonly think of as "caste" – an exclusive group into which a person is born, which forms the basis of one's social identity, and into which one should marry. This meaning is more specific than *varna*. To further complicate matters, the people of Bhalara give inconsistent answers to the questions "What is your *varna*?", and "What is your *jaat*"? Let me illustrate. *Varna* refers to the classical four-tiered hierarchy as conceptualized in the sacred Hindu texts. The four tiers in India are, in a minor way, different from those in Nepal. In India the four tiers include the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In Nepal they include the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Matwali (including the Tibeto-Burman groups such as the Sherpa and Tamang), and Shudra. In the Nepali scheme, Vaishya is substituted by Matwali, a legal concession to the many powerful Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups in Nepal (Haimendorf 1966; Hofer 1979).

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Jaat refers to "caste", and is more specific than what English speakers have come to know by the word "caste". For some groups *jaat* is identifiable by what we would call surname. For example, Dharu Damai is of the Damai *jaat*, and Sita Singh is of the Thakuri *jaat*. However, Dharu may tell you her *varna* is Damai, even though strictly speaking it is Shudra. And Sita may tell you her *varna* and her *jaat* are Thakuri, even though strictly speaking her *varna* is Chetri.

Below I use *jaat* and *varna* for purposes of accuracy; the rules of kinship and marriage are about these designations. The main structural, normative, and behavioral features of kinship and descent in Bhalara are as follows:

1) Varna endogamy Rules of marriage prescribe marriage within one's *varna*. In Bhalara, this rule is strictly followed, and any deviation is considered abnormal, anti-social, and aberrant.

2) *Jaat* endogamy and exogamy Some groups are strictly *jaat* endogamous, some are preferably *jaat* endogamous, and others are preferably *jaat* exogamous. The lowest Shudra – the Baadi, Damai, and Sarki – and the Giri are strictly *jaat* endogamous. All high-caste groups (excluding Giri)[1] are strictly *jaat* exogamous – the Rokaya, Bista, Singh, Upadhyaya, and Joshi, marry outside of their *jaat* (but inside their *varna*). Most of the Shudra low castes are preferably *jaat* exogamous – Parki, Okheda, Luhar, Sunar, Oudh prefer to marry outside of their *jaat* although they are not always able, and it seems to not matter if they do not.

3) *Gotra* and *thar* exogamy *Gotra* and *thar* exogamy are the incest taboos of Hindu kinship and marriage. *Gotra* and *thar* refer to clan and surname, and while *gotra* is not apparent from a person's name, *thar* may be

[1] In the past, though, Thakuri girls would be married to Brahmins.

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apparent. *Gotra* becomes relevant to the practice of kinship during marriage; a person is absolutely forbidden to marry another person of the same lineage. For the small exclusive groups like Sarki or Baadi, only one lineage exists in the surrounding area, and brides must therefore be located elsewhere. This is a factor in cross-cousin marriage among the lower caste groups where marriage with a *mamali* (mother's natal home) person is preferred.

4) *Jaat* hypergamy In contrast to India, *jaat* hypergamy – a woman marrying a man slightly higher in socio-religious status – is not common in Bhalara. Most women report that their *jaat* status remained the same after marriage, although some Shudra women felt their natal home *jaat* was higher than their husband's. Figure 5.1 shows women's perceptions of whether their *jaat* status changed after marriage, or remained the same. High-caste women are more likely to perceive a lowered *jaat* status after marriage than lower caste women, but there is not a significant difference in the percentages of women who believe their *jaat* remained the same or increased after marriage.

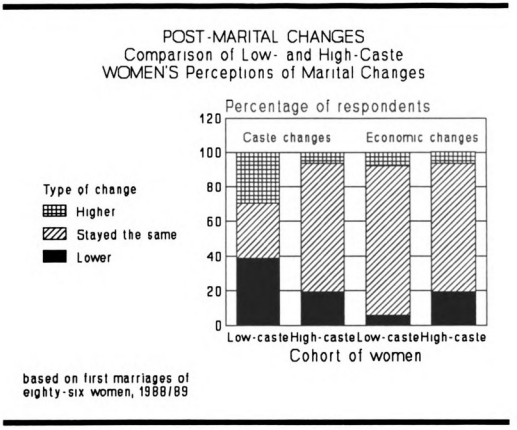

Figure 5.1 Women's Perceptions of Post-marital Caste and Economic Changes

Though intercaste marriage is unusual in the Bhalara community it is more likely that men of high caste will marry women of low caste than the reverse. Since intercaste marriage is marriage by choice, and to marry 'down' in caste is to forsake patrilineal rights, it appears that men are in a better position than women to make certain marriage choices and to take certain marriage risks. The reason given for men marrying women of lower caste is love. There is a local saying: "Women of lower caste were made exceptionally beautiful by God to compensate for their low status".

Figure 5.2 shows post-marital *jaat* perceptions among lower caste women. We can see that those at the highest of the Shudra hierarchy, the Luhar

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and Parki, are more likely to consider their natal home status higher than their new *ghar* status. The women who married into the Parki *jaat* (such as Luhar and Oudh women) are likely to perceive a lowering of their *jaat* status; on the other hand, women marrying into Luhar and Oudh (such as Parki women) are likely to perceive their status as the same or higher. Thus, even though in principle these three *jaat* are equivalent in status, the women perceive a difference in rank, based in part on the economic status of the *ghar* household. The Parki in Bhalara are not as wealthy as the Oudh or Luhar. Also evident in Figure 5.2 is the prohibition of against intermarriage among the Sarki and the Baadi; they each marry only other Sarki or Brahmin, and thus there is no possibility of changed *jaat* status.

In India, the higher status of bride-takers vis a vis bride-givers is due to *jaat* hypergamy. In Bhalara, the absence of *jaat* hypergamy is reflected in the relationship of symmetry between bride-givers and bride-takers. In-laws treat one another with decorum and respectful distance, though not generally with intimacy. In fact one man said that the bride's *pariwaar*, family is considered higher in status than the groom's family because their sacrifice of a daughter in marriage is so great.

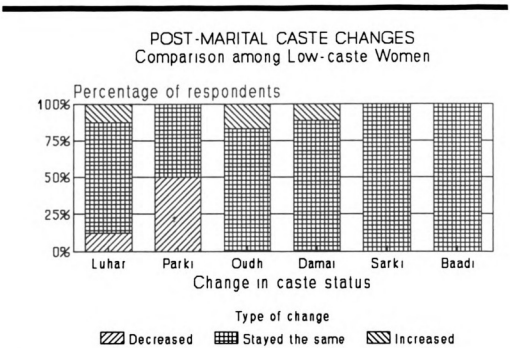

Figure 5.2 Low-caste Women's Perceptions of Post-marital Caste Changes

5) Patrilineal inheritance and descent It has been said that the commonplace notion of inheritance is a commonplace notion of kinship. In other words, much of what we need to know about the structure and practice of kinship can be found in inheritance rules and practices. Because inheritance is so central to kinship, and kinship so central to daily life in Bhalara, inheritance is an essential feature of the backdrop of this analysis of gender and caste in Bhalara.

Formal inheritance of name, lineage, immovable property, and rights to the dispersal of property (such as rights to *riti* patrons and land) is through males. The father's property, inherited from his father, is shared by all his sons and used by the son's wife and children. This property is owned by the lineage of males related by birth and descent,

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daaju-bhai, "older and younger brothers". Informal bilateral inheritance by women of other movable property is in the form of dowry. Inheritance of material goods and property is governed by rules, obligations, and structural laws that follow patrilineal inheritance. However, these boundaries may be circumvented by circumstance or informal, less codified and rule-bound practices. For example, women may inherit from their father extensive amounts of property in a "patrilineal" system. In the case of lower caste women, acquisition of artisan skills and the inheritance of the husband's *riti* relations are important. Collier and Yanagisako argue the importance of seeing these less formally structured practices of kinship and inheritance with regards to women, because, as we shall see, they profoundly circumscribe the relationships that women are involved in daily. And kinship, particularly its dimensions of property inheritance is more about relationships than it is about 'things'.

The structures of kinship are the product of maintaining *varna*, *gotra*, and *thar* purity through exclusionary practices. However, certain basic elements of kinship such as inheritance are defined and limited less by the structure and ideology of caste – purity and impurity – than by the material realities of production and property ownership related to caste and class. This is particularly the case in lower caste *moe*, households. For example, many Damai women receive sewing machines as dowry from their parents because they were productive seamstresses in the *maiti* and continue as such in the husband's home.

In addition, inheritance of land into the lower caste *moe*, household, is constrained by forces that have prevented lower caste people from owning land. In other words, lower caste people do not inherit land because of reasons of intercaste power and the limitations it places on land ownership (as previously discussed in chapter three) and not because of structured descent rules. What is of heritable significance among lower caste males are *riti-bhagya* relations. What is of heritable significance

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among lower caste women (and men) are skills: dancing and singing, sewing, basketmaking, leatherworking, and/or midwifery.

6) Patrilocal residence After marriage a woman moves to her husband's parent's house where another segment of the extended family begins. Here the wife lives the rest of her life, in service to the patriline as a worker, mother and wife.

7) Nuclear and Extended family households As discussed previously in chapter one, household compositions in Bhalara varies from the most common two-generation and 3-generation, to less common one- and four-generation. Extended families are the norm among lower caste groups, and both nuclear and extended families are common to upper caste groups. Such arrangements include a husband and one or two wives, their sons and/or daughters, the wives of sons, and their children. The local term for the unit of common residence of family members is *moe*, and is used in the text interchangeably with household.

8) Village endogamy and exogamy A bride's place of origin varies because for some *jaat* the availability of non-lineage marriageable women is less than for others. For other *jaat* the availability of several lineages from which to choose brides gives them more flexibility, and they prefer to take them from closer areas.

9) *Kanyadaan* marriage preferred The most prestigious form of ceremonial marriage is *kanyadaan*, the "gift of a virgin". *Kanyadaan* marriage is accompanied by dowry payments from the bride's *pariwaar*, family to the groom's. It is property generally understood to be the woman's, although there are limitations to her direct ownership, as I discuss below. However, a second and less prestigious form of marriage is practiced by people of lower caste, called *chori betchnay*, selling daughters. Bilateral monetary and in-kind exchanges characterize this form of marriage, though there is greater emphasis on brideprice exchanges from

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the groom's to the bride's family. This chapter focuses on the practice called "selling daughters" and its meaning in a dowry-defined culture.

Avoidance and Joking Relationships: Respect and Love

Kinship terms carry axioms of affect, etiquette, and obligation (Fortes 1969). In Bhalara's kinship culture there are relationships of avoidance and relationships of intimacy and joking within an extended *pariwaar*, family. A local axiom counsels people to "respect those who are older than you, and love those who are younger than you". Those respected are also those to be avoided, and are *chow* or *jutho*, untouchable or impure to the person concerned.[2]

One primary rule of kinship avoidance involves sisters- and brothers-in-law. A married woman and her older brothers-in-law, *jeta*, are in *jutho* or avoidance relationship with one another. They may not touch one another, may talk together only if necessary, and, in the case of the anthropologist taking photographs, may not be in the same photograph together. The potential for sexual attraction to develop between a woman and her husband's elder brother is thus avoided. This potential is considered very real. The older brother(s) has authority over younger brothers and their wives, and can, in principle, exert power of all kinds over them. The eldest son diminishes the appearance of complete power by avoiding contact with his younger brothers' wives.

Women refer to their older brothers-in-law as "one and one-half *saasuraa*", one and one-half father-in-law. The "one" refers to the usual show of respect that they give the father-in-law. The additional one-half of respect is necessary to verbally diminish the potential sexual threat of the brother-in-law.

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[2] *Chow* also describes menstruating women, a family that has just experienced a birth or death, and people of low caste.

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Avoidance behavior is frequent and obvious in the daily life of the people of Bhalara. For example a woman carrying a large load of firewood or fodder on her head must move off of the path to avoid on-coming related men. A second avoidance tactic employed by women forces the man to avoid her. This dance of avoidance is initiated when the woman first stops in her tracks and waits until the man sees her. Then, as she stands still he walks around her so that she does not have to navigate her large load of firewood or hay around him. It is women's responsibility to avoid men. Women are ever watchful for approaching *chow* men during work trips around the fields and hillsides. Women also cover their lower faces and head with a section of their scarves or clothing as a sign of avoidance. All of these practices credit women with showing respect for related males and acting, therefore, in honorable ways.

The avoidance relationship between sisters- and elder brothers-in-law is both a kinship and a social issue, as interpreted from the sanctions against their interacting. If the older brother-in-law and the sister-in-law taboo is broken the two are forced to eat *chuke ra chaamal*, sour juice and raw rice. This mixture is very difficult to chew and swallow. Its symbolic meaning is that the impossibility of getting any sensual pleasure out of eating the mixture applies also to the pair whose future contact is unacceptable. The iconic value of the sour juice and raw rice is great. It has the quality of being 'difficult to swallow', as would be the older brother's-in-law and sister's-in-law relationship for the community. It is sour and painful, as would be their own experience of a sexual relationship. It is considered undignified and base to eat raw rice, again, as would be their relationship. Thus, the older brother-in-law and the sister-in-law are punished for their unacceptable behavior. It is noteworthy that the man is required to eat the mixture also, not just the woman. The culture recognizes that the man is just as responsible as the woman for maintaining distance. The taboo is so

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A very different relationship exists between a sister-in-law and her younger brothers-in-law, *debar*. Their's is an affectionate relationship, and sisters-in-law are often very indulgent of their younger brothers-in-law. A younger brother is very happy when his older brothers marry because he can rightfully expect the new sister-in-law to be as loving and giving to him as his own sister(s) and mother(s). This relationship may not be absent of love interest, though; there are cases of women having affairs with their younger brothers-in-law.

The distribution of patriarchal authority in the lower caste household is different from that in the upper caste household. Their landlessness diminishes the control males have over property and its inheritance process because of the absence of material justifications for authority in the lower caste household. From the standpoint of patriarchal authority based on patrilineal inheritance, occupational tools and skills are not the equivalent of land. Evidence of this is found in the contexts of marriage and work, as is discussed below, and was discussed in the previous chapter on honor.

"Bone, Milk and Blood": The Substances of Kinship

While structural categories of kinship reveal the degree to which humans create order out of chaos by assigning social categories to biological facts (Douglas 1966; Levi-Strauss 1969), many recent studies of kinship in South Asia and elsewhere seek to unravel the meanings of categories to the people involved. These studies draw on indigenous concepts of family, relationship, and emotion to demonstrate the meanings of kinship (Trawick 1990; Daniel 1984; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Khare 1976).

One afternoon while I was translating tapes with Lal Bahadur Bogardi I learned more about kinship than would have been provided by laborious

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work on kinship charts (which, incidentally, I attempted several times, only to end in utter confusion on my part and frustration on the informant's part), Lal Bahadur's wife walked by. I greeted her, we joked, and she proceeded home, balancing a load of hay on her head. I turned to Lal Bahadur and said "Your relative [*ishtaa mitra*] just walked by". He replied "No, that is not my relative, that is my wife". I asked "You don't call your wife your relative"? He answered "No, she is family – *pariwaar*. *Ishtaa mitra* are her family". Noticing my interested confusion, the Brahmin Pradhan Panch from Dubaali and Goray Okheda from Kot, who had been sitting with us, gave an explanation of kinship categories, summarized below.

The *pariwaar*, family, includes the husband and wife, his parents, sons and daughters, and grandchildren. The meaning of *pariwaar* to the people of Bhalara is very similar to *moe* in that both designate the family. An important distinction lies in *moe*'s designation of the physical space of the family, whereas *pariwaar* is more ideological and connotes meanings of kin relationship (which *moe* really does not). After marriage the daughter becomes a relative and is no longer a member of the *pariwaar*. The distinction between *pariwaar*, family, and *ishtaa mitra*, relatives, involves several conceptual domains that include 'substance' sharing and lineage associations – specifically the sharing of bone, *ang; haad*, blood, milk, and *thar* (clan). Those sharing bone, blood, and clan are considered *pariwaar*, and those considered *pariwaar* must share these attributes. The people of Bhalara hold that the *haad* and *ang* come from the father's semen, and the blood comes from the mother. Mother's milk is the medium through which other 'substances' of the family, food, for example, are 'shared' with the child.

A woman, at marriage, acquires her husband's clan and relinquishes her parents' so that she is considered a member of her husband's *pariwaar*, family. The woman's clan changes immediately, at a certain moment in the marriage ceremony. People believe that transformation in the woman's

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clan status begins as the couple walks around the ritual fire (see the next section for a full description of the wedding ceremony). What about the associated *pariwaar* 'substances' of *haad* and *ang*? Is there immediate transubstantiation, as some authors assert (David 1973)? Or is it gradual through continued contact with 'substances' of the husband's *pariwaar*, as Marriott's model would imply (Marriott 1989)? I would agree with Marriott that the change of 'substance' occurs gradually, through the woman's continued contact with her husband's *pariwaar*. In-laws consider the new bride a lineage member, but their full acceptance of her is gradual. The catalyst for 'substance' change is the marriage ceremony. It is not likely that full transformation occurs by the end of the marriage because of the great importance placed on clan exogamy; only marriage between a man and a woman from different clans is recognized as possible. This was emphasized by the Brahmin: "We cannot marry in our own *pariwaar*, family".

Thus, the categorical difference between the wife's and the husband's 'substance' or 'bone' is a precondition of the marriage itself; there must not exist a prior 'bone' or blood relation between the two. However, through continued contact between the wife and husband – sexual, religious, work, eating – the affinal woman becomes evermore a clan member. The birth of a child establishes her and her child's full rights to clan membership. In the role as mother the woman contributes to the child a second substance needed to be a *pariwaar* and clan member – mother's milk.

The substances shared among *pariwaar* and clan members are bone and milk. These are differently conceptualized, though, because they are generated by different processes and each parent differently. Milk from the mother cannot be transformed or altered. Sibling relationship in a *pariwaar* depends on cohorts having been nursed by the same mother.[3] This cannot

[3] In polygamous marriages the second wife is called stepmother, and distinguished by children from their own mother.

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change for either the son or the daughter. But the bone and blood inherited from the father's semen changes for daughters after marriage, but remains unalterable for sons. It is this immutability that perpetuates and extends the lineage through the substance of males. Mother's milk creates a substance-based immutability for the daughter. Even after she is married, a daughter's connection to her natal home through her mother's milk does not change. The fact of being born from and nursed by the same mother establishes an immutable relationship between siblings based on shared substance. But that inherited by the daughter from the father – bone and blood – can, and does, conceptually transform at marriage and through connection with the husband.

Women have to be brought in from the outside and 'transformed' into the substance of the lineage. It is by virtue of the woman's connection to her husband's patriline through her husband that her milk imparts clan membership to a child. This appears to require the transubstantiation of her own bone and blood since women, after marriage, are no longer considered "family" to her *maiti* but "relative", *ishta mitra*. This loss of natal home clan connection is expressed in the context of funeral rituals: "We do *kriya* ["sit" for the funeral ritual and observe austerities in honor of the deceased family member] for our daughters-in-law but we do not do *kriya* for our daughters", according to Goray Okheda.

Blood, like milk, is polysemic in the context of kinship. A very interesting and important dimension to the blood of kinship is that lower castes use it to argue against caste-based discrimination. Many lower caste men and women protested that to "call us untouchable (*nachunay*) [as the high-castes do] is not good [not valid] because we all have blood. Their blood is red and our blood is red. We are the same, not different." Social equality, then, is justified through a belief in sharing the same substance, blood. Its color is the same for those of upper and lower caste, according to this view, which is

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symbolic of equality. At another level of equality symbolism, the lower castes say that people of all castes bleed if they are cut, that they are not only vulnerable to hurt and sorrow, but they are all equally human in their response.

The force of this one-blood ideology has, for Hindus, symbolic meaning beyond that of 'equally human'. The idea that there may be no basis for claiming exclusionary differences based on different substance seeks to dismantle the very basis of caste hierarchy with the additional potential consequence of dismantling the basis of family and clan membership. This position suggests that belief in the substance basis of clan membership, and its exclusionary outcomes, is weaker for people of low caste than of high caste since its loss, as stated in the "same blood" ideology, is seemingly not of negative consequence to them.[4] Those at the top are not interested in a substance-based ideology of equality, but are motivated to maintain a substance-based ideology of hierarchy and separation. This is resisted by those at the bottom.

The Geography and Practice of Marriage

Now let us turn to marriage, a foundation of kinship. During weddings, issues of gender and issues of caste become manifest. Women are completely dependent on their kin to arrange their marriages. As can be seen in Table 5.1 below, most girls are married before the age of fourteen and claim they have not begun menstruation:

[4] It is interesting to note that the same ideology of "one blood" is used by Rastafarans of Jamaica and the Caribbean. Here too a disenfranchised group - blacks subjected to a history of slavery - calls for a recognition of equality among all peoples based on the sharing of blood, the same blood, "one blood". Thus equality is achieved, according to these ideologies, not through justice of a certain governmental system - welfare, scheduled castes, socialism - but through a belief that all people have the same substance; this is held to be sufficient for social equality.

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Table 5.1 Women's Age at Marriage, by Caste

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Lower caste (51)	Lower caste (6)
Age at marriage (means)	13.6	13.7	13.2
Menarchial (percentage)	32.3%	15.7%	0%

Surprisingly, even though the average age at marriage for high- and low-caste women is the same (just under 14 years of age), their menarchal status is significantly different. Over twice as many upper caste women claimed to have started menstruation before marriage than did lower caste women. There are three possible explanations for this. Either the sample population was too small to accurately represent normal menarchial distributions (i.e. differences based on biology and not culture); or, lower caste women reach puberty later than upper caste girls due to nutritional differences; or, there was error in recall. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to fully evaluate each of this causes. If it is the case, though, that although both groups of women are usually not menarchal at marriage, there is a tendency to marry girls post-menarchal is greater among upper caste families, this is surprising given the preference for 'pure' (i.e., nonmenarchal) brides among the upper castes.

Girls' vulnerability to becoming victims of ill-fated karma is greatest around the issue of marriage. Girls' fear they will be fettered with "bad husbands", *naraamro shriman*, after marriage since parents cannot predict behavior fully. The most undesirable types of marriage for a young girl are to be married to an old man, to a man who already has one wife, or to be "sold" at marriage by her parents. Often these occur simultaneously. For example, a girl who is forced to marry either an old widower or a married man can be "sold" for more money than if the husband were the same age as the girl (making compensation for their loss less justifiable). The practice of selling daughters, *chori betchnay*, is the focus of this chapter; it occurs in lower caste

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families much more frequently than in high-caste families, and half of all lower caste marriages are the 'selling daughter' type.

The parents of brides and grooms have many factors to consider in deciding to marry their children. For religious, economic, and emotional reasons the *maiti* is interested in the daughter living close to them. The daughter is a person to whom *dakshina*, religious offerings, are given for religious merit; the daughter is sacred. She is also a worker needed during peak agricultural and commodity production periods. And mothers are emotionally attached to their daughters and want them to live nearby.

From the groom's perspective, there are also many practical advantages to bringing women from nearby villages. Quite a few families attribute their economic stability and prosperity to their daughters-in-law who are from villages nearby. These women are generally happier and more productive because there are more rewards accessible to them if their natal home is close. They can share the products of their labor with their natal home, they can get assistance from sisters in their own *ghar* work, they are close to their friends, they continue to be treated in a special way as a daughter, and they have albeit limited protection from unfairly critical or demanding in-laws. Although this question was not researched, it would not be surprising to find a direct correlation between frequency of wife abuse and natal home distance; those women without nearby natal relatives are more vulnerable than those whose relatives are close.

High-caste brides come from villages closer, on average, than lower caste brides. Of all women married only once, most came, as brides, from within Bajhang District (95%), but few lower caste brides came from Bhalara (17.6%). In fact, over twice as many high-caste brides (39%) came from within Bhalara. Furthermore, the average distance of high-caste women's *maiti* is inflated due to one group whose *maiti* are the

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most distant from the husband's home – the Thakuri. If these women were removed from the sample, the average *maiti* distance would be even smaller for the high-caste cohort.

This finding merits explanation because it problematizes general models about high-caste marriages which claim high-caste women come from far away. Such models presume there is more prestige associated with a distant bride because the *ghar* can assert more control over her. The prevailing models about marriage among upper caste communities in central Nepal (Bennett 1983) and northern India (Sharma 1980) emphasize the fact that upper caste brides come from villages quite distant from the husband's home. In the absence of comparison to such trends among other groups – such as lower caste or *matwali* – such conclusions remain incomplete.

Why might lower caste brides' villages be further from their post-marital villages than high-caste brides' villages? There are two explanations for this geography of brides: first, because of their greater *jaat* variety and heterogeneity, lower caste clans are smaller in numbers than high-caste *jaat*, resulting in smaller, clan-exogamous groups; second, upper caste families' decision to take brides from close villages allows them access to daughters' labor during peak agricultural periods.

As the maps in chapter one show, lower caste groups locate themselves in small, exclusive communities. These communities are single lineages (*gotra; thar*) of extended families. Recalling the rules of marriage, *gotra* and clan exogamy are very important. Lower caste must therefore marry outside of their community. It is difficult for Sarki to find other potential Sarki brides close by, so they must look outside of the immediate area. This is also the case for the Baadi. The lower caste groups of Parki, Luhar, and Oudh intermarry, but even their marital choices are limited.

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Regarding the second factor affecting upper caste families' decision to take brides from close by, all upper caste families want their daughters close to them to assist during peak agricultural periods. Thus, parents are reluctant to send their daughters far away. High-caste groups are homogeneously farmers; among the latter the Thakuri would be considered the most exclusive, and indeed, their brides come from the furthest distance of all the upper caste groups. Brahmins, too, are considered exclusive, but since they are greater in number there are more brides available to them locally. The same is true for the various Chetri *jaat*.

The need for future agricultural or other work from consanguinal women is less pressing for lower caste families. They are not primarily agriculturalists and therefore do not need their daughters for this purpose. And, unlike the high-caste families who ask their daughters to help during labor intensive periods in family farm production, lower caste families cannot demand artisan production work from their daughters. A Damini daughter, for example, once married, works as a seamstress for her *ghar* and rarely for her natal home, whereas a Bauni (Brahmin woman) or Chetri continues to provide reciprocal *parma* labor to her *maiti* to work as a farmer during peak agricultural periods.

Thus, there is more of a complete loss of an economically active person to a lower caste family once a daughter marries and leaves the natal home than is experienced by high-caste families. This conclusion is consistent with the marriage practice of *chori betchnay*, or "selling daughters", common among lower caste families which, I argue below, is a recognition of the value of lower caste women's economic contribution to the family, and the complete loss of that contribution to the natal home. In restitution for this loss the bride's parents demand monetary compensation from the groom's family.

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Maiti and *Ghar*: Women's Semiotic Orientations

The two places of most significance in a woman's life are her natal home, *maiti*, and her husband's home, the *ghar*. The *maiti* represents an idealized place of childhood and adolescence, an idyllic time when the physical landscape of the hills and the movement of the agricultural seasons and the ritual cycle are first experienced by a girl. Women remember their *maiti* in dreams, in yawns, in sneezes, in songs, and throughout certain religious months like Maagh (January 15 to February 15). *Maiti* is a metonym for the people living there. In other words, the place called *maiti* is conventionally associated with parents, siblings, sisters-in-law, grandparents. Thus, *maiti* comes to stand for the place and the people.

The *maiti* is a key symbol in women's psychological and emotional states, as well as a location for economic and religious events. Regarding the first category of significance, for example, while sleeping a person's *hangsa*, soul/spirit/"voice", travels. A married woman's soul often returns to her natal home to see the people there. A second occasion in which the natal home in used in interpretation of women's psychological states includes possession. During possession, spirits identified as possessing women are often associated with the woman's *maiti*, either as having possessed her during travels from the natal home during her wedding, or actually coming from the *maiti* to cause her problems. Why is something destructive associated with the *maiti*? First, the *ghar*'s shamans, and not the *maiti*'s, are the ones to interpret the possession (and the shamans are paid by the *ghar*) and they associate a disruptive force with the woman's natal home. This makes sense to the ghar, who normally feel themselves in competition with their daughter-in-law's natal home for her loyalty and affection, contributing to the ambiguous status of the bride in her in-law's home. Identifying possible sources of interference in the daughter-in-law's ability to work effectively in the household contributes to resolution of her ambiguous status.

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The emotional attachment a woman experiences to the *maiti* is fully recognized in Bhalara. The conflict she experiences from her desire to remain attached to her natal home, even after her first and second children are born, is given due respect. The *maiti* is a place where a married woman returns for periodic visits on many occasions. One category of visits is informal, unplanned short visits, most frequent for women whose *maiti* are in the same village or a neighboring one. If a *maiti* is more than an hour or two away a woman is less likely to make these informal visits.

A second category of visits to the natal home are planned, and are of either a religious or work nature. There are two main times of the year when all women, upper and lower caste, return to their natal home to be honored by parents and given gifts. Gifts made to a daughter, called *dakshina*, are presented on a leaf plate (as opposed to a metal plate). The leaf in its original state of undisturbed or untransformed nature is considered more pure than the metal plate which is transformed through a destructive process.[5] The daughter, in turn, brings gifts to her parents. At harvest a daughter from a landholding family may return to her *maiti* to be part of the *parma*, reciprocal, labor groups. As discussed above, this is one reason why parents prefer their daughters be married to nearby families.

Maiti visits are of a third type. The *maiti* is always a place of refuge for a daughter. There are numerous examples of women seeking temporary shelter and protection in their natal home because of abusive husbands or in-laws. For example, a young Saund couple are not living together because he continuously beats her. The son drinks heavily so she often stays away at her natal home. While in town she lives a few houses away

[5] Offerings to the devi or deity being worshipped during puja must also be presented on a leaf, an unpolluted form; an equivalent status of devi is attributed to the daughter in those sacred contexts when she is being worshipped.

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from her husband's home with her mother-in-law who is also alone.[6] Women also return to live in the *maiti* after a husband dies. This is more acceptable for women of low caste even though the lower caste women's severance of their ties to their *maiti* is more complete than for high-caste women. Widows from upper landholding castes are required to continue to provide service to the husband's home, whereas land is less likely to tie a lower caste widow to her husband's home.

In spite of its proclaimed protection and love for its daughters, the role of the natal home in a woman's life is ambiguous. The *maiti's* support is conditional on the woman remaining married, particularly for high-caste families; an unsuccessful marriage or early widowhood is dishonorable for a *maiti*. Thus, only in exceptional circumstances will an upper caste *pariwaar*, family take a daughter back to permanently live in the natal home (though, as the data below indicate, upper caste families prefer to have their daughters living close by). It is more acceptable for a lower caste family to welcome a daughter back to live permanently or temporarily. In the latter case the economic status of the *maiti* is relevant to the decision. A very poor lower caste *maiti* will not be able to support a returned daughter, but a lower caste family wealthy in *riti* will be apt to welcome a daughter or sister back because her labor can be useful to them. Still, a widow is not necessarily guaranteed an easy return to the natal home. Consequently, a woman's decision to leave her husband is shaped significantly by the option of living with her *maiti*.

Table 5.2 shows the frequency of contact a woman has with her natal home.

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[6] The mother-in-law has lived separate from her ghar because she allegedly tried to push one of her daughters-in-law into a fire. Since then her sons banished her from the house.

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Table 5.2 Married Women's Contacts with Natal Home

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
# annual visits to natal home	72.48	32.66	3.5
# annual visits from natal home	85.16	28.33	.33
The following are in percentages of "yes" responses.			
Natal relatives close	58.1	39.2	33.3
Relationship with natal home is good	93.5	94.1	33.3

Women of upper caste make more visits to the natal home than do their lower caste counterparts, and the fewest number of visits are made by women from multiple marriages. Lower caste women make fewer trips due to the distance of the *maiti*, their work at home, and the fewer opportunities to be given *dakshina* (gifts) by their *maiti*. The *maiti* of upper caste women is closer, on average, than that of lower caste women which allows them to maintain *parma* reciprocal labor contacts with the *maiti* throughout the year. A second reason for upper caste women's greater visiting frequency is that their families perform more rituals that acknowledge the high ritual status of the daughter who is called to the natal home on these occassions. Even though it is more acceptable for lower caste women to reside in their natal homes after a husband's death, they make fewer overall visits to the maiti. Thus, the ritual, economic, and social attachments of the high-caste woman to her natal home are stronger than is the case for low-caste women.

The maiti is a source of protection and support for the daughter; for most women, the maiti is a space in which, as a daughter, they have a status superior to that in the husband's home, and can relax. If greater numbers of visits to the maiti are indicative of a woman's greater need to 'escape' the *ghar*, then it appears upper caste women seek this solace more frequently than do lower caste women. It is also the case that the natal home is the one place to which upper caste women can legitimately

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travel without repercussions or criticism, and without risking honor. Lower caste women, on the other hand, have more freedom of mobility throughout the village and surrounding countryside in their daily work excursions. Yet another explanation for the patterns of travel shown in Table 5.2 is that the maiti is a place to go for financial assistance; inevitably, a married daughter returns to the *ghar* from the natal home with gifts and money. The low-caste maiti is not in the position of giving large, expensive gifts on a consistent basis to its daughters.

In contrast to the *maiti* is the *ghar*, the husband's home where a woman spends the majority of her adult life working the husband's farm (if they own land), working for her husband's high-caste *riti* patrons and others who will hire her (in the case of a lower caste woman), managing the work of hired laborers and low-caste *bhagya* (in the case of upper caste women), and raising children and grandchildren. The people found at a woman's *ghar* are her husband, his parents, their parents, the husband's siblings, their wives and children. Like the word *maiti*, *ghar* is used metonymically by women to stand for what it is conventionally associated with – most of her husband's patrilineal relatives. Depending on context there may be a narrowing of the associations to only the husband; women say *ghar* to mean husband. This use fits the prohibition against speaking a husband's name directly. A woman's children also live with her at the *ghar* but these persons are not included in the metonymic use of *ghar*.

The husband is expected to give *sukkha*, happiness, to his wife in the form of material goods, cash, provisions, gifts, farming assistance and aids, and intimacy; the husband is identified in the *ghar* as the source of a woman's happiness as well as her unhappiness when she is disappointed. The following explanation of why women leave their husbands is from a life history interview with Kaalu Luhar and makes metonymic use of the association between husband and *ghar*: "Women elope when they have suffering, *dukkha*, at the *ghar*. If another man promises

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happiness [*sukha*) she goes with him, thinking she will be happier. She could have babies. Someone will provide for her, so she goes. Without a good husband it is not like one's own *ghar*." Thus, the *ghar*, by definition, contains a husband. The wife expects the husband to provide for her. Without a husband, women feel they are trespassers in the *ghar*. Space – the *ghar* – and person are defined by the presence of a husband. Without the husband, women (such as widows) are ambiguous *ghar* members.

A splendid image of the contrast between a woman's life in the *maiti* and the *ghar* derives from an almost comical source. I had noticed that nursing women's breasts were disproportionate in size. In my typically frank research approach, I asked about this. The women laughed loudly and explained that one breast, the smaller one, is for the *maiti* and one breast is for the *ghar*. The meaning is splendid. Women find small breasts much more beautiful than the large breasts filled with milk. They associate the small firm breasts with their *maiti*, a place and a time when they were young, beautiful, and unwed. When they have children, women, in effect, save one breast for the *maiti* by not allowing the baby to nurse from it. This practice, they say, prevents the breast from continuously swelling with milk, and keeps it small. The large, ugly breast is 'working' for the *ghar* by breastfeeding its babies. In this image is captured a woman's conflict with her *ghar* for whom she sacrifices her youth and beauty to give service to her husband's patriline. Simultaneously, she retains her connection to her *maiti*, in spite of reproducing his patriline.

To illustrate the tension between the *maiti* and the *ghar*, let us look at an example of two honorable women whose efforts had opposite outcomes. Villagers of Sadil remember two cases of women whose desire to behave honorably were exceptional, but led, in one case, directly to her death. This woman from Sadil was regularly beaten by her husband, and she sought refuge in her natal home for long periods; she could not, however, separate from him because of pressure from her *pariwaar*,

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family. Her *ghar* relatives made unreasonable demands on her, and were very selfish in giving food and clothing to her and her children. One of her daughters died at the husband's home, allegedly because of their neglect. The longest she stayed at her natal home was two years, but she was gently urged by her natal home to return to her husband's home. The brothers said the family's *ijat* would be questioned if they let her live with them. The woman wished death upon herself; her mother also told me that she too thought her daughter would be better off dead than to suffer at the hands of her husband's home. While in her *maiti*, soon before leaving for her *ghar*, she came down with a fever, and the following day she died, to everyone's sorrowful relief.

The families of Sadil vow they will never give their daughters to the family, or even to the village. The *ghar* is held responsible for her death through their neglect. The *maiti* is expected, if necessary, to care for their daughters financially and emotionally until her death, but they cannot coerce or otherwise influence her to sever her ties with the husband's home. To do so would bring shame and criticism on them.

The second story of an honorable Sadil daughter is quite different and positive. She married a boy from Haat whose *pariwaar*, family was in continuous dispute with one of their widowed daughters-in-law. As the story goes, when the bride came to Haat, she showed great respect to everyone in the *ghar*, including the troublesome daughter-in-law, by bowing deeply to each of them. Through this public act of deference (which everyone remembers), gentle encouragement, and helpful behavior, the girl is credited with repairing relationships between the daughter-in-law and her *ghar* relatives.

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Vulnerability and Arranged Marriage

All first marriages in Hindu society are arranged by parents (or other adults should the parents be unable) for their children. Girls feel vulnerable about the issue of marriage. Throughout girlhood and adolescence, they hear admonitions of proper conduct and virginity, and horror stories about being torn from their natal home to live the rest of their lives with a "sixty-year old man".[7] Girls' marriages can be sabotaged in a number of unpredictable ways, they hear. The groom may not show up on the wedding day. Or he may arrive but is ugly. Or if the girl is exceptionally beautiful she may get cursed, *choke laagda*, by a jealous person and suddenly become thin, sick, or in other ways unmarriageable.[8] A girl may also be rejected at the last minute if the groom's family finds out that she has been sick in the past or has other physical problems that would signal to them an unfit girl (in these instances people bluntly say that they reject such a girl because they cannot be sure she will live long).

The marriage arrangements made by parents serve the parents purposes more than they serve the purposes of their children, according to newlyweds and young couples. Woman speak about their parents betraying and "sending them away" to live with a stranger. Following is a passage from an interview with Jamkhola Damai, a young bride from Kot who was

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[7] Women use units of twenty to count large amounts: years, grain measures, distance. To be the age of "three twenties" or "sixty" is a euphemism for being very old. And an old man, to a young woman, is incapable of sexual intimacy and giving a woman children. Thus "sixty" is a young new bride's expression of disgust, anger and despair at being stuck with such a husband. This is an 'imbalanced' marriage, one that doesn't fit, a marriage that is considered 'unnatural' by the people of Bhalara. A woman is disadvantaged by such a marriage, not the least of which is a diminished period of childbearing due to the husband's advanced age.

[8] These beliefs apply to livestock also. If a cow or water buffalo is producing large quantities of milk it is more vulnerable to being cursed. One woman said that the cursor is jealous of the animal. Owners of productive livestock tend to limit the number of people who come in contact with the animal because of the fear that the animal will get cursed. One woman complained that her water buffalo, which was giving four maana of milk per day before Dasai, suddenly stopped giving milk - "only half a maana". She said that someone out of the many Dasai guests saw the animal and cursed it.

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born and raised in India, and returned to Bhalara with her parents for her wedding. Jamkhola expresses her anger at her parents for "sending her away", especially when she was so young. She also talks about the parents "eating *dhan*" (taking money or wealth) at her wedding. [M=Mary; J=Jamkhola].

M: Did you know that the people were at your natal home to ask for you in marriage?
J: No, I didn't know.
M: So you didn't know?
J: I was really small when they came to ask about marriage. If they had told me I wouldn't have come back to the house, and I wouldn't have eaten. I would want to run away. If they told me they were giving me to them, I would not want to return to the house. But I was small and I didn't know anything.
M: Who told you later?
J: Later they said that they told me a *janta* was coming. And my father came to look for me to tell me. Then the wedding happened.
M: So your father told you?
J: Yes.
M: How did you feel?
J: I did not feel very good about it.
M: You didn't like it? Why not?
J: Well, my parents gave me away in secret. After the wedding it was like they just threw me away. It doesn't matter if you are older or a baby, you have to stay at the husband's house. And after staying at the house for awhile you no longer have to respect your parents.
M: You don't respect your parents?
J: They say that our daughter died for us, after her marriage. They took me to India. After the marriage they just left me here. They just left me here after I became someone else's. If I had not gotten married they would have taken me with them.
M: So you cried.
J: Yes. [pause]. They sent me while I was still young.
M: You were like a little girl.
J: Yes.
M: Had you even started menstruating?
J: No.
M: And you became a 'wife' after marriage?
J: Yes ...
M: Ever before marriage?
J: No. They bring us home after the marriage. And they call us a wife after that. We eat together at the *maiti*. And then the groom talks to the *maiti* about the bride. It happens at this time [this is confusing].
M: It is like that in my country.
J: Oh. But you don't get married until you are older and you have your own choice to get married. But our parents send us off when we are only small. It would be better if they waited until we were older.
M: Why do you think they do it when you are so small?
J: Who knows?
M: Maybe to have babies quickly, or to work?
J: But they are too young to be able to work. People just start coming to ask for a daughter in marriage, and they agree to it, and before you know it they have sent the daughter away. [pause].
M: And your parents also ate *dhan*?
J: Yes, they ate five hundred rupees in *dhan*.
M: Oh, for expenses?
J: Yes, for expenses.
M: You also did not like that?
J: No.
M: Do you not like it in your house? Is there a mother-in-law?

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J: No.
M: Yes there is!
J: Yes [laughs]. I just feel like dying when she starts to talk.
M: Oh.
J: I would like to be alone but she is there. But she is always there.

The groom's family's preference for arranged marriages in the hills derives from the role that a new bride plays in her husband's *moe*, household. She is expected to honor and respect her in-laws, to obey them without question, and to serve them. If the daughter-in-law is brought in as a stranger, her in-laws are better able to extract this respect and these services from her than if she has been intimately involved with their son before marriage. Therefore the arranged marriage is seen as more stable than a "love marriage", not because the couple is less likely to separate or divorce but because there is stability in the extended *moe*, household, through the control the in-laws have over their daughter-in-law and her compliance with *pariwaar*, family hierarchy.

A girl's marriage affects her for the remainder of her adult life, yet she has little to no control over the choice of a spouse, at least according to *chalan*, local custom. In Bhalara, custom and practice are born out in Bhalara. The vast majority of marriages are arranged, with little significant intercaste difference in how often a woman thinks her parents arranged her marriage. There is also little difference in how often a woman thinks she had some or complete input in the decision.

There is significant intercaste difference in the degree of satisfaction with marriage. High-caste women are as often satisfied with their marriages as they are dissatisfied, but lower caste women are over twice as likely to be satisfied with their marriages than dissatisfied. This is due to the option to leave an undesirable marriage if they choose. In the field, I asked the married women of the fifty families if they were satisfied with their marriages. To be satisfied, *chitaa bujna*, is a state of overall happiness in a situation that one may or may not have actual control over, but leaves one with a sense of control nonetheless.

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For women, a sense of control over their current marital situation may derive initially from the degree of choice they had in their original betrothal arrangements. Therefore the data below are correlated with whose decision – the woman's, her parents, or both – predominated in the marriage arrangements. The following results were obtained:

Table 5.3 Women's Marital Satisfaction, by Caste

LOWER CASTE	Not satisfied	Satisfied	Percentage of cohort
Own choice	-	8	14.3%
Parents' choice	18	28	82.0%
Parents' and own choice	-	2	3.6%
Percentage of cohort	32.0%	68.0%	
HIGH-CASTE			
Own choice	-	-	0.0%
Parents' choice	16	11	87.0%
Parents' and own choice	-	4	13.0%
Percentage of cohort	52.0%	48.0%	

Satisfaction in marriage can be interpreted in two ways: a woman is pleased with her situation, and/or she feels she has power in her marital life. The fact that eight lower caste women chose their spouses would be indicated in satisfaction levels, as it is. The intercaste difference indicates that upper caste women are either dissatisfied and/or feel powerless to change a marital situation.

Girls resist their parents' marital efforts, sometimes in quite forceful ways. There was an extraordinary incident during the fieldwork involving a Chetri girl's resistance to her parents' attempts to marry her locally. While on a medical trip to India with her father, she fell in love, and, upon returning to Bhalara she tried to escape back to India. I include this incident from my fieldnotes because it provides rich insight into three of a girl's most significant relationships – with her parents, her brother, and her future husband.

As the uncle departed with a group of his friends and relatives, the girl walked off near the edge of a hill by herself, then dashed down the steep incline, getting quite far down the hill before anyone even

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started after her. Her brother was the first to pursue her, and he reached his sister only near the bottom, where a fierce struggle ensued. She was desperate to leave the area, and fought him hard to let her go. As they struggled, some of her male cousins and her father reached her and she was overpowered.

The father is a *sojo manchay*, a 'straight man', who neither drinks nor plays cards, is uneducated, tall, strong and always working next to his wife in the fields. He has shown exceptional affection for his daughter by taking her to India for medical care and spending alot of money on her for clothes while there. The girl is not attractive, and though the parents have tried to find her a husband locally, she has rejected all of their choices, refusing to take up the life of a peasant woman.

When they dragged her to the top of the hill, her father stood away from her, letting his brother and sons handle the matter. He stood off to the side looking very worried. The father addressed the crowd by describing how much money he had spent on her, and rhetorically asked why someone would want to leave the area where her family and friends were. He was not going to let her go to India and marry the boy of her choice, that was just not the way things were done here. He addressed his daughter with these words: 'If you leave, your mother, *maya*, will die, she will definitely die. In sadness, your mother will fall of a ledge or die of hunger. Why do you want to do that to your mother?'

The girl continued to weep, ignoring her father's words, and continued to struggle from her brother's grip. It was raining but no one seemed to pay attention. Night was falling. At one point the girl broke free of her brother and cousins and started to walk away. Her brother went after her, and at this point the father, in his rage, approached her and raised his arm as if to strike her. He did not hit her, but the onlookers were aghast: 'My god, the father's anger must be so great for him to raise his arm to strike a daughter of her age.'

The father again tried to appeal to the daughter's sense of duty to her parents. He promised her a marriage with a good boy. He told her how important she was to him by saying: 'I will wash your feet and give you away'. (This refers to the part of the wedding ceremony in which the daughter is honored by the father and others as a deity of superior status by washing her feet). The father also told her he would do this for his honor, *ijat*. The daughter was asked to understand her important role in giving honor to him, to the father who had raised her, and that she was threatening all of this by taking off to India.

The incident reveals the Bhalara community's shared belief in the values of kinship and proper marriage. Boys who were watching said she was a *naraamro kayti*, bad girl, to want to leave and not marry someone from around Bhalara. The girl tried escaping a second time a few months later, but was again forcefully brought back. And several times when she was late returning home from cutting grass or firewood the alarm went out that she had tried to escape again.

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Selling daughters: Cancelling the 'Gift'

Among the people of untouchable caste in Bhalara the transfer of cash and in-kind payments in exchange for a bride is common. *Chori betchnay*, "selling daughters", is the local derisive term for this practice. This practice is only minimally an economic transaction, however. The money that the bride's parents request and receive from the groom's family has a singular social use: to pay for the feasting of the groom's party at the bride's house during the wedding. A small amount remains for the parents' personal use. The term "selling daughters" has dual conflicted meanings. The literal meaning of the economic metaphor signifies a market-type demand for lower caste brides. But at the level of cultural meaning the metaphor expresses disdain for the practice. Paradoxic in a society characterized by dowry demands, the practice of selling daughters can be located in a system of gender meanings that derive from the caste and class position of Bhalara's untouchables, as these distinguish them from upper caste persons and practices. I develop these ideas in this section.

Figure 5.3 summarizes marriage types according to caste. Lower caste women's marriages were equally *kanyadaan*, the ideal, ceremonial, and prestigious "gift of a virgin", and brideprice marriages. The latter, however, occurred with over twice the frequency of high-caste brideprice marriages. High-caste and prestigiuos *kanyadaan* ("gift of a virgin") marriages occurred with nearly twice the frequency of lower caste *kanyadaan* marriages. Figure 5.3 shows marriage types according to *jaat*.

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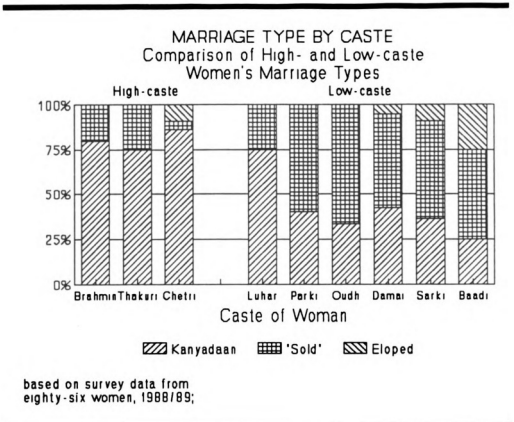

Figure 5.3 Marriage Type, by Caste

Only one of the lower caste groups, the Luhar ironsmiths, had more *kanyadaan* marriages than marriages in which the daughter was sold by the parents. Correspondingly, the Luhar are the largest landowners of the low-caste groups. Thus, there is a possible association between wealth in land and the degree of *kanyadaan* practiced; the data will be analyzed further to examine this association. Otherwise, all other lower castes practiced "selling daughters" than *kanyadaan*. The lowest caste group, the Baadi, had the highest frequency of elopement marriages. Elopement, *poil gaya*, is the least prestigious form of marriage, and occurs in some cases of intercaste marriage, or, as in the Baadi case, when an intracaste couple start living together and the families are without

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resources to stage a marriage. Elopement is also preferred in women's (but not men's) second and third marriages.

I use the term "brideprice" for the money received by a bride's family more for the sake of convenience than ethnographic accuracy. Selling daughters is not socially or ritually sanctioned in Bhalara and there is insufficient data to establish its connection with the rest of Nepal, the Kumaon region of India, or other parts of north India. Brideprice marriage has been described only briefly for India, and the majority of descriptions come from south India (Gough) and Sri Lanka (Yalman 1963). "Selling daughters" is mentioned by the untouchable man who is the subject of Freeman's life history (1979,83), though there is no discussion. Raheja rather artificially forces instances of old Brahmin men and other upper caste men who, "for some reason" cannot get a proper bride and therefore give money for young brides, into her model of the transferal of inauspiciousness. In such instances, which she claims are examples of exchange and not gifting, the transferal of inauspiciousness does not occur, as it normally would when gifts are transferred from a source of higher status to one of lower status. In such instances, according to Raheja's brief discussion (of a not uncommon marriage practice), the *paap* remains with the groom's family (237). The contrary is true in Bhalara; the *paap* of "selling daughters" remains with the girl's parents. In the end, South Asia has been stereotyped as a dowry culture in contrast to the prevalence of brideprice in Africa (Goody and Tambiah 1973; Sharma 1980; Fruzetti 1982).

The ideal and prestigious form of marriage for all castes in Bhalara is *kanyadaan*, the charitable and meritorious "gift" of a "virgin" girl by her parents to a groom and his family (Fruzetti 1982). The people of Bhalara idiomatically capture the central symbolic act of *kanyadaan* – washing the daughter's feet – in a sorrowful expression of fondness and respect for the daughter: " Only after washing your feet will I send you away". Religiously and socially prestigious, *kanyadaan* privileges the

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sacred capital of the daughter as a gift over her labor value as an agricultural worker. The sacred capital of the daughter reaches a climax in the wedding ceremony when her feet are washed, *kuta dunay*, by her relatives and she is given money. The amount of money she receives reflects the number of people who take advantage of this form of virgin worship, itself a reflection of how many people acknowledge the sanctity of the gift. To the people of Bhalara, the sanctity of the gift derives from its purity; the virgin gift is sabotaged and diminished when money is accepted by the parents for a daughter's wedding. Thus, there is less *kuta dunay* money when a daughter is sold.

The practice of selling daughters is of interest to Himalayan and South Asian studies because the practice of taking money for a daughter is enigmatic and contrary to Hindu *kanyadaan* marriage which, as a rule, necessitates the transfer of large amounts of dowry wealth from the bride's to the groom's *pariwaar*, family. Of local ethnographic interest is the fact that *chori betchnay*, "selling daughters", is spoken of in caste-based conspiratorial tones, the highs accusing the lows of the greatest transgressions, and vice versa. When I first learned of this practice I assumed that few people would discuss it, particularly since a man had just had a conflict with the local police on exactly this issue. Surprisingly, lower caste women openly discussed this practice. From what they told me I conclude that the selling of daughters was more common in the past than now, that it is currently illegal (according to the Nepalese Legal Code), and that understandably those who denied ever having accepted money for a daughter were probably covering up. "Selling daughters", or brideprice exchange, is a system in spite of itself.

The people of Bhalara agree that it is a "sin", *paap laagnu*, to sell daughters in marriage. As one informant put it, "only wives can be sold, never daughters". This is a reference to *jaari*, monetary compensation made by a man to the husband of a woman the man wishes to marry (compensation for "stealing" one's wife, as the villagers put it). Money

demanded for a female relative can only be *jaari* which by definition goes to a husband. Accepting money for a daughter signifies her as structurally similar to a wife – and thus the father is gravely close to a symbolically incestuous act. For a Hindu, symbolic incest is of lasting karmic consequence. Later I discuss the ritual resolution of this karmic transgression. At present I argue that the practice of selling daughters is a marginally acceptable practice that in spite of its current illegality, is retained by some *jaat* but discussed only by those with the least to lose and the most to gain economically, the untouchables.

As can be seen in the previous tables and figures, over fifty-percent of the lower caste women interviewed classified their marriages as <u>not</u> ***kanyadaan***, in contrast to under eight-percent of upper caste women. The total amount of rupees paid by the lower caste families in the research population was Rs. 11,732, (U.S.$470) or an average of Rs.419 (U.S.$17) for those brides who were "purchased". In contrast, a total of only Rs.1,360 (U.S.$54) was given by upper caste families whose daughters-in-law remembered an exchange of money based on negotiations between families. This was only four out of thirty-one upper caste women, and the average given per woman was almost one hundred rupees less than that given for lower caste women, or Rs.340 ($14). Although this finding was not further investigated at the time of research, I would suggest it results either from underrepresentation of the actual amounts received by upper caste parents, or the more unacceptable nature of the practice of selling daughters for the upper castes than for the lower castes.

The local expression for accepting brideprice is "eating *dhan*", eating wealth. The linguistic proximity of *dhan*, meaning wealth, and *daan* of ***kanyadaan***, meaning gift, establishes the full meaning of this phrase – "to eat the gift", to cancel the charity of giving the girl freely, without cost, to the groom and his *pariwaar*, family. Thus, by accepting brideprice the ideal form of marriage – the gift of a virgin – is

negated. Throughout the village, talk of the up-coming wedding generates inquiries into how much *dhan* was eaten, phrased simply as *kati kaiyo*, "how much was eaten"? In the context of interviews, lower caste women would classify their marriage as not *kanyadaan* if the parents ate *dhan*. The *dhan* or wealth eaten refers to the one or two hundred surplus rupees of brideprice used for the bride's family's personal expenses, and not the other in-kind payments.

When people speak of "eating *dhan*", there are three amounts that are discussed: 1) the original amount requested by the bride's family; 2) the total amount agreed upon to cover expenses; and, 3) the actual amount of cash taken by the bride's family after all other food donations by the groom are subtracted. As we see in the description of a wedding and the brideprice negotiations to follow, the latter is usually much less than the original amount requested and discrepancies in expectations creates a political-economic subtext to all such weddings. The brideprice is not a large amount and is used primarily to cover feasting expenses.

Lower caste women whose parents accept brideprice are unquestionably displeased; they would have preferred the prestige of a *kanyadaan* marriage. Though lower caste women as individuals prefer the status of *kanyadaan*, brideprice is, ironically, one part of a matrix of concepts and practices that confer autonomy and power on lower caste women, as will be further elaborated below. The unfortunate social fact is that relinquishing social prestige for a modicum of autonomy is precisely what the social-structural "requirements" of the caste system engenders, as far as women are concerned.

The greater prevalence of brideprice among lower caste families is due to the social recognition and acceptance of lower caste women's role as autonomous economic actors. These roles were described in chapter three, and include decision-making control over daily production roles such as

wage labor, family farm production (albeit within the confines of a marginal or landless landholding status), artisan production; control over the distribution of resources within the family; less dependency on males for subsistence; and decision-making control over travel. In the low-caste household, women's labors are not mystified. While the artisan husband makes commodities, the wife works on the family farm and on the farms of others. Landownership by males in a patriline gives them rights over the labor and labor products of their wives that is absent in the lower caste household. In chapter three we saw the high-percentage of rented land in the low-caste household, land acquired through the joint effort of the wife and husband. The land owned by a high-caste household is not acquired through the efforts of its women; they enter the husband's household as a bride with no property, and no rightful capacity to 'earn' land as the lower caste woman can. Thus, the economic power of low-caste women is in the form of recognition of the products of her labor by the household. Her labor is not mystified by claiming, as does the high-caste patriline, that it is not valued.

The economic power of lower caste women contrasts with that prescribed for high-caste women in the village who are forbidden to work for others and whose status depends on acceptance of, and submission to, patriarchal authority. Thus, apposite to the ideological principles of caste hierarchy, brideprice privileges lower caste women's labor value over her ritual value. Lower caste parents speak frankly and rhetorically when asked why they "eat *dhan*": "Why shouldn't we take money for our daughters' weddings? We are poor but evenso we raised our daughters to adulthood. Yet eventually we must send them away to work for another *pariwaar*, family". Their right to compensation is conditioned by the consensual recognition of the labor value of the lower caste woman. In Africa, brideprice legitimizes the marriage. In Bhalara, brideprice is an alternative form of legitimation of the economic value of the daughter. It does not, however, legitimize (or de-legitimize) the marriage.

While brideprice symbolically affirms the value of lower caste women's labor, it does not negate her ritual importance to her *maiti* and to her *ghar*. There are two unique religious roles of lower caste females not available to upper caste females. First, before marriage, daughters' ritual roles are many: lower caste families use *panchakanya*, "five virgin girls", in rituals more frequently than high-castes. *Panchakanya* participate in *nuaran*, the infant's naming ceremony, *pasnay*, the infant's first rice feeding, and in marriages. Second, a lower caste woman's marriage sets in motion one of the most enduring ritual roles of daughters and sisters. This role involves the designation of lower caste priests, *bamin*. Lower caste priests are selected from among a male's matrilateral male kin, specifically, sons-in-law or brothers-in-law (*joi* or *bhaanja*) who are related to a male through his wife or mother. This category of men can receive *dakshina* – offerings given to one higher in ritual status, such as a daughter and her affinal relatives – from a woman's *ghar* relatives because they, like the woman, are "sacred" to the man's *pariwaar*, family. Thus, this category of men can perform religious roles because of their consanguinal relationship to females. Lower caste families retain priests traced through agnatic females for all rituals, and they are honored and remunerated in ways similar to caste Brahmins.

The economic need to sell daughters has developed out of the social and historical construction of lower caste poverty and increased pressure on land for farming. This process was described in chapters three. Since their arrival in Bajhang from Chitaurigard in northern India many generations ago, when they migrated with the ancestors of the Bajhangi Thakuri kings, untouchables of Bhalara have lost in competition for land because of social and political discrimination against them by those in power – the Thakuri and Brahmins. The informal land tenancy and sharecropping arrangements of the past have been eroded by the certification requirements of land reform and land registration.

As in many areas of the world poverty, induces greater value of women's labor (Bossen 1984). This is also the case among Bhalara's untouchables who are the poorest in what is already a marginal subsistence economy. Because of the recognized value of lower caste women's labor, fulfilling a proposal of marriage depends on the groom's family paying what the bride's family demands. As discussed in Chapter 3, lower caste women's labor comes in many forms. Within agricultural production lower caste women work on their own small family plots or as traditional *bhagya* laborers and wage laborers for upper caste families. Within non-agricultural production lower caste women are informal daily wage laborers and producers of caste-specific commodities and services. The demand for lower caste women's labor is increased by two factors: male migration to India, and polygamy among lower caste men, which reduces the pool of marriageable, economically active women.

Property, Rights, and Marriage

What is the relationship between property ownership, in the form of land, and marriage? Many scholars of gender, culture, and society have noted the association between lack of property inheritance by women, and lack of power over economic, social, cultural and religious resources (e.g. see Acharya and Bennett 1981; Beneria and Sen 1986; Bjorkman 1986; Borque and Warren 1981; Bossen 1984; Collier and Rosaldo 1981; Coontz and Henderson 1986; Davis 1983; Engels 1976; Goody 1973; Mackintosh 1981; Mies 1986; Miller 1981; Newman 1981; Sacks 1975; Sanday 1981; Schneider 1971; Sharma 1980; Whyte 1978). To control property and valuable resources is to have social power. To control women as a form of property, or, more precisely, to lay rightful claim to their services, is to control many aspects of kinship organization, power affiliations, gender hierarchy, and material wealth. The idea that women are a form of 'property' transferred between families has undergone many theoretical permutations (Levi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1975; Sacks 1975; Llewellyn-Davies 1981), and is still problematic. Strathern (1988) suggests a conceptualization that locates the 'ownership' in the rights

to the services and products of another person, in the case the husband's over the wife's. This framework sheds light on the social relational aspect of 'ownership', rather than the 'commodity' aspect. In the lower caste household, the lack of land partially diminishes one aspect of rights – namely, the fruits of her productive labor on his land – that a husband may have in his wife. In many respects the land the lower caste *moe* farms is jointly acquired as *maatya* rented land.

The marriage ritual and its many material exchanges symbolizes the multi-dimensional relationship between wife givers and wife receivers. In North India and among high-caste groups in Nepal, exchange is asymmetrical, burdening the bride's family with large dowry more than the groom's. Tambiah (1973) suggests that this asymmetry is a feature of kinship and marriage in South Asia where patrilineal and patrilocal groups, which stress male inheritance of land and other property, stage their marriages as a transfer of rights in the girl from the girl's parents to the patriline. While ideally the idiom of the virgin gift symbolizes her parents' sacrifice, the recipients of the gift gain rights in the girl's reproductive and productive potential. From a structuralist-materialist perspective, the groom's post-marital jural authority over her lies in their control over the land which will be her primary source of subsistence throughout the remainder of her life. It is generally understood that the groom's family has rights over the bride's labor on the family farm. In Bhalara, women are the farmers, not necessarily through choice, as they will tell us, but through the labor demands of *ghar* members such as the husband, mother-in-law, and other sisters-in-law. The wife who does not work is soon replaced by a second wife, and her children may be made to suffer as well. In addition to the rights over her labor power, the groom's family is the first to gain rights over the girl's capacity to reproduce a pure patriline. According to the ideology of the *kanyadaan* form of marriage, then, the bride and all of her reproductive and productive skills and services are "gifts" that cannot be returned, and the groom's family gains control

over these through their control over property, particularly land. The extensive efforts made by the bride's and the groom's family to resolve conflict between the couple speaks to the socially-orchestrated tenacity of the gift status, as does the near absence, in Bhalara, of marital termination (though separation for long periods, with the woman staying at her natal home, is not uncommon).

It follows, then, that the *absence* of land (and hence heritable land) among untouchables results in marriages that convey different meanings regarding rights in the girl from those of *kanyadaan* marriage among upper caste and landholding families. When lower caste daughters are sold in marriage, the groom's *pariwaar*, family is 'purchasing' her labor power. She is no longer a "gift". The original mystification or misrepresentation of the bride as a 'gift object' – with its attendant ideological practices of honor and asymmetry of in-law relations – in the high-prestige *kanyadaan* marriage is substituted in low-caste marriage with another misrepresentation of the bride as a 'commodity object' (Strathern 1988). Either way the daughter/bride is commodified, yet it is the rights in her services that are at stake. In the 'gift' form, her services are 'free', but in the commodity form, they come at a 'price'.

What are the consequences for the girl? I would argue that because she is not a gift but is 'bought', the groom's family, ironically, relinquishes complete control over her services – sexual, economic, domestic. The cultural irony is that rights in a woman's products and services by the patriline into which she marries, rights that inherently diminish the value of women's work (and must deny them for the sake of honor) must be 'gifts' from one patriline to another. The prestige of the 'gift' is born by the woman, who, in addition to her lack of control over her own labor, cannot leave the husband's *ghar* without risking great social consequences. On the other hand, there are few sanctions against lower caste women leaving their husbands. What this signals is

that lower caste women are not the only or even perhaps the primary source of prestige for men; in a system that denies prestige to the lower castes, this is not surprising. Marital separation and remarriage, and widow remarriage are more acceptable to people of low caste.

The evidence is convincing that lower caste women have more decision-making power and control in their marriages and family lives than do upper caste women because of their greater economic autonomy in the household. For example, lower caste women do not tolerate unhappy marriages in which the husband has taken a second wife or is suspected of having a lover. Of the women who were married more than once (7% of the entire survey population, or six women, all of whom were lower caste), the most common reason given was that the first husband had remarried another woman; in such a situation, the first wife chose to terminate her first marriage and marry with a second husband. Neither are lower caste women forced to stay in marriages that may be abusive. The second most common reason given by lower caste women for ending a first marriages and remarrying was that the first husband had mistreated her. Finally, contrary to upper caste widows who are forbidden to remarry if they wish to retain their caste and economic status, lower caste women remarried when the first husband died. Still, lower caste women do risk, in the case of second marriages, the loss of their children to the first husband's patriline. One woman had children (a daughter and a son), and these children do not live with their mother but with the paternal grandparents (the first husband's family). Therefore, in comparison to their high-caste counterparts, women of lower caste have more marital options available to them.

What factors determine if a lower caste marriage will be *kanyadaan* or if the daughter will be sold? One factor is the economic status of the bride's *pariwaar*, family. A second is the birth order of the husband; marriage to an eldest son is more prestigious than to a youngest. A third factor is the birth order of the daughter; eldest daughters are

less likely to be "sold" than youngest daughters. An example from the field is Tela Bir Damai's eldest *buhari*. Phunga comes from a relatively wealthy *maiti*. Her wedding was *kanyadaan*. At her wedding her *maiti* gave her gold jewelry, and they gave a gold ring and a radio to her husband. Her in-laws also gave her gold and silver jewelry, but she wasn't allowed to keep much of it because it was used as gifts and to cover the expenses for the younger brothers' weddings. From this example it appears that the decision to sell a daughter or give her away as *kanyadaan* is partially dependent upon her family's financial status. If they have the resources to provide a respectable dowry and to give gifts to the husband then they do not ask for money for their daughter's wedding. Instead, they are able to use their own resources – either their own or those they have acquired from *riti* – to gain religious merit and social status. For their daughter, the result is a better position in her *ghar*.

Thus, it would seem seem that all things equal, the lower castes might prefer to follow the more prestigious marriage form. Indeed, on those occassions when they are able, they do. However, all things are not equal. First, as a group, the lower castes' committment to upper caste beliefs such as religious merit via the 'gifting' of a daughter, are, at best, equivocal. Second, they lack in most cases the resources to give the dowry with the daughter, a requirement of the *kanyadaan*, gifting, form of marriage. Third, taking bridewealth from the groom's family has become part of lower caste culture that distinguishes them from those of upper caste. And finally, tied with the last reason is a lower caste culture that values the economic autonomy of its women.

Comparison of data on *kanyadaan* and brideprice marriages shows many material, ceremonial, and ritual differences that reflect alternate sets of values and concerns associated with marriages among upper and lower caste groups. In understanding these differences we need to look not only at the material realities of poor, lower caste families, but also

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their beliefs and practices associated with gender roles in marriage. To begin, data on material gift transactions indicate that daughters who are sold for brideprice receive little to no dowry from their parents; there is generally a greater flow of cash and material goods from the groom's to the bride's side. While this practice at one level appears to strongly reflect the economic reality of the lower caste and landless family's situation, poverty is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for the exchange of brideprice since any family can borrow money if the need is great (many upper caste families go into large debt to marry their daughters). We need to look further to answer why families of lower caste choose to reverse the direction of marital exchanges. We find clues in the rituals of marriage themselves, specifically, in the fact that not all of the *kanyadaan* ritual elements are present in brideprice marriage ceremony. For example, fewer *maiti* relatives wash the bride's feet, feeling that she is not a "virgin gift". These daughters explain "Of course I was not given dowry or jewelry. After all, my parents 'ate *dhan*', so these things aren't given". Throughout this chapter I will examine the meaning of such statements.

I asked the older Damai male musicians at a wedding one day the reasons for choosing *kanyadaan* versus "selling daughters". They said that parents choose to do *kanyadaan* if "the bride has no brothers". In other words, if there are only girls in a family and if the family is not too poor, then they will decide on the more prestigious and meritorious "gift of a virgin". A sonless family will not have the future expense necessary to marry a son – costly jewelry for a *buhari*, feasting of both parties, payment to entertainers and *bamin* priests, and gifts to others. These Damai men consider a *kanyadaan* wedding prestigious ideal they admit they can only sometimes meet.

The prestige of a *kanyadaan* marriage, combined with other factors associated with it, such as greater than average wealth of either the

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bride's or the groom's family, creates a favorable, hospitable context that the new bride enters. We met Phungu a few pages back; her *ghar* situation is a good example of this. Phungu was the first and eldest bride of several sons, the daughter-in-law with the most power. Her father-in-law, Tela Bir Damai, has many *riti* to whom his *pariwaar*, family is responsible for sewing, and is one of the most productive tailoring families in the area. His family is large, they own no land, and the entire income of the family comes from sewing; they do not sell their labor to other families. In this *pariwaar*, family the men sew and the women care for children, prepare and cook food, deliver new clothes, collect firewood, and care for livestock. These women, including Phunga, do no fieldwork. Their annual *khalo* from *riti* is sufficient for *moe*, household, subsistence.

What has Phungu gained in status by marrying into this family? She has little fieldwork (an enviable position), her authority reigns supreme over the other four daughters-in-law, and she has economic security from her husband's many *riti*. Her husband's family can be selective in choosing wives for their sons since they can offer a desirable living situation. Phungu considers her *ghar* situation satisfying.

Another lower caste family, one of the wealthiest in the area, was proud that they elected to have a *kanyadaan* wedding for their son. Two daughters-in-law and two daughters of the groom's parents told me about the wedding exchanges. They said they did not give any money to the bride's parents. "We did not eat *dhan*". Instead, the bride was given sixty *tola* of silver and just under six *tola* of gold directly as jewelry, and she was given another one *tola* of gold from her natal home. The family publicly displayed the *kanyadaan* wedding with colorful flags decorating the windows of the house. The women said this display was only possible if the wedding was *kanyadaan*.

Although *kanyadaan* is prestigious, patrilineal authority and honor in which it is grounded conspire to ideologically, socially, and economically subordinate the high-caste wife. In contrast to *kanyadaan*, we find an 'incomplete' (from the high-caste perspective) domination of the wife acquired through the practice of selling daughters, and different consequences asserted for gender relations in the lower caste household. The phrase 'mythic male dominance', as formulated by Peggy Sanday (1981) to describe a social mismatch between an ideology of male dominance and practices of female power, aptly describes gender relations among lower caste families. Relations between lower caste men and women are less characterized by male authoritarian dominance found in most upper caste gender relations. This form of 'dominance' is incomplete or 'mythic' because it is characterized by the existence of an ideological structure of patriarchy found in Hindu religion and society that is not supported by a material base of heritable property such as land. The result is a behavioral complex in which lower caste men do not possess full authority and power to completely subjugate their wives, as is true in the upper caste households. In the lower caste household, women have economic power, men's and women's economic roles are complimentary, and each has relatively equal access to economic resources. This is not the case in the upper caste *moe* where women's and men's economic relations are asymmetric.

There are other equivocations of patrilineal authority among lower caste groups. Men never carry the middle name "Bahadur", which means "brave", a signifier of aggressive masculinity and common to all upper caste men. Nor do lower caste men acquire ritually-ascribed authority because they do not go through the *barthaman* ceremony. This ritual elevates a male to a position of authority based on purity that involves avoidance of females. Conversely, lower caste women do not participate in the *Tij-Rishi Pancami* ritual complex (to be discussed later), the meaning of which embodies the subservient role of females in Hindu society. Thus,

in ritual and in material reality, the basis for male domination over women is less for people of low caste than for people of high caste.

MARRIAGE PREPARATIONS

Astrological Charts and Auspicious Months

The importance of astrology in governing and influencing ritual and other human pursuits has been fully described for India (Pugh 1983; Kemper 1979; Zimmerman 1980; Madan 1985). Most conclude that Hindus arrange time and human action to produce auspiciousness. Thus, human action performed at a certain time produces beneficial, prestigious, and meritorious results.

Such a systematic study has yet to be completed for Nepal, but any visitor to the Himalayas soon realizes that the timing of activities is of utmost importance and consequence. One of the main roles of the Brahmin in the community is to consult almanacs and interpret them for others. Everyone in Bhalara recognizes auspicious and inauspicious months, and ritual calendars, including the scheduling of marriages, must follow the guidelines of astrology. This would be particularly true for the longest, most expensive, and most planned of Hindu rituals, the wedding. The use of astrological meanings in marriage preparations include matching the couples' birth charts, and determining the dates for the marriage preparations to begin and the marriage rituals to occur.

Chinha is the astrological chart Brahmin astrologers construct for each Hindu person at birth by a Brahmin astrologer. Untouchables have their charts constructed by caste Brahmins; lower caste *bamin* do not construct them because they do not have access to the almanacs. The charts of a prospective couple must "match", *milnay*. I asked women what would happen if a very desirable marriage arrangement did not produce a fortuitous astrological fit between the girl's and the boy's charts. Most mothers said they would probably continue with the arrangements because they

would be able to find something that would fit. One should not be cavalier about grossly mismatched charts, though, and if a Brahmin priest strongly advises that the marriage not take place, the parents should cancel. Brides' charts are given to the groom at their wedding. At death the *chinha* is tossed into the water with the charred remains of the corpse, unrolled and left to drift in the water.

There exists a relation between the human marriage cycle and the agricultural cycle based on more than mere pragmatics. The relationship is held in place through the idea of what Zimmerman (1980) elucidates as the 'appropriate time', *rtu satmya*. Weddings may occur during the winter months of wheat growing. But during the rice-growing monsoon months of the summer, marriages may not take place. What is the meaning of these restrictions? Are they simply instrumental, or symbolic?

Rice is a more labor-intensive crop than wheat; seedlings must be transplanted from small plots into the large, expansive fields. They must be well-irrigated and the irrigation ditches require maintenance. There are more landslides and flooding during the monsoon, ruining crops, destroying property, and causing death.[9] Thus, the monsoon summer in Bhalara is characterized by uncertainty. It is also characterized by fertility. All human efforts are directed toward the success of the rice crop, the preferred and sustaining crop of the region. Thus, the characteristic energy and meaning of a marriage – human fusion and human fertility – conflicts with the energy and meaning of the rice crop and its season – uncertainty and agricultural fertility.[10]

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[9] Travel is much more difficult during the monsoon, yet people still travel when necessary.

[10] This system corresponds with the system described by Bourdieu (1977) for Africa.

The most popular wedding month, the winter month of Maagh (January 15 to February 15), is the holiest and most auspicious Hindu month. The local Brahmins say they do not sleep during the month of Maagh because there are so many *puja*, ritual worship, and weddings to perform.[11] During the month of Maagh, female consanguinal relatives – daughters and sisters – are given gifts of sweet breads and curried vegetables called *anyi* by their mothers. The gifts are brought from the natal home to the daughter's *ghar* by siblings or the mother. But some lower caste groups – the Damai and the Baadi especially – are often unable to fulfill this obligation until Maagh is over because the month is a labor intensive period for them. The Damai are extremely busy working at weddings; they must sew new clothing and play for the wedding party. Damai also play during the sessions in which the local *dhaami* , shamans, "sit in the temple" for five days becoming possessed by the deities. The Baadi, too, are busy entertaining for the wedding parties. Thus, the daughters may not receive the *anyi* from Maagh until the first week of Phagun.

Following Maagh, Phagun (February 16 to March 15) is also an auspicious month for weddings. But during the year of fieldwork there were many more weddings in Maagh than in Phagun because the Brahmins determined that Phagun did not have many auspicious days. Phagun was filled with *malmaash* days that year, days marked by inauspicious planetary alignments.

The limitations and considerations that influence the date of a wedding vary according to caste. The Damai try to complete their weddings early

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[11] Maaghi tihar, the feast of Maagy, is the most important tihar because it heralds the beginning of the most auspicious month in the Hindu calendar. Food exchanges between friends are extensive; during this tihar one gives generously to as many people as possible, friends and relatives. Daughters and granddaughters are worshipped; they are given money and gifts, and puja is done to them. Certain foods are linked to particular months as mediums of auspiciousness. If eaten during those months, these foods are spiritually beneficial. A mixture of rice and lentils called kichardo is eaten in Maagh, often prepared communally. Rice pudding, khir, is beneficial if eaten in Saun (June 15 to July 15) and a vegetable curry made from stinging nettle should be eaten in Push (December 15 to January 15).

in the wedding season so that they are available to play at other castes' weddings.

Usually there are no weddings during the month of Jeth (May 15 to June 15) because it is considered inauspicious. However, a *dhaami* or shaman can have a wedding during this time because the inauspiciousness does not affect them. For example, the wedding of Bir Damai took place during Jeth because he is a shaman. He also made his own marriage choice of a girl who is two years his senior. His mother, a widow, had trouble locating a girl because she apparently has a reputation of being difficult to get along with and is argumentative.

Events other than inauspicious planetary alignments can spoil wedding plans, even after the date has been set. Births and deaths among close relatives of the bride or groom, or menstruation of central females can postpone weddings because of the temporary *chow*, ritually polluted, state of the *pariwaar*, family. For example, a Maagh 28 wedding in Piket, planned to be a big affair, was delayed because of birth impurity. A child was born to a daughter-in-law of the groom's *pariwaar*, family in Piket, so all family members were in birth impure. The wedding proceeded after the child's *nuaran*, naming ceremony, was performed. Once a name is given, order is reestablished and the wedding can proceed.

Brideprice and Other Wedding Negotiations

If a bride's *pariwaar*, family decides to sell their daughter rather than have a *kanyadaan* marriage, the bride's family first requests money well into the pre-nuptial process when the groom's family makes a public request for the girl. After a Brahmin has made the necessary astrological determinations for the prospective couple, a designated group of the groom's male relatives called *kurautay*, "those who do the talk", make three formal visits to the bride's family – to ask for the girl *(kayti magnay)*, to bring small gifts of food and clothing, and to place red *tika* on the bride and her relatives. Throughout these visits

the bride's family attempts to ascertain the number of guests expected from the groom's party. During the third visit by the matchmakers, *kurautay*, the bride's *pariwaar*, family requests money for the wedding, claiming they are too poor to meet both the feasting expenses and the dowry. This request for money is over and above the requests for gold and silver jewelry, clothing, and other "gifts". After negotiation and compromise between the matchmakers and the bride's family, partial payment is given. The bride and groom do not participate in these negotiations. During the final days of marriage preparations male relatives of the groom bring the final installments of grains, other cooking supplies, and cash.

To ameliorate the *paap*, the "sin" of selling daughters and to publicly acknowledge that they relinquish the merit of *kanyadaan*, the bride's parents do not perform some of the central rituals present in *kanyadaan* marriage. The absence of the "gift" is reflected in the absence at the bride's house of its two corresponding ritual components, presentation of *dakshina*, money offerings, at *kuta dunay* ("washing the feet") when the bride's parents and other *maiti* relatives wash her feet; and *behaunay* ("marriage"), when the couple walk around the fire god Agni and the groom puts vermillion powder in the girl's parted hair. In weddings that had involved the giving of brideprice, these rites were performed at the groom's house. There, the groom's male relatives who are in a respect relationship to her wash her feet and present her with token gifts and money. But because *dakshina* is not given to the bride during the foot washing at her *maiti*, she does not receive the larger amounts of gifts and money associated with that rite. There is a custom of sharing some of the foot-washing money with the husband. To be in a position to share reflects a position of esteem in which many relatives honored the bride as a goddess. Table 5.4 below shows the difference in amounts of "foot washing" gifts and money received between *kanyadaan* and non-*kanyadaan* brides. We see that far fewer lower caste people

acknowledged, through giving money (*dakshina*) at the foot washing, the sanctity of the virgin gift than high-caste people:

Table 5.4 Ritual Offerings to Brides, by Caste

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste(31)	Lower caste(51)	Lower caste(6)
Total rupees from *kuta dunay* (means)	119.61	43.16	55.00
Total rupees shared with husband (means)	35.87 (30%)	4.97 (12%)	6.67 (12%)

According to the data in Table 5.4 on women who had *kanyadaan* marriages (excluding those who were sold), women of upper castes receive nearly three times more *kanyadaan* money (specifically, that given to the bride during foot washing) than women of lower caste, and share thirty percent of it with their husbands (two and one half times more than the amount that lower caste women, on average, share with their husbands). Lower caste women do not share large amounts of their foot washing money because they do not receive amounts the sharing of which would confer on them prestige.

I have been arguing that lower caste women enter a set of social relationships at marriage that allow them a position of relative equal status with the husband. Paradoxically, this is true in spite of having been exchanged with brideprice. To resolve this paradox, we have to look at the cultural context of "selling daughters" in Hindu society, a society that idealizes *kanyadaan* marriage and large dowry. With perplexity and concern, we read how astronomical dowry demands in India's urban areas have become life-threatening to new brides. The decision by lower caste parents to accept brideprice for a daughters' marriage is governed by an immediate economic necessity and social obligation to elaborately feast the groom's party. In other words, the groom's family is paying to be feasted by the bride's family. Brideprice negotiation can be thought of as a communal effort to fulfill as many of the marriage functions as possible.

Gifts Given to the Bride

Most of the jewelry that a woman wears is given to her by her husband's family at her wedding. Very specific requests are made during marriage negotiations and the agreement by both families must be honored. Some girls receive jewelry before marriage from their families. Jewelry must be authentic to be of value, meaning it should be made of pure gold or silver. Every woman is skilled in assessing the purity and value of another woman's jewelry. Jewelry made of brass is considered low quality – even if the brass looks like gold, as it often does when shined by a goldsmith's preparations – and worn only by those who are too poor to obtain the real thing. Brass jewelry includes nose rings and earrings because every woman must wear these, but ankle bracelets and headpieces of gold are worn only by the most wealthy women and are not a necessity. Table A.13 in the Appendix details the variety of types of jewelry that women wear.

One distinction women of low caste make between themselves and women of upper caste is that the latter receive much more jewelry from the natal home. One Okheda woman told me that "High-caste women get so much money from their natal home – gold, money, cloth. Especially the Thakuri because they are rich. But lower caste women do not get very much, maybe some silver and clothes from the *maiti*."

Collecting Supplies

Because lower caste families own such small amounts of land, they have little to no grain surplus. Thus, they are limited in their capacity to participate in social exchanges since these often involve feasting large numbers of guests. Weddings involve the most elaborate and extensive feasts, and feeding all guests with generosity and quality food is a requirement of any wedding. Weddings are, therefore, very expensive affairs and the primary cause for borrowing money and debt. As a result, among the more egalitarian low castes, wedding expenses are often divided equally between the groom's and the bride's families, or if one

of the families is very poor then the other family covers all of the expenses.

As in other times of need, lower caste people ask their high-caste *riti* to help them with wedding expenses. One of the rights to *khalo* is asking *riti* for grains for a wedding. Thus, preparation for a lower caste wedding involves both the groom's and the bride's family collecting food supplies from *riti*. For example, the parents of a Luhar groom from Dubaali began begging from their *riti* weeks before the wedding. They have many *riti* and many relatives. They desired to have a very large wedding, made possible by the material support of these people. In the end, this Luhar family was very happy with the wedding they gave for their son. They were able to feed a large number of guests without having to borrow money; much of the food was obtained from *riti* and relatives from throughout Bhalara. People's contributions of grains for the wedding feast totalled between 408 kg. and 490 kg. of husked rice, eliminating the need for the parents to borrow. The father had also lent money to his *riti* on a *maatya* basis, and he was able to beg alot of *khalo* from them. The parents said they were proud of the fact that they did not have to take out any loans for the wedding, that they sponsored a *kanyadaan* wedding, that they gave the bride five to seven *tola* of gold in jewelry, and that her natal home gave her one *tola* of gold also.

Many castes were invited – Parki, Luhar, Sunaar, Okheda, and Chauro [people who fashion wooden *tayki*] – and fed the day before the wedding party left for the bride's house. All male guests are expected to travel with the wedding party. The more guests one is able to feast, the larger the wedding party and the greater the prestige.

THE RITUAL OF MARRIAGE: SOCIAL DRAMAS AND SYMBOLIC THEMES

In this section I focus on the social relational elements of the wedding ritual as these are most relevant to people of lower caste. Lower caste people's inaccessibility to the sacred Hindu texts that instruct

worshippers in all of the correct symbolic elements necessary for the ritual introduces the potential for uncertainty that finds resolution in conflict and negotiation. Thus, in examining the lower caste wedding, not only the intended formal performances but also some unexpected events are discussed. These include ritual acts between various people; it is the people who are acting/performing, and the relationship that they initiate, that is of interest.

I draw from observations made at three lower caste weddings, and information from interviews. The degree of detail contained here is a compromise between those elaborate and complete descriptions of Hindu weddings that exist in most ethnographies of the area (Fruzetti 1982; Raheja 1988), and the need to supplement the literature with ethnographic detail from lower caste weddings.

Rituals and Women's Satirical Drama, *Jakram* at the Groom's House

The following description is from a different wedding than the one which will be described in more detail later.

The evening before the wedding party leaves, the same evening that the groom's guests are first fed, the groom's family priest, *bamin*, performs the *nau graha puja*, worship of nine planets. The *puja* begins late in the evening, at nearly midnight, and ends the next morning at 4:00. My Okheda friend Goray told me that the purpose of the *puja* is to purify the nine planets, *nau graha suddha banaunay*, because they may have an inauspicious effect on the groom and the wedding party as they travel on their journey to get the bride. In this *puja* nine different grains are used – wheat, rice, soybean, barley, millet, mustard, green lentil, yellow lentil, and brown lentil – to represent the nine planets. In upper caste weddings, this *puja* is followed by the *janai* tying ceremony for the groom in which he becomes twice-born. The lower castes, however, do not do this. As Goray said, "We do not read the *katha* [the classical Hindu texts] like the high-caste do. But we worship the gods in our

hearts, inside, [*bhitra*]. We do not make a show of worship like the high-castes do."

Once the nine planets are appeased, the family, relatives and guests sleep. The following late morning and afternoon, more guests are fed, and the groom is worshipped by his parents. By late afternoon the familiar sound of the Damai drumming signals to the mountain community that the wedding party is leaving in less than two hours. All of the men of the wedding party assemble for the trip to the bride's home.

The marriage rituals begin at midnight of the day set by the Brahmin.[12] Once all of the preparations are made, the groom's male relatives leave for the bride's village. In their absence, the women begin preparations for that evening's *jakram*, satirical performance. During the *jakram* women of all ages engage in rowdy and licentious singing, dancing and mimicry of men. The *jakram* takes place at the groom's mother's house, outside, at night. Males of all ages are forbidden to watch the *jakram*, risking brutal insult and beating if they approach. This prohibition against males creates an atmosphere of excitement and mystery. Indeed, the feeling of a *jakram* is mystery and darkness, allegation and intrigue.

Three entertainment forms constitute the *jakram*. First, *deora* line dancing is the predominant, sustained form of entertainment. Young married and unmarried women form two lines and dance and sing in response to each other. The main themes of the line dance songs are separation, love, fate, and work framed in cultural idioms of suffering, karma, symbols of the forest plants, livestock, and female work activities like cutting grass. Second, auspicious songs are sung by post-menopausal women, often widowed, and include auspicious songs that

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[12] High-caste families hold the thread investiture or barthaman ceremony for the groom which initiates him into religious adulthood as a twice-born Hindu. Low-caste families do not perform this ceremony since they are not twice-born.

are sung throughout the three days of the wedding. *Mangal* are semi-religious songs of joy believed to build auspiciousness around the occasion. The timing of auspicious songs is also significant in that they should be sung during particularly significant moments in the ritual. But during the *jakram* auspicious songs are sung throughout the performance.

The third performance element is a satirical drama that mocks men, Brahmins, and *maatajis*, wandering female ascetics. It is performed by older, married women dressed in men's clothes. This satire is the main event of the *jakram*, and it is to see the satire and the denigration of these normally revered figures that women attend the *jakram*. The main object used in the satire is a long pole, usually of bamboo, held between the 'man's' legs. The role of this phallic icon in sexual intercourse is satirized throughout the *jakram*.

The satire is the main event most anticipated by women, and the main event of the *jakram*. Because the phallic icon is on display in a non-religious context (as opposed to the religious context of the phallic *lingam*, a symbol of Lord Shiva), boys and men are not allowed to view the *jakram*. A woman at one of the *jakrams* I attended said that if men came, the women would be very embarrassed; thus they must be kept out, physically if necessary. Indeed, to this end women brandish long poles which are used against boys who try to get in to see the *jakram*. Older men are hostile about the *jakram* because they are prohibited from attending. Boys vigorously oppose their exclusion. Throughout the night they hide behind trees and haystacks in an effort to see the drama. The boys give themselves away by howling like jackals, and female scouts often locate and flush them out with screaming, swearing, and laughter.

Women do not prepare the *jakram* area for guests (unlike male performances). In fact, "guests", per se, are not even recognized. Invitations are not sent; instead, word of the *jakram* spreads through

women's networks, and because the *jakram* is a traditional event of a wedding, village women expect it to take place. The illicit nature of the *jakram* – the phallic iconism, mocking of men in sexual intercourse, swearing, caricatures of men, mocking of religious figures like Brahmins and *maatajis* – contradicts organization and formality.

Any woman may attend the *jakram*. Lower caste women are welcome at high-caste *jakram* because they are regarded as good line dancers and singers, and high-caste women attend lower caste *jakram* for the entertainment. In the line dances, women of all castes intermingle as they wrap their arms around the waist of their neighbor and move their feet in the rhythmic steps that keep them flowing in a circle. The prohibition against inter-caste touching is relaxed during the line dance. Women are teased throughout the night by other women dressed as men, but there is a code for who can and cannot be teased. Usually only older women are teased. At one *jakram* these were women who had reputations of being outspoken and unafraid of talking to men. There were Thakuri women present but they were not teased. There were no Brahmin women present.

Who are the satirists? The main performer is the groom's mother (if the groom does not have a living mother, then his sister-in-law is a substitute). She stays inside during the first part of the *jakram* during which line dances are performed and auspicious songs are sung. While inside, with the help of her older female friends, she prepares her costume. She puts on a pair of men's pants (women never wear pants in this part of Nepal) and a man's jacket, smears her face with charcoal so that she won't be recognized, and, at the right moment, rushes out of the house brandishing a *lati*, stick, between her legs amidst roars of laughter. She is accompanied by other rowdy women dressed in men's clothing. I was unable to recognize the women at first, even while they danced in front of me.

The *jakram* lasts the entire night unless the evening cold chases people home to bed.

Interpreting the *Jakram*

The *jakram* is a socially sanctioned way women publicly criticize men. But because this is a turning of the tables, we need to interpret its meanings as these shed light on relations between the sexes.

In understanding the meaning of the women's *jakram*, we can compare it to another small-scale local performance sponsored by upper caste families and given to mark auspicious events, the *kirtan*. The *kirtan* is primarily a male performance sponsored by village leaders and local government or by a local person who wishes to mark an important occasion. Women are present at *kirtans*, but they do not sing. Men sing and women watch. But in the *jakram*, women are the performers and the observers. A *kirtan* may take place inside or outside, depending on the size of the sponsor's house and the weather. The *jakram* always takes place outside because there is such a big crowd and the content is too threatening to the many sacred spaces inside the house (particularly the kitchen and *puja* room). During the *kirtan*, religious songs known by everyone are sung, and men dance. During the *jakram*, the songs sung are composed by women. There is a personal quality to all women's songs, and they are not performed in a mixed-gender setting. Lower caste people are allowed to view the *jakram* if it is held at an upper caste *moe*. Lower caste are not allowed in the *kirtan* space, especially if held inside, though they may observe from a distance if held outside. They do run the risk of being sent away, though, in the latter situation.

Other noteworthy differences between the *kirtan* and the women's *jakram* include the fact that the *kiran* is held in a well-lit, well-prepared, formal space. The *jakram* is held in an unlit, dark space (in fact, must take place in a dark place; this became clear when I was forbidden to use my flashlight to see some of the players and singers) that is not

well-prepared or arranged for guests. This precaution is taken to prevent men from seeing the performance. The *jakram* is a secular, non-religious event – even though auspicious songs are sung. The *kirtan*, on the other hand, is a religious event.

In sum, many of the elements of the *jakram* mark it as transgressive and marginal, yet transgression of gender boundaries in a socially sanctioned manner sets in relief those very relational boundaries. In the previous chapter I described the use of sexual metaphorization by both sexes to express antagonism towards the other. In the use of the phallic icon women again draw on male physiology to represent the collective of males, the plural 'male', a composite of the relationships from which he is constituted, including, importantly, those with women.

The Role of the Lower caste Priest, the *Bamin*

People of lower caste do not use instructions or prayers from religious texts in their marriages. This follows the general prohibition against their reading of sacred texts, particularly the Vedas. According to the high-school Sanskrit teacher this prohibition is found in the Laws of Manu where is stated that people of untouchable caste do not have the "right" to read the Vedas. The right of women to read the Vedas is also prohibited in the Laws.

In spite this prohibition, the untouchables of Bhalara get their ritual 'work' done. Like people of upper caste, the lower caste groups hire priests to do *puja*, worship, for the main life cycle rituals of birth, marriage, and death.[13] The greatest difference between high- and lower caste *puja* is the priest. The lower caste priest is not of Brahmin caste but is the *joi*, a daughter's husband, or *bhaanja*, a daughter's son (or the son or husband of any woman classified as daughter, to include all daughters of a man's classificatory brothers). The *bamin* is thus chosen

[13] Lower castes do not use priests for a girl's menarchial seclusion, nor do they perform barthaman for unmarried boys, a ritual reserved for high-castes.

from among a potentially large pool of males related to consanguinal females and is retained, like the Brahmin priest, for several generations by lower caste families.

The choice of the *bamin* and their payment schedules are flexible. Like caste Brahmins, lower caste *bamin* are paid at full moon (*purnima*) and new moons (*ainsi*), the first day of a new month (*ekadaasi*), and during all *puja*. Some, however, are paid less frequently, the minimum being at the time of puja. If a man is a shaman, he cannot be a *bamin*.[14] Thus, a distinction is made between those who can do public worship of the gods as a priest, and those who become possessed by the gods as a shaman. This distinction is also found among the Brahmins; men who are shamans cannot also be priests.

The *puja* performed by lower caste *bamin* is not a solo performance. Although there is only one man designated the *bamin* for that puja, there are many men present who are also *bamin* for other families, and they usually participate in some manner, whether as carriers of supplies or conveyers of advice and other forms of help. Thus, the lower caste *puja* is usually marked by more interaction among priests than the high-caste *puja*. These interactions can be cooperative or conflictual since there exists a symmetrical (equal) relationship (rather than a complimentary or hierarchical one) among all potential *bamin*. In the description that follows we see an occurrence of both types of interactions between *bamin*.

I now describe in some detail a Damai wedding. The emphasis is on the main "work" of various stages of the wedding, and some relevant symbolic elements. The purpose is to contextualize the wedding as an event with

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[14] During the wedding of Dibriya, Rangay Luhar's youngest son, I asked why one joi and not another was the officiating bamin, since at the wedding, another joi was pointed out to me. This man was the husband of Rangay's youngest sister, and the couple lived in Bisket. He was of Parki caste, and a practicing dhaami, or shaman. It is because of his shamanistic relationship to local gods that he cannot be a bamin.

many dimensions: negotiations of political and ritual practice, the religious meaning of lower caste ritual, how the wedding is a stage on which old relationships are renewed and new ones established, exchange of material goods, time frame and auspiciousness. Details of the many subsidiary *puja* elements of the marriage are not given here because such descriptions can be found elsewhere (Bennett 1983; Fruzetti 1982; Raheja 1988). However, because the following section is summarized directly from fieldnotes, extensive ethnographic detail is given to enhance the narrative representation and interpretation of lower caste weddings, as well as answering the need for more detail on lower caste weddings. The descriptive section is followed by a discussion.

A DAMAI WEDDING

Preparations

Arrangements for the wedding were initiated by the groom and the bride after they met at an annual festival in Chainpur three months prior. Though the boy had been spending a few nights a week at the girl's village, their marriage was still regarded officially as an arranged marriage (though no one close to the couple would deny the measure of "love marriage"). Evenso, money was taken by the bride's family to cover wedding expenses, and so the wedding was considered a non-*kanyadaan* wedding and the ceremony follows abridged *kanyadaan* protocol.

The initial formal negotiations began in mid November, nine days before the actual wedding. Three relatives of the groom, Kalay and Manay (who are cousin-brothers to the groom, the groom's uncle's children) and Chakray (who is related to the groom as brother-in-law, *saalay*) are the designated *kurautay*, matchmakers who are men from the groom's family who manage the marriage arrangements and preparations. Chakray is the main matchmaker because he is closely related to the bride's family as son-in-law. The matchmakers first obtained the girl's birth details from her family, then brought them to a caste Brahmin in Bisket to ask if the couple's astrological charts and signs matched. The matchmakers went to the Brahmin in the last week of Kaatik; even though Kaatik is not appropriate or auspicious for weddings, initial astrological determinations can be made.

Both the bride and the groom are without fathers, though this did not influence negotiations in any apparent way. The groom's father went to India over sixteen years ago when, according to the groom's mother, "my son was five months in my stomach". The father has not been heard from since. He has younger brothers living in Kot. The bride's father, Galya,

died two years ago. The groom, Ghanyay, seems older than the claimed twelve years, perhaps sixteen.

The matchmakers are also related to the bride. Chakray's wife and the bride are sisters, so she is his *saali*. The bride is also Kalay's *puphu*, maternal aunt, specifically his father's *mama*'s (mother's brother) daughter (if she were his own *mama*'s daughter she would be his cousin-sister). Because Kalay and the groom are cousin-brothers, the bride is also *puphu* or aunt to the groom, her own husband. However, marriage between a "nephew" and his "aunt" is acceptable because the "aunt" is from the *mamali*, a mother's (or, in this case, a father's grandmother's), or paternal grandmother's (in this case) *maiti*. Indeed, marriage with *mamali* women, or, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, is seemingly preferred by lower caste families (an issue requiring further research).

When the matchmakers consulted with the Brahmin in Bisket they also obtained auspicious dates for the marriage preparations and the marriage. The Brahmin gave them two - Munsir 9 (November 24) and 18 (December 3). The groom's family chose the ninth because the groom is anxious to get married, and some of his male relatives are going to India soon. If the dates had not been acceptable to the groom or the bride, they would have solicited their own family *dhaami*, shaman, to ask the *kuldevta* or lineage god for another date. The Brahmin also gave the date on which material preparations for the wedding could begin - Munsir 6. Numerous activities must be started on Munsir 6 - sewing clothes for the bride and groom, collecting firewood, soaking rice out of which flour is made for bread, milling wheat flour, collecting food and other supplies from *riti*, and collecting pots and pans for feeding the guests.

On Munsir 3, after visiting the Brahmin in Bisket, the matchmakers go to the girl's house in Dubaali to formally ask for the girl, an event called *kaytilai magnay*. They speak with the bride's brother and mother. That same day the matchmakers returned to Dubaali to give red *tika* [15] to the girl and other relatives present. This is called *sai tika* because it establishes that the girl now belongs to the groom's family, *sai raheko*, and no one else may ask for her, nor may she be given to anyone else in marriage. The *kurautay* bring several measures of rice, flowers, a walnut, tumeric root, incense, and foods such as rich sweetbreads prepared by the groom's family to be eaten by the bride and her relatives. Negotiations for the amount of money that the girl's mother requests begin at this time. The men prepare their calculations based on the numbers of guests since the amount asked for should be equivalent to the wedding costs. They expect it to be around Rs. 500 ($20).

On Munsir 6 the matchmakers go again to the bride's house with food and gifts. Now they are told that the bride's mother wants Rs. 2000 ($80). After negotiations, though, the matchmakers agree to give Rs.1200 ($48).

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[15] Tika is a temporary mark made on the forehead of another individual or oneself. It is made in different up: from dry powder, powder and water, ground plants, plastic, or, in the case of weddings and other special events, dai chamal, which contains three auspicious and pure substances: water, rice, and colored powder. Throughout the marriage ceremony dai chamal is put on the foreheads of others in a gesture of ritual and hierarchical significance. Hindus believe one's fate is written on the symbolic space of the forehead at birth; thus, a substance of ritual value placed there protects that which is good "written" there, and, even though one's fate is sealed at birth, the unfolding of one's fate can be positively promoted by keeping that area sacred. Wearing a tika is a sign that one is conscientiously working on the fulfilling and ripening of one's fate. Another explanation for wearing tika is that it pleases the gods and invites them to protect the wearer from evil spirits.

On Munsir 8 pre-wedding activities at the groom's house begin. In the late afternoon five young unmarried female relatives, *panchakanya* ("five virgins") bring plate offerings of flowers, rice, *tika*, walnuts and clothing along with several *maana* of soaked rice to the groom's house. The plate offerings symbolize each of the girl's *kuldevta*, lineage gods. The groom then takes a *masal* for beating rice and begins pounding the soaked rice to make paste. While he is doing this his sister-in-law playfully tries tying a cow bell around his waist, and he forcefully resists. His married sister then gives *tika* to everyone present while the groom's sisters and sisters-in-law rub the white rice paste onto one another's faces. Soon everyone is rubbing the paste on each other, laughing and shrieking. This is greatly enjoyed by everyone.

Departure For and Arrival at the Bride's House

Towards the close of daylight the groom's relatives and guests prepare to depart for the bride's house; they constitute the *janta*, the wedding party which fetches the bride. Departure to the bride's house is never efficient or quick. Some men are late, others fix their clothing, the groom's female relatives delay the groom, many items are missing and searched for, drums are readied. Finally, the groom emerges from inside his house and sits in the litter. The sprawling party of over forty Damai men and boys descend from Kot, down the steps to Kholi bazaar, playing drums and rhythmically stepping to the drumbeats. Behind them come five Badini, dancing and singing, accompanied on the *maadal* drum by a Baadi boy. Next comes the groom carried in a wooden litter called a *taapdaan*, and held over his head is a black umbrella draped with wreaths of marigolds. He wears a white *daawra suruwaal* with a suit coat, the male uniform of formal ceremony in Nepal. He is draped with long wreaths of brilliant gold and red marigolds given by his sisters and sisters-in-law.

When the wedding party reaches the central plaza in Kholi the litter is set down while the Damai musicians play drums and cymbals, and dance in a circle. Others of the wedding party make last minute purchases of cigarettes, small cigars called *bidi*, and alcohol.

Finally the wedding party starts for the bride's house, a journey of only thirty minutes. Along the way the party stops for refreshments of alcohol, poured into the mouths of the dancers by one of the groom's brothers. They say the alcohol helps them to "not be shy". Several other stops are made for dancing in the fields, followed by shouting and singing. The *janta* performance conveys the prestige and power of the groom's family and relatives to the bride's relatives that "We are many beautiful singers and dancers. We are 'big people', we are 'bigger' and stronger than you".

Throughout this journey the groom sits silently in the litter. The group finally arrives and the brides' female relatives - "our sisters", as the Damai men referred to them - throw water on the groom and on other important males of the party to "cool them off". The dancers and singers continue for a few minutes, and then the second phase of the wedding begins. During the rituals at the bride's house the groom's female relatives are performing the *jakram* (previously discussed) at his house.

Ritual Activities at the Bride's House

In a small, crowded one-room dwelling a young girl sings a plaintive mourning song in which she implores her sister, her mother, and her brother to not send her away. A low fire burns in the hearth. Even though she and the groom are in love with each other this ritual mourning by the bride is considered not only proper but essential. She and the groom must not use the occasion of their marriage to express their affection for one another. Rather, he must play the role of capturing the bride, to her feigned sadness and resistance. She in turn must not appear happy to be leaving her natal home, which would insult

them and put in peril the very important relationship she must maintain with her *maiti* throughout her married life.

The bride huddles in a corner, clinging to her older sister. Representations of deities surround her and her relatives in the kitchen. Her brother, dressed in the pure color of white, is sitting in front of a symbol of the god Kailash made from a brass vessel. This representation of the deity sits next to a brass plate that holds two long crossed pieces of wheat dough with indentations. The god Ganesh is also present in the symbol of a walnut. Along with the hearth fire, the only other source of light in this crowded room is from the small flames burning in the long dough. *Ghee* is lit in these indentations, and the light is placed on a pile of flowers and rice. Long skewers sit in the corner; these are used during the foot-washing part of the wedding ritual which takes place later outside.

The first presentation made by the groom's party is a small wooden vessel, *tayki*, of yoghurt, carried from Kot to Dubaali by one of the groom's male relatives. The vessel is decorated with marigolds and long leaves. This yoghurt is put inside the bride's house near the sacred fires, and will be carried back to Kot the next day to be used in a feeding ceremony on the third day of the wedding. The bride's sister and brother direct much of the business of the wedding with the help of Manay Damai from Kot. The bride's mother sits in a corner and is quiet.

The family discusses the problem that the brother's wife - the bride's sister-in-law - in a show of resistance to the wedding, has not returned from her natal home. Apparently the bride had originally been promised to this woman's brother by the bride's father a few years ago, the arrangement intended as an exchange of daughters. But today the bride is marrying someone else. The sister-in-law felt that her own natal home is offended by this. In protest she refused to wash her sister-in-law's feet by staying at her natal home for the duration of the wedding.

Conflict Over the Choice of a *Bamin*

Soon after arriving at the bride's house a large fight erupts between the men of Bisket and Dubaali, and which the men of Kot eventually join. The conflict concerns who will perform the marriage ritual at the bride's house. There were two *bamins* present, Manay and Alphi Lal, both from Kot and both related to the bride as matrilateral relatives (*joi-bhanja*). Alphi Lal is expected to do the *puja*, but he refused to because he is angry at the bride's brother who had refused to give him his older sister to marry a few years back. Both have subsequently married other people (the sister actually married Chakray Damai who also lives in Kot, which means that Alphi Lal has a daily reminder of this insult by the bride's brother). Manay, who can also perform the ritual, refuses at first because the brother's family never honored him in the past as a *bamin* to do *puja* for them.

To make matters worse, Manay and Alphi Lal themselves are not on good terms. The bride's brother asked Manay to do the *puja* but other relatives asked Alphi Lal who had done *puja* for them in the past. Manay expects to do the *puja* and brought all of the necessary things with him. Still, Alphi Lal feels slighted and tells Manay, who himself said that he would not do the *puja*, that Alphi Lal should do it. By this time Alphi Lal is sufficiently offended and refuses. Then Manay claims he is insulted and eventually the conflict develops into a fight that lasts over an hour, offenses of the past resurrected by many individuals and groups of individuals during this occassion. The bride's brother quarrels with his other relatives from Dubaali. And because of the delay in worshipping the groom, his Damai relatives from Bisket get angry and take the opportunity to start fighting with the Dubaali men. Some people wonder if the wedding will proceed. It is a serious fight; some people are shoved down the hill and others are hit. The bride's family is very

worried and eventually they implore Manay to begin the *puja*. Eventually he agrees but not until after the conflict causes many hard feelings.

Once things settle down lighted skewers and plates of offerings that had been inside the bride's house are quickly brought outside for the washing of the groom's feet by the brother, a ritual aspect of the wedding. A *mandala* is drawn on the ground by Manay and one of the plates is placed in the center. The groom is lowered to the ground and he removes his socks and shoes. The brother takes water from Manay five times, turning in a circle counterclockwise, and sprinkles the water over the groom, his future brother-in-law. Then the groom pours water over his own feet which is caught by the brother and tasted in a sign of subservience to the groom. *Tika* is given to the brother, to the groom, then to everyone else of significance in the bride's family. Washing the groom's feet elevates his status superior to that of his in-laws. He can not enter his in-laws house until his superior status is established and recognized. A plate offering is prepared for the *upa pradhan*, a Luhar man of significant political importance. The crowd then breaks up and a few hours later everyone is fed.

Most of the food fed to the groom's party at the bride's house was given by the groom's family itself. The bride's family is said to be "without *shakti*", without the power to provide a large feast for the many wedding guests because they are very poor. So the groom's family contributes substantial amounts of grains for the feast. The groom's family is not particularly offended by this since it shows the lower caste community and all of the guests their greater economic power. Indeed, some people think that it is now becoming custom for the groom's family to provide the food throughout the wedding.

However, such altruism changes to controversy later as the groom's family attempts to include the food in the pre-marital negotiated brideprice. Indeed, a second verbal conflict develops between the bride's and the groom's relatives over the issue of payment to the bride's family. By the second day of the wedding only Rs.400 ($16) had been given in cash and the groom's family state that they have no intentions of giving more. They argue that the *dhan* they are expected to give, the original request of Rs.2000 and its subsequent negotiated amount of Rs.1200 is to be used for expenses. Therefore, since they have defrayed so much of the bride's family's food costs by contributing major amounts of rice, lentils and sweetbreads, they are not planning to give any more cash.

Washing the Bride and Groom's Feet

After all of the groom's party have been fed the second feast at the bride's home, the bride and the groom's feet are washed in a symbolic gesture of their superior status. The washing is done inside the girl's house, presided over by the *bamin*. The actions are similar to the initial washing of the groom's feet by her brother, though more people are present.

But before the girl's feet are washed she dons the new red clothing from her *maiti*, and the gold and silver jewelry presented to her by the groom. She then joins the groom, and the couple sits in a small room inside her home, surrounded by relatives, smoke from cooking fires, and constant talk. In this wedding the groom's feet were washed before the bride's by her brother, mother, and other male and female relatives. Males older than the bride are *chow* to her and do not wash her feet. Because the bride was sold, no *dakshina* in the form of foot washing money was given to her. Some money is presented to her two days later by those relatives - both her own and her husband's - who wash her feet at the groom's house; but she receives no substantial dowry or foot washing money from her natal home relatives. For the rest of the evening and the next day the Baadi sing and dance, and the groom's party sleeps, wanders around the village, and eats one more meal in the early afternoon.

Capture of the Bride
In the early afternoon after the guests' final meal, the bride hides from the wedding party with the help of her friends, and the men in the wedding party search for her. This is the last performance before the groom's party leaves with the bride. Several of the girl's friends take her to the *ban*, the jungle, to hide her from the men. The groom and his male relatives search for her and carry her back to the house, kicking and screaming. The bride is then placed in the litter, and with much desparate wailing, the captured bride is carried to her new *ghar*. Some of her male relatives accompany the wedding party.[16] With the drums beating and men yelling and singing, the journey back to the groom's house commences.

Arrival at the Groom's Village
The bride's brother accompanies her to her new home, her husband's *ghar*, never leaving the side of the litter in which she is carried. Because her *maiti* is poor the bride has no wedding gifts with her.

The Kot men dance and play into the main bazaar of Kholi, displaying their talents as musicians. The performance at their own weddings is more elaborate than those weddings for which Damai are commissioned to play. Variations on a main rhythmic theme are introduced by the musicians, and five to seven men, with a bass drummer in the center, prance forward and backward in a circle, beating drumsticks (simple sticks fashioned that morning) in syncopated rhythm. The crowd of about eighty men and women in Kholi bazaar is entertained for thirty minutes. Then the group gathers to form a raucous line of dancers and singers and shouters, and slowly makes its way home to the groom's house in Kot. The bride is carried at the end of the procession, the best remaining last. She is what everyone has come out to view.

Wedding Rituals at Groom's House
It is evening when the wedding party arrives. Immediately the bride and groom perform a small ritual in which *tika* and flower *maalaa*, necklaces, are exchanged. This exchange is similar to that which occurred at the bride's house, only there the bride is absent and other natal home relatives paid respect to the groom while he is still in the litter. At the groom's house also, the bride remains in the litter until this ritual is over. First the *bamin* recites some prayers and places *tika* on the corners and sides of the litter while the bride remains inside. Then he applies *tika* to his forehead and instructs the groom to apply some to the bride's forehead, which he does. She in turn gives the groom a *tika*. Finally, the *bamin* pours a small amount of water over the bride's shrouded head to cool her off. While this is happening the groom is raised off of the ground by a brother or cousin-brother. The couple exchange flower necklaces and the crowd applauds.

Mother-in-law (*Saasu*) and Daughter-in-law (*Buhari*) Search for the Rupee
In the next phase of the wedding at the groom's house, certain aspects of the kinship relations between the bride and her new *ghar* affines are enacted. Once the *tika* and flower necklaces are exchanged the bride exits the litter and goes inside her new mother-in-law's house, her *ghar*, along a candle-lit path. The groom follows her inside. Once inside the groom's mother sees the figure (but not the face) of the bride for the first time. The two women then play a game to alleviate the tension between them and to symbolically enact a relationship of cooperation. The mother-in-law sets a large plate filled with rice, two or three walnuts to symbolize Ganesh, and a *maana* and silver coin. First, the mother-in-law pours rice into the *maana*, then the *buhari* pours it out and fills the *maana* again. The mother-in-law then pours out this rice

[16] The bride's father, if alive, would not have gone because it is considered *paap*, a sin, for him to view the events of the wedding at the groom's house.

and fills the *maana* again. This is repeated five times, and the *buhari* is supposed to eventually find the coin, which she does.

Next follows a series of introductions of her new *ghar* relatives made to the bride in which hierarchy is established. The bride comes to know a given person's relationship to her (she is still covered and cannot see faces) by listening to the conversation, particularly how the person is addressed by others in the room. The person places *tika* on the bride, and she returns it. Those with rank lower than the bride's - brothers, sisters, younger sister-in-law, nieces and nephews of her husband – bow to her. In turn, she bows to those higher in rank than herself - mothers-in-law, older "mothers", aunts and uncles (older males are not present during this) of her husband. This bride has four mothers-in-law to whom she bows.

There is a moment of confusion regarding one female relative. This woman, married to one of the groom's brothers, was the bride's niece before the marriage. After the marriage, though, she becomes higher than the bride in rank as a *jetaani*, or wife of one of the groom's older cousin-brothers. This woman's natal home is also Dubaali. Neither of the two women will bow to the other, and opinion is split as to whose rank is higher. The older *maiti* women try to coerce the bride into bowing to the *ghar* woman, encouraging her subservience to the *ghar*. Eventually they both bow to each other.

After the *tika* is given the *ghar* affine taps the bride on the head and says "from now on you are my sister-in-law" [or my daughter-in-law, or whatever the new kin relationship is]. Through this process the bride learns all her new female relatives. The groom, meanwhile, departs for Kholi to drink with his friends and male relatives. His bride stays in his house that evening, and the next, but returns to her natal home on the fourth day after the completion of the following ceremonies.

Ritual at the Groom's House

Before dawn on the third morning occur the rituals considered to be the most important part of the wedding. The main event is when the bride and groom, tied together at the waist with a white cloth, circumambulate a fire burning in the center of the wedding space. This is called *bebaahaa*, or "marriage" and is a powerful symbolic statement of the joining of the two people and the bride's severing of clan relationship, *ishta mitra*, with her *maiti*.

The wedding altar is constructed in a small space in front of the groom's house under a canopy. The *bamin* places four kinds of leaves at the four corners of the space. In the center a two-tiered square altar is formed from red clay, water and manure. A *mandala* is drawn around and on top of this from white barley flour. This work should be done by the *bamin* but his hand is injured from too much dancing the evening before so others help in the altar's construction. There are sufficient numbers of experienced *bamin* to correctly construct the altar, though this then gives them the right to contribute to the *puja* once it begins. Next, a copper coin is placed in one corner of the altar. A leaf is placed on the eight loops of the *mandala*, and on these rice and a coin are placed. String is wrapped around the space to "seal" it off from evil spirits. A vessel of water is then placed on each corner. Finally two flat pieces of wood are brought for the bride and groom to sit on, under which a coin tied in a white cloth is placed.

The bride and groom sit in front of the altar. Her face is still covered with her bright red and gold wedding shawl. Most of the *puja* prayers and ritual are done by the groom's *bamin* (a matrilateral nephew). He begins by giving *tika* to everyone within the inner circle of observers. The groom's sister begins singing an auspicious song, a wedding song of joy and blessing (though to Western ears it sounds mournful). She and other women continue the singing throughout the ceremony.

Next, a walnut, piece of *hadelo* (tumeric root), betal nut, *tika* powder, and a rupee coin are tied into a cloth and then tied around the waists of the bride and groom. During this wedding the walnut persistently fell out of the cloth, much to everyone's amusement. Throughout the ceremony the groom must hold this bundle, called *behav pachuro*.[17] The bride and groom then walk five times around the fire, counterclockwise, the groom holding the bundle between them. Two times the bride led the couple around the fire, and three times the groom led. Between each rotation the groom is handed a small leaf plate with barley seeds soaked in mustard oil by the *bamin* which he passes to the bride behind his back without looking. As he passes the barley the groom says "This is from such and such village", saying the names of one of five villages - Haat, Bisket, Devastali, Sadil, and Piket (four of which were included in the research) - from where his family has *riti*. When he says this people seem amused. The bride takes the plate from the groom, passes it back to the *bamin* who burns it in the fire. This process is repeated five times. The bride's brother is present, although no other *maiti*-relatives are allowed to attend. After this the couple sits, the *bamin* chants prayers, and then they stand again to walk around the fire one final time.

Foot Washing of the Bride and Groom

The next phase is the washing of the bride and groom's feet. It is one of the most richly symbolic aspects of the wedding because through a gesture of subservience - drinking the water that has washed the bride and/or groom's feet - a person receives religious merit. There is no one present at the wedding who is ritually higher than the bride or groom during this part of the ceremony. This part of the wedding ceremony confirms the attainment of religious merit associated with the "gift of a virgin".

The bride's brother is the first to wash her feet and give her some money. The brother is followed by other natal home relatives, then a few of her new *ghar* affines. The smallest amount given is one rupee. There is discussion between some *ghar* male relatives on whether they would wash her feet, and grimacing, some said they would not. Their reasons include lack of interest in the religious merit, particulalry because her natal home "ate *dhan*", and because drinking the water that touched someone's feet is repulsive. Such discourse would not occur at a *kanyadaan* wedding. At any rate, only a few people washed the couple's feet (mostly younger children) because the *maiti* "ate *dhan*". No *ghar* women wash the couple's feet because married women are forbidden to do so.

The belief about washing feet and tasting the water is that one's past transgressions of *dharma* are removed, and religious merit is gained. People laugh when some small children wash the couple's feet (people often laugh when they see children doing adult things). After washing the feet, the worshipper places tika on his or her own forehead, then on the foreheads of the bride and groom. The relative then gives her (and sometimes him) a rupee or two, and bows to them.

There are rules about who may ritually wash a daughter's and her groom's feet. The bride's father and brother may wash the groom's feet but her mother may not. Upon her arrival at the groom's house, no women may wash the bride's feet because *ghar* women are forbidden from washing the feet of females other than their own daughters. *Maiti* women may wash the bride's feet, but not the groom's.

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[17] The items put in the bundle vary according to caste. The Thakuri, for example, put a janai thread, rupees, a small piece of gold, and a supari, betal nut.

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Post-washing Symbolic Play and Prayer

After the solemnity of the foot-washing, the bride and groom engage in a series of playful interactions. First, a candle is lit for the groom who holds it in front of the bride's face and asks her to show him her face. The couple are embarrassed and behave shyly. Then water is placed in front of them and they are asked to both look at it. In order to view these things the bride has to peer out from under her shawl carefully so that she can see, but not be seen.

The couple then feeds each other the yogurt that is carried to the natal home from the *ghar*. Some sweetbreads are put on a plate and she divides the bread in five pieces and feeds him the bread. He then takes some of a vegetable and yogurt curry (made from the flowers and leaves draped on either side of the *tayki*) and eats it. He feeds her bread and she takes some of the curry. The couple then look into the water in the vessel to see their shadows, *chaiya*. Then the groom holds a mirror up to her face and asks her "who is better looking, you or me?" She has been able to see him, but he hasn't seen her (in theory, at any rate). She is supposed to answer "You are", but the bride, typically, just laughs. Then a mixture of honey and oil is put in front of them so they can try and feed each other their own *jutho*, impure. First he takes some to his mouth and then quickly forces it into her mouth. She tries to do the same. While all of this is happening the crowd intentionally embarrasses the couple by demanding that they do it properly, or that they cannot hear the groom or the bride's answers.

When the play and teasing described above are finished the final and most solemn part of this phase of the wedding begins. Everyone present holds some barley seeds in their hands and folds them. The *bamin* recites some prayers for about five minutes, while people toss parts of the barley into the fire. At the end everyone tosses the remaining barley into the fire. Then a male relative of the groom goes behind them as the couple stands and lifts both of them into the air. At this everyone cheers, the bride turns away embarrassed, and the ceremony is finished with pronouncements of "Alas, that work is now done".[18] A goat is slaughtered, meat, rice, and vegetables are cooked in huge copper pots, and all the guests feast, sing and dance for the rest of the day.[19]

Post-marital Rituals

At dusk of the first day after the bride's arrival at the groom's house – the day after their first night together, which everyone assumes is their first sexual encounter with one another – the couple go to the local water tap, accompanied by a group of friends but no close relatives. The bride is covered in her red wedding shawl, draped over her wedding *sari*. She fills one of the shiney new dowry *gaagri* (water jug) with water from the tap and sets it down. Then the groom turns the carefully filled jug upside down, emptying all of its contents. This is repeated five times in a serious rather than teasing manner (as in others of these kinds of marital ritualized interactions). When this is done a special *tika* which marks an auspicious event is then given to

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[18] In her study of Aboriginal ritual and female power, Diane Bell finds that ritual is also called "work". Bell sees ritual as an arena where the values of a society are writ large, and the rights to participate in these rituals are connected to rights in the land, as accorded by the Law of the Dreamtime.

[19] The Okheda jaat perform their weddings quickly and unceremonially, regardless of whether dan was eaten or not. If the girl's father or family says that they have the finances to have the wedding at their house, then it is performed there. Otherwise,the bride is carried to the ghar and immediately upon her arrival the wedding ceremony is performed. It is done inside in the evening. The Okheda follow the same procedures as those described for the Damai, but they do not show a candle or water.

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everyone present, and accompanied by shouting youngsters, the couple returns to the groom's house with an empty vessel. The wedding rituals are completed.

SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE RITUALS

Process and Conflict, Hierarchy and Cooperation: Establishing Relationships

Not all aspects of the marriage ritual are analyzed here. Some remain unexplored ethnographic detail because they are not relevant to the central issues of the dissertation. Rather, I explore themes in the wedding that bear on the question of the similarities and differences in the hierarchies of gender and of caste, and their relevance to the reproduction of social hierarchy. I focus on the construction of meaning for the social actors involved as this relates to gender and caste aspects of social hierarchy. This focus requires looking at how the wedding gets done, who does it, and what those who are involved are 'saying' to one another. This social text of the ritual serves to give a sense of the group working as a whole, how that group sees itself in relation to other groups (particularly upper castes), and what the gender relations within this group are.

With this in mind, Victor Turner's ideas (1969) about social dramas are useful for analyzing performance and social relational dimensions that were either ritually enacted or completely unplanned (such as the *bamin* conflict). Social drama refers to a "specific unit of experience" when a community's movement through space takes on moments or periods of time which can be called "dramatic". A person or subgroup breaks a rule, deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. Turner regards many of the life-cycle rituals – particularly those associated with puberty, marriage, and death – to indicate a sort of breach of customary order of group life, after which many new relationships, with their concomitant conflicts, develop.

According to Turner's framework we can see social conflict not as chaotic deviation or predetermined script, but as a potentially

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transformative period in which social actors are engaged in reformulating the meaning and practice of local social life. In the Damai wedding, two potentially conflictual new relationships were ritually addressed, between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, and between bride and groom. As well, the *puja* element of foot washing establishes hierarchy among groups of kin. One could also regard 'not normal' and conflictual events within these rituals to signal social transformation. This is the case with the *bamin* conflict.

In the *bamin* conflict, prior conflicts between individuals and kin factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of honor, interest and ambition. According to Turner, such conflicts mount toward a crisis of the group's unity and continuity unless quickly stopped by an individual's or group's redressive public action. If the social drama is allowed to run its course the outcome may be either the restoration of peace and "normalcy" or social recognition of irreparable breach or schism. In the case of choosing the *bamin* to perform the wedding rituals, a decision was finally made, one that people later said they had expected – that Manay would perform the ritual since he had come there prepared with the necessary ritual items. But the conflicts among individuals and Damai patrilineages had to first air themselves (in a violent way, it should be noted, since there were people injured).

There are several moments in which the asymmetry between husband and wife are asserted in the wedding ceremonies. To illustrate, let us turn to the post-marital ritual of the groom emptying the *gaagri* that the bride has carefully filled with water. There are two sets of gender-related issues at play here in this ritual. One involves the dominance-submission axis of the husband-wife relationship. The second, in conflict with the first, involves the ethos of social values and expected conduct between people. This social value is part of a complex of behavioral codes that includes reciprocity and sharing to one's ability. One of the greatest insults one could endure in Bhalara is

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lobi, greedy, because the social good is not being honored if a person does not share with others. I examine the second dimension first since it is the one most likely to be overlooked. Then I return to the first issue.

In Bhalara, it is considered improper and rude to empty something that someone else has filled. This ethos guides behavior inside the home as well as exchanges in the market. The principle involved is that the giver is allowed to complete the transaction. Put another way, whenever accepting something from someone else, the giver is entitled to complete the giving by placing the good in the receivers's hand, or her shawl, or other carrying instrument. For example, when buying food materials from my landlady, from other families, or in stores the giver measured the goods then poured them into my bag. When *khalo* food is presented to lower caste families by high-castes, the same technique is used. And again, in the household, a potential source of friction exists between the daughter- and the mother-in-law should either empty the filled vessels of another. This control is extended to the cooking area where the cook has exclusive rights over the distribution of the cooked food. Thus, these rules are a prerequisite to harmonious relations in the household and are function to show deference and respect to another.

However, some of the new relationships are characterized in the wedding as hierarchical and involve actions that contradict the code of ethics of equal sharing, a social value directed towards the social good. The set of values that they come in conflict with are those surrounding the ideology of the patriline. Quite specifically, the husband is in violation of the value of the social good and its emphasis on cooperation and sharing when he empties his wife's water vessel. The wife dutifully refills it, only to have him empty it again. The husband interferes with and is destructive of her efforts, forcing her to repeat the process. She, in turn, serves him that which he needs, more water. The husband represents all males in his patriline whom she must serve.

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Thus, her expected subservience to the patriline is clear. But, as a result of his actions, the wife's work is doubled.

This is an important point because it expands on a prevalent model of women in South Asia. In this model of patriarchal authority and dominance, women as wives are viewed with suspicion by the husband's home because they are thought to be agents of destruction and fissioning of the patriline (Bennett 1983; Sharma 1980). However, the post-nuptial ritual involving the husband and wife at the water tap represents the male as destructive and meddling (from the woman's perspective) in the woman's work, and the woman as persevering and competent. Thus, the negative characterization of women in the structural model of patriarchal authority is weakened by observation of certain rituals as the ones above, and by viewing these from a female perspective, particularly one relevant to the production and work within the household.

Certainly the husband's negative behavior has a disciplining effect on the wife. She is being instructed by the husband to accept his actions, actions which may at any time sabotage her work. Furthermore, she may not protest or seek revenge; the bride remains affectless, unguided, and unsupported during the vessel emptying. This dimension of the ritual behavior asserts the husband's superiority over the wife in a general way, though it is done through violating other widely-held social values, such as cooperation.

The vessel has symbolic significance for women in particular. They are the main providers of water which they carry in earthenware or metal vessels. For this purpose women are inevitably given dowry vessels at their weddings.

The final reading of this ritual is that the person or group who can violate, without consequence or fear of sanctions, socially-held values

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is a person or group with power. The woman is subservient to the actions of her husband, thus reinforcing the asymmetrical dimension to their relationship in which she has no power of recourse or protest. But the act of destruction by the husband should not, nonetheless, be lost in the practices of hierarchy and dominance.

I emphasize this point in contrast to Strathern's holistic view that the dominance of male over female has to do with a direct connection to hierarchized social values, in particular the value of the "social good" (she means society or community, not other 'collectives' such as the household or the family). Strathern suggests that gender relations can be understood as subtexts or subnarratives of larger social values (Strathern 1981). The above example suggests that we cannot always view gender relations as direct reflections of other social values but rather we must be able to see contradictions and inconsistencies. The example above illustrates that far from aligning itself directly with other sets of values, such as the "social good" and proper behavior, the male's dominance (another part of the system's structure) is asserted through an act that violates those values. The lack of punitive action against him – action that would fall on others – establishes his superiority. Thus, the married couple acts, at times, outside of certain social value frameworks, revealing a gender asymmetry that asserts itself in contradiction of other conventional social values. That this ritual occurs after the couple's first legitimate sexual contact further supports the argument that they are acting as a dyadic unit, albeit a unit with asymmetry.

Social hierarchy is played out in the wedding ritual through the manipulation of spaces and persons. There are many spaces of different meaning in a wedding. The reception area is the first space the groom's party sees when it arrives. It is a public space, usually in front of the bride's house, and many guests, relatives, friends, and village onlookers gather there to greet the party. One person is conspicuously

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absent from this public space – the bride. She stays secluded, being marked as a person who must stay away from this area. As at the time of her uncelebrated birth, the female stays out of the public eye. It is dominated by the groom and his all-male party.

In contrast to the rituals of hierarchy are moments and practices in which cooperation and relationships of kinship are established. Equal in significance to the relationship with her husband is the bride's relationship to his mother. Their's is a constant companionship, uncomfortable and conflictual though it may be. The mother-in-law may be any of the following to the daughter-in-law: mother, friend, critic, advisor, ally, or enemy. The ideal is cooperative ally; their earliest ritualized interactions encourage this. Let us look at the wedding ritual in which the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law fill, empty, and refill a *maana* of rice. This ritual occurs at dusk on the first day of the bride's arrival. It is the first social interaction between the two women. The meaning of this performance is that these two women should value an equal and cooperative work relationship in the home. If the daughter-in-law cooperates, she shares in the family's wealth, symbolized by the rupee coin she 'finds' in the *maana*.

The Auspicious and the Inauspicious

As discussed in Chapter 2, untouchables have been viewed as people who either do not practice Hinduism and its popular forms in the same (legitimate) manner as the upper castes (and therefore lower caste religious life is seen in some way as inferior), or their religious practices imitate upper castes' religious practices (Moffatt 1979). Although it would be analytically naive to rule out all forms of high-caste emulation, particularly since the the lower castes do not have (legitimate) access to religious texts, there are several reasons to reject the model of emulation Moffatt (1979) proposes. First, the lower castes simply have little access to upper caste ritual. The upper castes do not communicate with the lower castes about issues of ritual

performance, and the lower castes do not actively consult with upper castes about the proper use of ritual. Indeed, during the research both groups were often enlightened as to what the other was doing when I discussed worship with them.

Rather, here I would like to reexamine those aspects of the wedding ritual that demonstrate the meaning to lower castes of a central Hindu belief in auspicious and inauspicious qualities of religious worship. Secondly, I would like to re-state lower caste views on upper caste ritual. These two questions are relevant to the issue of the practice and experience of intercaste hierarchy.

In the *nau graha puja*, the worship of nine planets, we can interpret lower caste understanding of the planets' effects on their lives. The planets can impart an inauspicious effect on the wedding, according to my lower caste informants. This view agrees with the literature on astrology and Hinduism which cites that planetary configurations impart the quality of inauspicious or auspicious on events and persons. The sense in which inauspiciousness was imputed by the low castes to the planets was in relation to planetary effects on a person – the groom – and a group of persons – the wedding party, consisting mostly of males.

The people of lower caste acknowledge that they do not read the Hindu texts. But there is a noteworthy difference between the lower and upper castes' conceptualizations of why this is so. Lower caste conceptualize the omission in the language of tradition, *chalan* – it is not the tradition of lower caste to read the sacred books. Their explanation reflects lower caste *dharma;* it is not part of their *dharma* to read the texts. The high-caste explanation of why the lower caste do not read the texts is different; untouchables are prohibited, according to Hindu law, from doing so. Thus for the upper castes the practice (or lack of it) is one of prohibition and exclusion; for the lower castes, this practice is one of difference. In another phase of the marriage, an Okheda man

expressed criticism of high-caste practice of *dharma*. "We [people of low caste] do not make a show of worship like the high-castes do". Here an ethos of worship is expressed as different than that of the high-caste. The people of lower caste worship the gods, only they do it inside their hearts, privately.

Commensality, Fertility, and Sexuality

In Nepal, the color red symbolizes female fertility through its association with menstrual blood. In central Nepal a menarchial girl is given red clothing by her father after she emerges from "the cave", *gupha*, where she has spent several days in isolation (Bennett 1978). This is not practiced in Bhalara, but unmarried girls wear red glass bead necklaces called *pothay*, and red glass or plastic bracelets called *churaa* or *chinri*.

Red is the bride's wedding color. All of her wedding garments are red, including blouses, skirts, and shawls. A red cloth is draped over her while she is carried in the wedding litter to the husband's home. The vermillion powder put into her parted hair by the groom is red. Fertility is symbolized throughout the wedding in the color red.

The Baadi *jaat* are also associated with fertility[20], and they are invited to dance and sing at weddings. As entertainers they are part of the symbolic landscape surrounding a Nepalese Hindu wedding, a landscape rich with the red color of fertility and the strains of wedding songs advising the couple of the importance of bearing children soon.

The symbolic association between commensality and sexuality for Hindus involves two forms of the same process, incorporation of substance to produce 'sameness' of *jaat*. The subtext to the associate is *jaat*. During the marriage ceremony there are many instances in which these two

[20] The large performance given by the Baadi, called "Baadi jaatra", introduces the beginning of the rice harvest and begging season in Bhalara.

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domains of human behavior are linked in the context of *jaat*. In its simplified form a wedding is about the prestige of feasting and performing rituals, and wedding food preparation is shared by men and women of the same *jaat*. During the ceremony, ritual exchanges of food between bride and groom introduce their future commensality, and feasts, in which people who do not regularly share food eat side by side. Meals mark the completion of important ritual segments in the wedding. Correspondingly, the first presentation made to the bride's family by the groom (during the actual wedding) is the yogurt that the groom carries to the bride's house. Commensality joins persons legitimately 'joinable' through their *jaat*, and in a wedding, the persistence of joining through commensality is marked.

Protection, Capture, Abandonment

Girls are afraid of their wedding days because they must be "sent away", *chori pataunay*, separated from their natal home. Parents are sad when daughters are born because they know they eventually leave the natal home. This is the daughter's karma. During the wedding the daughter is protected from the forces of the *ghar* by her *maiti* relatives and friends in different ways, but these are, in the end, symbolic gestures. The girl is forced to leave. Thus, many women express anger at their *maiti*, in particular their fathers, for sending them away, and, in the case of "selling daughters", for accepting money.

The bride remains hidden under her red wedding saari throughout most of the ceremony, particularly after the groom arrives at her house, while she is being carried back to the groom's, and during the rituals at the groom's house. Combined with her proper shy comportment is her protecting of herself. The bride interacts with no one. Indeed, the covered bride, surrounded by dancing boisterous men, seems protectively separate from these menacing male forces. It is considered "sinful" for others to raise her shawl to look at her, although young *ghar* girls try this once she arrives.

Other themes related to abandonment, such as capture, speak during the wedding ceremony. Shortly before she is taken to the husband's home the bride runs away and hides from the wedding party with her friends. The wedding party looks for her, carries her back to her natal home, and finally puts her in the wedding litter to take her away. Many people come to watch this part of the ceremony because of the spectacle: the bride screams and cries, and kicks and hits her tormenters. The scene is like a gang rape. The bride grabs onto the doors and walls of her natal home, pleads to her natal home relatives to take her back, and resists so violently that sometimes she is injured. But drag her to the *taapdaan* they do, as she continues to loudly and plaintively mourn the loss of her family and her friends, and their abandonment of her. Thus, throughout the wedding there is forced expulsion of the bride from her natal home, experienced by her as abandonment and betrayal following on the heels of a life of protection. The bride clearly does not experience her wedding as a smooth transition to a new life, but an abrupt ending to delightful childhood memories, replaced by uncertainty and fear.

The Impermanence in the Gift: Rights of Alienation over Dowry and Other Gifts

Bilateral inheritance is uncommon, though women may receive wealth in dowries. I do not, nor do the women of Bhalara, consider dowry to be a form of 'female inheritance', as do some researchers (Yalman 1967), because a woman does not have complete rights of alienation over the property she receives from parents at her wedding. As seen in Table 5.5 below, very little of the gold and silver received as either dowry from her *maiti* or gifts from the *ghar* is retained by the woman. Rather the gifts are given to other women – one's own daughter, daughters-in-law, and sisters-in-law – by men. Or the jewelry is used to buy land or food, or to cover other marriage expenses. Women say that their dowry is eventually sold or refashioned by a woman's son in the purchase of jewelry for his bride and for other investments. Thus, like land, the rights of alienation are confined to males (sons). And like land that

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women farm and have rights in the produce from but may not sell or in other ways alienate, women wear the dowry jewelry but may not dispose of it for other purposes. The women of Bhalara say that they do not "own" the wedding jewelry: "Even though I wear this jewelry it is not really my own. My son or husband may take it at any time". Table 5.5 indicates such loss occurs more frequently among lower caste than upper caste women, though for both groups of women, loss of jewelry occurs in the majority of cases.

Table 5.5 Amounts and Uses of Women's Wedding Gifts

The following are in means and percentages. 2.5 *tola* equals 1 ounce.

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
Tolas gold from *ghar*	3.98	1.60	.96
Tolas *ghar* gold remaining	1.55	.42	0
Percentage loss	61%	74%	100%
Tolas silver from *ghar*	54.48	36.75	40.00
Tolas *ghar* silver remaining	35.52	16.73	0
Percentage loss	35%	55%	100%
Sets of clothing from *ghar*	1.87	1.31	1.33
No. blankets from *ghar*	.77	.43	.17
Tolas gold from *maiti*	.33	.31	.08
Tolas *maiti* gold remaining	.32	.03	0
Percentage loss	0%	90%	100%
Tolas silver from *maiti*	5.00	8.39	15.83
Tolas *maiti* silver remaining	2.94	.88	0
Percentage loss	41%	89.5%	100%
Sets of clothing from *maiti*	1.42	1.22	1.17
No. blankets from *maiti*	.55	.22	.17
Naalis land from *maiti*	.90	0	0
No. cows from *maiti*	1.13	.49	.67
No. water buffalo from *maiti*	.23	.06	.17
No. goats from *maiti*	1.29	.16	0
No. calves from *maiti*	.13	.16	0
Some or all cooking utensils from *maiti*	100%	82.4%	100%

The gifts received by the bride from the *maiti* and from the *ghar* is standarized; brides expect certain gifts from both sides. For example, the dowry gifts from the *maiti*, *daijo*, include cooking and farming tools,

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livestock (preferably a calf or a goat), clothing, money (from *kutaa dunay*), sewing machines (for Damini brides), and perhaps gold and silver jewelry. Minimal dowry are cooking tools that the bride needs in her new home; in Table 5.5 we see that all upper caste, and nearly all lower caste women received cooking utensils from their natal home. The *maiti* may also give gifts to the groom. These include a traditional Nepali hat called a *topi*, a radio, a set of clothing (*daura suruwal*), and a gold ring. The husband's family is also expected to give the bride gifts. These include the majority of gold and silver jewelry, hair decorations, clothing, and blankets. The Nepalese of Bhalara do not generally sleep on beds (except for the very wealthy who may own one or two beds, but even then women do not have first choice), nor do they use furniture in their homes; thus no furniture is received.

The cooking utensils given by the natal home are the gifts of most permanence and are completely controlled by the bride. The data indicate that the natal home always gives these as gifts to daughters. Second in property status are livestock given by the *maiti* – calves, cows, water buffalo, and goats. Women have relatively complete control over the alienation of these animals; i.e., they are considered to be the bride's property by the husband's home. However, animals and animal products are always shared with family members; thus, animals cannot be considered solely a woman's property for her own discretionary use. The woman who sold milk and saved the money to buy clothing would be criticized. Otherwise, all other gifts are either impermanent and must be replaced (clothing, for example) or are not under control of alienation by the bride.

The gold and silver received by a bride from the *maiti* and the *ghar* may be used by the *ghar* at any time and for any reasonable purpose. Among the women interviewed, lower caste women lost larger amounts of their jewelry to sale much more frequently than did high-caste women. Furthermore, lower caste women married more than once lost all of the gold and silver jewelry given to them during their first marriage. This practice of taking all forms of wealth back from a woman who decides to leave is common throughout Nepal. If a woman

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leaves her husband, all of her wealth must remain with him, including her children. Thus, the claim that dowry is a form of female property does not apply to the situation in Bhalara if property is understood to be something over which ownership and rights of alienation devolve. Lower caste (and high-caste) women do not have full rights of ownership over their dowry. It seems more adequate to view dowry as a material resource that contributes to household reproduction since it so frequently is used to meet subsistence and ceremonial costs.

There are intercaste differences in alienation of jewelry received from the *ghar* versus that received from the *maiti*. High-caste women did not lose any of the gold jewelry that their *maiti*, their natal home, gave them, whereas lower caste women lost on average over 90% of their natal home silver and gold jewelry. Thus, for those of upper caste, there is a higher value placed on a woman's jewelry from her *maiti*, a value that she be allowed to retain it as long as possible. If any jewelry is to be sold by the husband's family, it must be that given by the husband's family itself. Such a differentiation between *maiti* and *ghar* jewelry seems not to apply to those of lower caste, possibly because their need to sell is so much greater, sooner.

What is the gold and silver used for? According to survey data, the precious metals are most frequently given by the husband's patriline to other women — daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other wives. Following this with nearly equal frequency is the jewelry used to purchase land, livestock, food, alcohol, or used for court expenses or gambling debts. Some is lost in property divisions. Thus, while all women's dowry is often sold for household reproduction, it is more frequently sold in lower caste families.

It is difficult to determine women's decision-making authority over the use of jewelry. It could be argued that except for those cases in which it is used to cover gambling and alcohol expenses, or is given to other wives or sisters-in-law, women probably have some power over the other uses of their dowry since it is in their interest to bring new daughters-in-law into the house, and to

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buy land and food. But jewelry is not a form of matrilineal property, or analogous to male property; women's dowry is far more easily dispersed or 'invested' than is male property, such as land. Dispersal and reinvestment of women's jewelry in lower caste households is common due to the fact that they have few other sources of wealth. The sale of jewelry to purchase food indicates a dispersal made out of desperation; once alienated from the *moe*, such commodities like gold and silver jewelry are not easily replaced.

I now turn to a final area in which gender and caste are seen to be related in culturally and socially relevant ways. I have established the lesser economic autonomy of the low-caste household (its greater dependence on upper castes), the differentiation of gender and caste in the domain of work and household provisioning, the metaphors and practices through which gender and caste are mutually articulated and which are used by gender and caste to differentiate persons, and the demystification of the 'gift' feature of the low-caste bride. The final chapter turns to the biological' reproduction of the family, the patriline, and the household. This concludes the three aspects of reproduction introduced in chapter four: fertility, reproduction of social hierarchy, and reproduction of persons.

BEARING THE *JAAT*: CHILDBIRTH AND MOTHERHOOD

Ijat and Jaat: Honor and the Patriline

Honor's cultural parent is marriage. Patrilineal honor becomes manifest and perpetuated when marriage prescriptions are followed. Patrilineal honor is most completely embodied in the concept of *jaat*, caste. Like impurity discussed in Chapter 5, honor has an instrumental and a symbolic dimension, both centered in the idea of *jaat*. Instrumentally, honor establishes *jaat* power, the power of caste. One function of honor in the Hindu context is the demonstrable religious and economic power of the *jaat*. People in Bhalara consider a family with honor to be one which has members who cooperatively work toward fruitful economic and religious goals. Upper castes have advantages in both of these endeavors. For example, the high-caste patriline contains power both economic and religious. Because maintaining honor fundamentally begins with marriage and the ordering of legitimate sexuality, we find in Bhalara that the castes with the most power (whether religious – Brahmin – or economic – Thakuri) place the greatest emphasis on female honor. Legitimation of *jaat* and patrilineal power depends on women's honor.

At the symbolic level, honor is achieved through *jaat* purity. Organized and proper marriage is the process by which *jaat* purity is actualized. The primary marriage rule of *jaat* endogamy guarantees *jaat* purity and honor. What will be discussed further here is how the ordering of caste through marriage is the ordering of legitimate sexuality, and, specifically, how the ordering of sexuality involves men and women in culturally distinct ways. Briefly, questions of honor arise more typically around women than men; what to do about honor is an issue of what to do about women. Here I will examine how and why this is so.

Because of *ijat*'s close association with patrilineal reproduction and caste purity, honor is mapped onto the female body in ways fundamentally different from the male body.[1] The culture of Bhalara presents different images of honorable men and honorable women. Honor moves through the spaces between patrilineal members and punctuates the rhetoric of marriage negotiations and the ideology of marriage and the family. A girl of any caste should be a virgin at marriage, proved through prudent social restraint in the company of boys. There is little question that the burden of regulated sex before marriage falls on women. If young, unmarried girls – of low- or high caste – are teased about having a boyfriend they get very angry and demand a rupee as *dakshina*, offering, from the tormenter. Such offerings are linked to the goddess status of a daughter. Since she is unmarried her reputation, unless argued against with facts such as pregnancy, is implicitly impeccable. The unmarried virgin, the *kanya*, is pure and has the right to assert her goddesshood by asking for compensation in the form of offerings. The community supports her claim. The girl's rhetoric of demand is as follows: "I am a *kumari* [virgin], a *churi* [daughter], and a *devi* [goddess]. You cannot say that to me. So give me one rupee".

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[1] Caste-based distribution of honor has been eloquently described by Marriott (1976), though his concept of 'substance' mystifies the corporeal location. The location of the Brahmin's superior honor in the body is protected by minimizing practices. A bizarre example of honor's residency in the body, and a strategy used to "save face", is the over fifty Indian students who burned themselves alive in protest of Delhi University's "reservation" system which provides low-caste and other disadvantaged students with jobs and university placement. This reservation system is found in all sectors of Indian society and is the target of corruption charges. Rather than suffer the dishonor, the "loss of face", of being replaced by those lower than themselves, the Brahmins controlled their destiny by destroying not only the face, but the entire body.

This is not, of course, the only use of fire to achieve honorable goals. The power of the symbol of fire begins with funereal cremation and purification of the corpse. But acts of self-immolation, far from being considered suicide, transmit honor. The prime example of this in Hindu culture in sati, the immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyre. Fire and the female body fuse symbolically over the male corpse. Sati's illuminate caste honor, but do not bear it as persons but as patrilineal members.

As stated above, honor is ultimately recognized in the collective, the family, the household, the patriline. Individuals can be honorable, but it is understood that honorable behavior is in the service of the patriline. The appropriate word to describe individuals or classes of individuals who have good conduct is dharma.

A man's conjugal honor begins with marriage to a woman of the correct caste, and her bearing children (preferably sons, particularly for the upper castes). A man can take as many wives of his own caste as he chooses, but if he marries outside of his *jaat* his patriline's honor is compromised. A woman's honor depends on the same things, but also includes avoiding certain forms of public behavior. The *jaat* and the family with publicly recognized *ijat*, honor, is described as *thulo*, big.

Menstruation and Impurity

In the following description of the beliefs that the people of Bhalara hold regarding menstrual impurity, I make use of Mary Douglas' insights into the role of pollution beliefs, particularly as these shed light on certain aspects of the relationship between husband and wife in Bhalara. She proposes that pollution beliefs operate at two levels: the instrumental and the expressive (Douglas 1966,3). At the instrumental level pollution beliefs are used to influence the behavior of others. For example the people of Bhalara claim that certain natural disasters such as landslides and earthquakes are caused by pollution transgressions. At the expressive level pollution beliefs symbolize the social order. For example each sex may be a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids. Alternatively, only one sex, usually males, is endangered by the other (females); such patterns of sexual danger can be seen to express symmetry or hierarchy. Douglas points out that it is not believable to think that such expressions are actual reflections of relations between the two sexes. Rather, she suggests that "ideas about

sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relations between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the society at large". (Douglas 1966,4).

In Bhalara, pollution beliefs associated with the basic functions of biological reproduction, sexuality, and eating operate both instrumentally and expressively to control the behavior of various categories of people and to hierarchize those people. The impurity of women's menstruation and the impurity of sexual relations are controlled through the ideology of the patriline. As Douglas puts it "the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code" (Douglas 1966,3). In the case of the conjugal pair, the "natural" comprises sexual fluids, and their regulated exchange is the moral code which serves to govern the social order.

Douglas also provides insight into the process by which gender is implicated and appropriated in the symbolization of hierarchy. She observes that the two sexes can serve as a model for the collaboration and distinctiveness of social units. What goes for sex impurity goes for bodily impurity as well. She believes that "ideas having to do with separating, purifying, punishing for transgression, and demarcating are attempts to put order into an otherwise untidy arrangement" (Douglas 1966,4).

For a young Nepali girl the transformation into the proper adult woman begins at an early age. One of the earliest and far-reaching cultural ideas she learns is *chow*, impurity. It is first applied to the child's bodily emissions, then to proper eating etiquette which entails not touching others' plates or the cooking area. Later *chow* is used to explain her mother's monthly absences from inside the house, and is used to convey that certain persons are not to be touched – specifically,

people of caste lower than her own. As Mandelbaum notes for Khalapur, India, "The training repeatedly reinforces the idea that there is a hierarchy of relations, inside and outside the family, and a proper child carefully observes the proprieties of subordinate and superior roles", (30, quoted in Singer and Cohn). In Bhalara, the impurity of one class of people or things is conceptually transferable to the other; for example, when I asked a Brahmin why she did not eat chickens, she replied that "Chickens are like the Sarki. That is why we do not eat chickens". In other words, the impurity inherent in the animal was homologous to that of the person, the untouchable.[2] This knowledge of what is *chow* is carried into other areas as the child develops, but at the early stages is undifferentiated by gender. Later, girls, in identifying with their mothers in the formation of their female identity, associate ever more aspects of *chow* to themselves – in aspects of cooking, menarche, and childbirth. Boys are not *chow* for girls, they are only threats to honor. But girls and women are, for boys, part of their socialization knowledge of what is *chow*.

Initially, the application of *chow* to their own caste is the same for girls and boys; this is not a gendered use of the concept. But it is applied differently for the different castes. High-caste children are taught their social superiority, in the idiom of purity, to low-caste children because the latter's touch is polluting and must be avoided. High-caste children learn they are 'bigger' than those of low-caste through the measure of *chow*. Low-caste children, in turn, are taught that their touch is polluting to adults of high-caste and that they should not enter their homes, and should not touch them. Through this process of caste identity formation eventually develops the link between bodily substance and caste identity, to be later in life associated with

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[2] Mandelbaum (1968) found that scripts of scolding often incorporate the use of low-caste groups - like Leatherworkers and Sweepers - to insult children.

proper role behavior. This constellation of ideas is what is embodied in what *jaatidharma* (Kolenda 1978), those sets of beliefs about proper role behavior based on one's caste. One's *jaat*, or caste, identity becomes inscribed into the child as something that is first unpleasant, dirty, noxious, perhaps dangerous. As children get older, caste identity becomes caste and gender differentiated: for males, as that which low-caste persons and women possess, and for women, something associated with their femaleness and their caste, if low.

The rules governing a woman's behavior during her menstrual period are straightforward and complete: she is isolated from the family, does not touch or serve anyone except young nursing infants, and must not allow anything touched by one's self to be touched by others. This period of impurity is different for girls and women who have not born children, called *kanya* (virgin), than for married women who have born children (*upayako aimai*) by one day. The former cannot give water or food or touch anyone for six days, whereas the latter can touch others and serve food on the fifth day of menstruation. Both must bathe on the morning of the fourth day, but the *kanya* is polluting for another two days. The mother, however, is not.

The culture of Bhalara constructs the end of menstruation as a time of conjugal duty directed toward continuity of the patriline. Women are expected to have sex with husbands as soon after the fourth day – preferably on the fifth day – as possible. People believe that a woman can conceive easily at this time, and, in keeping with the ideology of patrilineal continuity, is more likely to bear a son than a daughter. A menstruating woman, during the four to five days of isolation from her affines, cannot contribute to household reproduction, either material (productive) or biological (she is barred from sleeping with her husband). She lives alone in an isolated area, away from the family. In

this context we can understand the degree of urgency about having sex as soon after menstruation as possible, an urgency that reflects a cultural concern for patrilineal continuity.

The irony of the menstrual taboo is that a woman's husband must do her work, particularly if there are no other women to help or no one can be hired temporarily. Collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking meals, caring for children, and weeding fields are all done by men during the five days of a wife's isolation. In Bhalara there were several households that lacked alternate women, or where two or more women regularly menstruated simultaneously. The men were responsible for the extra work and they resented it. Of course observers did not hesitate to tease them.

Menarchal rituals of seclusion for pubertal Nepali girls have been described and analyzed in detail by Bennett. For the Parbatiya Brahmins and Chetris of eastern Nepal the ritual of seclusion is called *gupha basnay*, "sitting in a cave" because the girl cannot be exposed to the light of the sun for eleven days (Bennett 1983). Bennett does not discuss this practice among girls of low caste, nor how the practice is different if the girl begins menstruation after marriage. In Bhalara, menarchal rituals are more likely to occur after a girl's marriage since, as we can see in Table 6.1, the vast majority of girls are pre-menstrual at marriage.

Table 6.1 Women's Age at Marriage, by Caste

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
Age at marriage (means)	13.6	13.7	13.2
Average percentage of women menarchal at marriage	32.3	15.7	0
Average percentage of women **not** menarchal at marriage	67.7	84.3	100.0

In Bhalara, the phrase *gupha basnay* is not applied to the menarchal period of seclusion but there are some similarities to what Bennett describes. I did not observe any girls in seclusion, so the following description of events was provided by Suna Damai, age 30, from Kot village. The period lasts for ten days, and there is no difference between the seclusion of girls based on caste. The first day of seclusion must be spent away from the *maiti* or the *ghar*, preferably at a non-relatives home because no relatives should see the menstruating girl on this first day. This house is called *biranksi*. The girl is forbidden to view any males, related or unrelated, for four days, nor any related women for two days. The mother is the first family member to visit her daughter. She gives her a walnut, a symbol of the god Ganesh, the "homeless" god (like the girl herself during this period), and many sweet foods, *tihaar*. Suna did not tell for how long the mother stays with her. Suna said that avoiding the sunlight was not an important part of the process of seclusion. She emphasized that men must be avoided, and avoidance of the father, in particular, was done out of shyness.

The girl stays at the *biranksi* for ten days. Her touch is polluting and she cannot touch water nor can others touch anything she touches. After the fourth day the girl becomes *choknay*, "clean, touchable" by bathing.

After this only other women can be touched; men continue to be avoided. The tailor is called and new clothes of any color are sewn.[3]

Mary Douglas' work on pollution beliefs and their connection to ideas about danger in a given culture provide insight into how the practices and beliefs surrounding menstruation in Bhalara reflect the complexity of social structure, particulalry patrilineal structure. Douglas claims that socially-recognized pollution is the culturally constituted embodiment of the breaking or transgression of ideas of either social fusion or fission. The danger of pollution will be intensified in those groups where is found clear and rigid lines of social structure. In Bhalara we have seen many such lines and intersections of social structure: caste hierarchy, patrilineal organization, separation between male and female, kinship and age-based stratification, humans place in 'nature', and class stratifications. Using this model, we can see that the menstruating woman, marked as 'polluted', is a symbol of disorder at many levels: she is isolated from the family social unit, she is prohibited from fulfilling her roles as a mother and a wife, she is forced to live in closer proximity to non-humans (most women remain in the animal barn attached to the home during menstruation), and she is untouchable to everyone, even those of untouchable lower status. While the mensturating woman herself is not guilty of social transgression, she acts as a very powerful symbol of a preordained order in her temporary symbolic state of disorder and separation. The menstruating woman stands temporarily outside of the boundaries of the patriline, and her marginality is sustained for a short period until its ritual resolution and restitution into conjugal duty is possible.

[3] The high-caste girls described by Bennett are given red clothes by the father, which she interprets as a symbol of their fertility. The color red is the color of a bride's wedding clothes, thus linking her fertility to impending marriage.

In menstrual practices there also exists a sense that the power of a woman's sexuality must be (re-)captured by the patriline (the first capture took place at the wedding). Douglas notes in Purity and Danger (1966) that disorder symbolizes both power and danger. The menstruating woman, via the disorder of her impurity, symbolizes both power and danger. Prescribed post-menstrual ritual bathing not only cleanses her physically but also ritually. Bathing is understood by Hindus to 'cool' the heat of danger from impurity (recall the 'cooling' of the groom during the wedding; his danger was due to the heat of his deity); we thus find bathing an integral part of Hindu rituals of all kinds. Once a woman cleanses herself of the pollution of menstruation, the patriline, through the husband, quickly recaptures the woman's power, casting it as potent sexual fertility, by encouraging sexual intercourse between wife and husband.

Women say it is their *dharma*, their moral duty, to obey the menstrual restrictions. To this kind of association between moral value (*dharma*) and impurity located within the body Douglas makes several interesting points. She says that moral situations are not easy to define, while pollution rules are unequivocal and easier to cancel than moral transgressions.[4] Regarding appropriation of the physical body in these symbolizations of transgression and disorder, Douglas says that the more a symbol is drawn from a wide range of human experience the more wide and certain its reception. Therefore the symbolism worked on the human body is most direct. We must see in the body a symbol of society such that the powers and dangers credited to social structure are reproduced in small on the body.

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[4] Sacrifice is a common way to erase the pollution. What is interesting in the Hindu context is how the notion of the auspicious may fit into this scheme. Although the difference between the auspicious and pollution is a primarily temporal one, like pollution the auspicious is easier to locate than are moral situations. Thus, with two systems of transgression at work, Hindus have constructed an elaborate though manipulable moral system, and called it religious duty, *dharma*.

The logic of menstrual restrictions against women is part of the logic of the symbolic nature of the caste system. The hermeneutic device of seeing the caste system as a symbolic system imaged on the body and concerned with social hierarchy has been used by many South Asian scholars (Beck 1978; Marriott 1989; Daniel 1984; Das 1984). Since the reproduction of caste hierarchy is founded on principles of birth and parentage, we see Hindu culture emphasizing sexuality in its preservation of the purity of castes. The sexuality of the female body and its ordering in the form of menstrual taboos and conjugal duty symbolically inscribes the order of caste onto the female body (I have previously discussed how honor is one cultural form that this inscription takes). Thus among all castes, boundary impurity focuses particularly on sexual impurity.

Pregnancy and Shame

The words to a local song express the pain of childbirth by contrasting it with the enjoyable process by which one gets pregnant:

> "Haasi pardeko ghatila, rooey phukaunda".
> "Laughing [I] become pregnant, crying [I] give birth".

Women are afraid of childbirth, but they also enjoy the pleasures that lead to pregnancy. Thus women experience a conflict in their main role as bearers of children. The women of Bhalara are embarrassed about their pregnancies because people will know they have slept with their husbands. This cultural feature highlights the predicament of marriage for women in Bhalara. Marriage is a negotiated relationship between two families that happens to involve two individuals who are expected to bear children. However, for the woman, marriage initiates a conflict. A Nepalese Hindu woman has spent most of adolescence restricting access to her body. She has made her body a space of uncontestable honor for her parents, and her reward is her marriage. The marital paradox for a woman

is that now she is expected to act in a contradictory way. It is now honorable to allow access to her body by her husband. In the confused shame of ambiguity, the pregnant woman avoids telling others.

This same shame, *laaj*, exists for grandmothers who become pregnant. An older Damini explained how she felt when she got pregnant at age forty. She said that everyone then knows she is sleeping with her husband. But at her age sensual pleasures should be abandoned for spiritual pursuits, according to Hindu life stages.

The (female) culture of Bhalara is pro-natal in many ways: children are considered a gift from god, full womanhood begins only after bearing children, and a woman's status is enhanced after the birth of children. The idealization of childbirth attempts to convince women that the pain, agony, worry, and death associated with childbirth are risks worth enduring for their own social status, their husband's family, and society. Much like other Asian cultures, the mother-child bond is far more significant to the woman than the husband-wife bond.

How do a woman's relatives behave towards her pregnancy? The *maiti* honorably waits until the birth of the first child before visiting a daughter after her marriage. And her husband? Men in general take a keen interest in women's pregnancies, but they do not discuss it with the women. Instead they debate and discuss the subject with their cronies in tea shops or at other male social occasions (which by definition means that women are not present). A quasi-medical English term for childbirth has recently appeared in male language – "delivery case". This phrase is used by men to refer to a specific birth or the generic process of women giving birth. It is used often in the context of a difficult birth, a birth that the men may have participated in helping to overcome the difficulties. For example, if a woman is experiencing late delivery, men

will solicit help from other midwives, experienced women, or will either travel the three hours to bring a "doctor" from a distant community, or arrange for the woman to be carried to the hospital in Chainpur ten hours walking distance from Bhalara. In general, though, men are barred from the delivery room (usually a corner in the house inhabited only by women). Men say they are too embarrassed to watch a birth and they often pretend that nothing is happening.

The people of Bhalara say that when women are pregnant they desire certain foods, particularly sweets and sour foods. The abnormal conditions of desiring certain foods and sickness and vomiting that accompany pregnancy are called *auchan lagnu*. It is often these behaviors that reveal a woman's pregnancy because otherwise she keeps quiet (see Freidl's study of Iraqi women on a similar sentiment, 1989); a woman is embarrassed if others know or refer to her pregnancy. The mother-in-law has the privilege of announcing the pregnancy to outsiders; a daughter-in-law should not discuss her own pregnancy. According to the women of Bhalara it is necessary to have sex with one's husband during pregnancy so that the baby will grow in the womb and emerge big and healthy (and hopefully male).[5] Knowledge of this custom adds to a woman's embarrassment about her pregnancy. If sex is absent the baby will be small and less formed.

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[5] This belief allows a certain level of control over the outcome of pregnancy, which is otherwise seen as the action of fate. For example, the people of Bhalara read the position of the moon at the time of a child's birth to predict the quality of its character. While I did not hear of any supporting cases, they believe that a son born on new moon may die soon after birth; if a daughter is born, her father may die soon. Any child born on new moon that survives is thought to have a difficult character; it is feared that such a child will "bite its parents", which means the child will cause alot of pain and suffering for the parents. New moon is a period of darkness in the night sky. It is an adharmic period, a period of marginality and disorder. Brahmins and *bamins* are given dakshina on new moon to counter its inauspicious effects.

Fears of Childbirth: The Cases of Jamkhola and Maya

Women's fears of childbirth are realistic. The physical risks involved in giving birth in a rural hill community are exacerbated in Bhalara by the lack of reliable health care facilities. In the event of complications such as I describe below, human, monetary, and medical resources are used based on a decision-making process that involves the value a family places on its daughters-in-law. Even though in Bhalara the life of the mother (or, more accurately, her reproductive capacity) is valued over the life of the unborn, a family experiences limitations to their capacity to help a daughter-in-law in danger. In the first excerpt from a life-events interview, a young Damai woman named Jamkhola talks about her fears of childbirth, other woman in the area who have given birth recently, and her reasons for choosing one midwife over another. [M=Mary; J=Jamkhola].

M: Do you think you will have a girl or a boy?
J: Who knows?
M: Your face is not darkened. If your face gets dark, then will you have a son or a daughter? What do they say here?
J: A daughter.
M: A daughter. So since your face isn't dark, do you think you will have a son?
J: Well, I think I am going to die anyway, so what does it matter if I have a son? All I wish is that it lives. Will it live or die? Nobody knows.
M: You are afraid.
J: Yes.
M: Alot of babies die around here.
J: Yes. The baby should be safe as long as it can live up until its naming ceremony. Three women gave birth lately ...M: Who?
J: One was Lali's mother.
M: Yes, Lali's mother...
J: One was from Dubaali ...
M: A daughter-in-law?
J: No, not a daughter-in-law ... One Damai woman from Kuch. She was really ready, and wanted to have the baby, but what baby was born [the baby would not emerge quickly]?
M: You are afraid?
J: Yes, I am afraid. [laughs]. Yes, it's true. I am really afraid.
M: We just talked about it now. Here in Nepal it may take three days or it may take three hours. If three hours then it is easy.
J: This is the first time. The first time it takes a long time. That one woman in Haat took three days [referring to Maya, below]. By the evening of the second day it became very difficult. That's what everyone was saying. She couldn't do anything more. And so it must have just felt like she wanted to die.
M: There is alot of pain, alot of pain. But you are very strong.
J: What strength do I have?

M: Does that Luhar midwife not do midwife work for the Damai?
J: No, she works with us.
M: But you aren't going to call her?
J: Why should I call her? She is too forceful. She does what she wants. She puts her hand inside the body. Now, those women who really know what they are doing, they do it very slowly. But the Luhar makes it more difficult for the delivering woman. So for these reasons we do not call her.
M: Oh, she doesn't do it slowly enough.
J: No.
M: She uses too much force.
J: Yes, with force.
M: And that hurts alot.
J: Yes.
M: So you won't call her?
J: No.

In the following case a young girl experiencing severe difficulties during her first delivery was left to die because the family's male members refused to spend the money and time to transport her to a hospital ten hours away. Her husband's absence also contributed to this decision.

The girl, Maya, was sixteen and from Haat. Throughout her pregnancy her husband was away in India working and was not expected to return until some months after the child's birth. I had talked with Maya on a few occassions about her pregnancy and her fears. She had developed dark spotting on her skin which was interpreted as a sign that the fetus was a girl. She was quite frightened about the pain she anticipated. She was a very strong girl physically and a good worker. Maya was a "daughter of the village", *gauko chori*, since her *maiti* was also in Haat.

Three days after Maya's water broke the child still did not emerge. A French anthropologist and physician was in the village studying the Baadi, and he was called to the home. Many women from Haat and the surrounding villages, including the best midwives, had tried unsuccessfully to pull the baby out. The physician advised that the woman be carried to Chainpur's hospital where a resident eye surgeon could perform a cesarian or help the woman in some other way. The

physician warned that the mother was at great risk. He did not think the baby was alive because he could not detect a heartbeat.

The father-in-law was responsible for the final decision, and he decided against it, saying that "We do not have the money to cover the expenses", even after the local men had offered to carry her there for free. The local men said they were very displeased with the father-in-law's decision, saying it was the wrong one and that he had seriously neglected his daughter-in-law. But his decision was final and they were not able to intervene. Over the next few days the girl became very swollen and feverish. The baby finally came out, stillborn, but the girl continued to swell. In the middle of the night, Maya died. For days the villagers mourned and comforted each other as the facts transformed into the rhetoric of a family's history.

The dangers of miscarriage and the death of the mother are real. Women fear miscarriage because the dead fetus is not easily expelled. The community's senior midwife, Luharni, described in a second case to follow shortly, attributed the death of Maya to the fact that a mother cannot easily expel the fetus, and it takes "many hands" to pull it out. All of these hands touching Maya caused her death, the midwife decided.

The value of children comes from the painful yet common experience of infants' and children's deaths. It is difficult to survive infancy and childhood in Bhalara. To illustrate, there is a Baadi boy whose name is *babaji*, "holy one, respected one". He received this religious name after he survived a life-threatening illness as an infant. Everyone uses this name, even high-caste patrons. Because he survived the illness, he is considered holy, special, like a god. Babaji retains his low caste status but he is specially marked because god blessed him and gave him a special "shakti" to survive against difficult odds.

Table 6.2 shows the number of children born on average to the married women sampled, according to caste and number of marriages, and the number of deaths of children. While analysis of the infant mortality rates would detract us from the main point, namely that the fear of children dying is to the people of Bhalara grounded in factual reality, it should be noted that these figures reflect rates of infant mortality that exceed those published for Nepal.[6] The single greatest cause of death among infants and children under the age of five is dehydration and other complication caused by chronic dysentery.

Table 6.2 Women's Birth Histories, by Caste

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
Total sons born	2.26	2.02	.17
Sons deceased	1.13 (50%)	.61 (30%)	0
Total daughters born	2.29	1.82	.33
Daughters deceased	1.26 (55%)	.61 (34%)	.17

We see two significant patterns in the data above, neither of which can be fully explored in this context. The first is that a daughter has less chance of surviving infancy and childhood than does a son, particulalry if she is high-caste; the second finding is that upper caste women lose more children through death than do lower caste women. Explaining these patterns requires a thorough analyis. However, field observations would conclude that one possible cause for differing infant mortality rates between low- and high-caste families could be that women of low-caste are less involved in agricultural production than are women of high-caste. We recall that of all the work women perform, fieldwork and gathering firewood and fodder are the most time-consuming and keep women away from home the longest. Thus, low-caste women, who are on average less engaged in this work than high-caste women, are able to spend more

[6] According to the 1991 version of PC Globe, the infant mortality rate for Nepal is 98 deaths per thousand births.

time with their infants, and, importantly, can nurse them on demand. An infant who is not nursed regularly is more vulnerable to infection with dirty drinking water (as found in prepared substitutes for mother's milk will be used) than one who is nursed on demand throughout the day.

Unwanted Pregnancy: Abortion and Infanticide

Pregnancy outside of the married conjugal unit – either premarital or extramarital – are in direct violation of family honor. Should a married woman become pregnant by a man other than her husband, her male affines have the right to force her to leave their house and live with the man who is the father. The woman is urged to reveal the offending man's identity, and people are apt to believe her. The offending man is required to pay *jaari* damages to the husband's family, and she must return all of the wedding jewelry she was given by her husband's family. The greatest tragedy, however, is that a woman in this unfortunate situation must relinquish custody of her children, both sons and daughters, from her first husband; the children stay with the husband's patriline and they may eventually get a stepmother if and when their father remarries. To prevent such tragic consequences a woman might try to abort the fetus, which will be described below.

Badini (women of the Baadi caste) who get pregnant by men other than their husband can do one of two things: leave her own husband and live with the man; or her husband may demand a *jaari* payment to compensate his property-based right to control over his wife sexually. This amount is usually close to the original marriage transactions, though with the Baadi, who do not rely on large transactions, it may be difficult to prove that the compensation is the correct amount.

If an unmarried girl is raped (I did not hear of any cases), the first choice of her family is to request that the boy or man marry their daughter. If he refuses, or if there are caste differences between the girl and the boy then the family has the right to demand compensation from the man. Everyone feels that a girl in that situation will eventually get married, though it is unclear if this will occur before or after the marriage.

There is no local birth control for women except the "flower of a male goat", *bhakarako phul*, the testicles. Normally this part of the animal is cooked separate from the rest; it is burned and blackened in coals and is only eaten by males. Women are forbidden to eat the testicles, but women sneak it away from the fire. The (inverted) metonymic association is intriguing: consumption of part of the male sex organs neutralizes a woman's fertility. It is as though their ingestion blocks the male's contribution to pregnancy.

Women who face an unwanted pregnancy – either because the child is not her husband's or she is unmarried – will attempt to abort the child in secret before others can discover the pregnancy. Various things may be eaten. One concoction described had the following ingredients: molasses, honey or honeycomb from the hornet (*bhero*), and something called *tayjaab* which only a "doctor" (not an herbal healer, called a *baidya*, but an Ayurvedic or other person classified as "doctor") can procure. Informants said bribes were necessary to get the ingredients because everyone knows what *tayjaab* is for. A woman therefore needs assistance in aborting a child, and those who know about the abortion are sworn to secrecy. All girls who become pregnant before marriage are ostracized from the *maiti*. I have heard of Brahmin, Thakuri, and Baadi girls to whom this has happened. These women generally go to live with a relative in another village, and may eventually marry.

Should an abortion be unavailable and the baby develops to term, the mother may kill the child by holding a cloth over its face and sitting on it. The mother is the only one who can do this since she and the baby are polluted for ten days after birth.

The most common form of birth control is vasectomy. Though it is reliable and safe, women are ambivalent about vasectomy because often

their husbands elect to have one performed by the vasectomy camp "doctors" who pass through Bhalara once or twice a year without consulting their wives. Women may still want more children and they are very angry when denied this by their husbands. Vasectomy is discussed openly as an option to limiting family size, though I have no data on how many of the men from Bhalara have had the minor operation. Women refer to vasectomy as "getting a needle" (*syu lagounay*), though they know that a "tube", *naali*, is cut. Women also believe that males lose some of their sexual energy after a vasectomy.

A Birth and Post-Partum Impurity

I will now describe a birth in which I participated. It took place in the house where I lived for nearly four years; the child was born to the first daughter-in-law. Actually my level of participation involved only heating water on my stove to bathe the infant; otherwise I was a mute and rather helpless bystander in an event that shifted from the extraordinary and miraculous to the grotesque and frightening. This birth (the mother is high-caste) is of interest because it describes the role of the low-caste midwife and her interactions with the family. And hopefully it captures a sense of the intensely penetrating moment of extreme and lasting birth impurity.

The following is directly quoted from fieldnotes. Raju is the mother, Ganesh the father, Luharni is the Luhar midwife, and Ama is the mother-in-law. The latter is my landlady.

"At 10:15 PM Ganesh asked to borrow my flashlight because, as he said, 'Shanti's mother is not feeling well. Her stomach hurts'. He had to go and fetch someone from Dubaali. It was obvious that Raju was in labor, and the 'someone' was the best mid-wife in the community, fondly called 'Luharni' after her Luhar *jaat*. I go upstairs. Raju is leaning against the kitchen wall. Her mother-in-law tells her to put her feet straight out. Raju resists but then does it. The labor pains cover her face, and seem to be about every one to two minutes. Raju does not cry but grits her teeth, bears down on the ground, breathes heavily, and the pain passes. She relaxes. Ama rubs warm ghee on Raju's stomach and back. She

feels her back to see where the baby is, how it is progressing. Ama asks Raju to move to another corner of the room, off of the bedding which will otherwise get badly soiled. Again, Raju complains, but when I leave to get some water from downstairs and return, she has shifted positions. The mother-in-law speaks in a low voice. I feel afraid of the danger. I want to make light of the situation, perhaps ask if they think it will be a girl or a boy. But the question seems inappropriate. Nothing should be directly said about the impending birth. Everyone wishes for a son; Raju has one (troublesome) daughter already. Instead, I remind Raju that she had mentioned her back hurting that morning, that this was an early sign of things to come. She smiles.

They do not ask me to leave, although I think my presence makes Ama, who I have known longer than the others, uncomfortable. Soon, Ganesh and the mid-wife return.

Luharni waits upstairs in the kitchen's anteroom. Ama calls Luharni inside the kitchen where the birth will take place. Luharni enters and respectfully bows to the mother-in-law, to me, and to Raju who is writhing in so much pain she does not notice. Raju has her back to the wall. Luharni squats in front of her, asks how she is doing, how much it hurts, and Raju mutters a few words. Then Luharni very skillfully says 'Let's have a look' and reaches under Raju's skirts to feel the vagina and measure its opening. Ama seems again concerned about my presence and arranges Raju's skirts around her so that modesty is preserved. But she does not ask me to leave. From then on the mid-wife does not remove her hand from the birth canal except once to help Raju turn around with her back to Luharni, and squat. The mid-wife and Ama start an unending exchange of information about the birth. 'The head is here, but pushed back against her bones [pelvis]. So we have to get it further down, maybe turn it around a little bit.'

Raju becomes much more vocal after Luharni's arrival. Ama had prevented her from making noise before, but she is encouraged to express whatever is happening to her by the sympathetic expertise of the mid-wife. Luharni, for her part, is also working very hard. Her left hand is inside the vagina and she massages it and pulls, sometimes squatting and then standing to get a better grip. I think that both the mother and the mid-wife are certainly 'laboring'. Luharni is an older woman, perhaps 55, but in her work she seems exceptionally strong and untiring. Raju lets her work, though several times she moans 'Luharni, oh Luharni, take your hand away! I am going to die, I cannot do this anymore.' Both Ama and Luharni tell her that is nonsense, she is quite alive and fine, and the baby, *baalaakaa*, is coming out.

Shortly after midnight the baby is finally born. Up until then Luharni and Raju work very hard to get the baby out. The people of Bhalara believe that the baby must come out as quickly as possible to prevent harm to the mother. Luharni continues to gently pull, Raju pushes, and Ama holds her daughter-in-law upright and massages her back. Eventually Raju is on her hands and knees with her head against the wall. Ama finally gives her a pillow for her head. Luharni coaches her, 'You have to push really hard, really hard. Yes, like that. Good. Now push again. The baby is coming. It is coming.' Raju breathes deeply and slowly and steadily works to push the baby out.

I am sitting in a corner, watching Raju's first daughter, Shanti, silent. I realize that for one of the first times I can remember, I am being left alone. No one is asking me questions, or staring at what I am doing, or asking me to join in. It is like I am not present. The scene is frightening. The smell of blood is nauseous. I am glad I am there, but not because of it being particularly miraculous. Rather the

opposite. The scene is very physical and raw. Sweat drips from Raju's forehead. The squishing of blood is nauseous. I am anxious that someone is going to break or explode or die. Raju must push hard but her effort is frightening.

Luharni controls the entire event. She instructs Raju, informs her and Ama of the baby's progress. She tells Raju to push hard one more time. Raju insults her: 'Luharni take your hand away'. And Luharni laughs, 'Don't be silly. The baby is coming. You have to push really hard'. And Raju obeys, groaning and grunting for the hundredth time. Calmly, Luharni says 'Here it comes', and with the splashing of blood and water a baby girl falls onto the floor.

Suddenly, Luharni and Ama move away from Raju. The baby lies squirming on the floor in a dark puddle. Raju cannot see it; she is turned against the wall, breathing heavily. Then the newborn shrieks! and keeps on crying and wailing. No one has touched it yet. Mother and baby are alone in the corner. Ama and Luharni just watch. Then Luharni begins her second phase of instruction to Raju. 'Now turn around. Put the baby on a piece of cloth. Did the afterbirth come yet? No? Okay, that has to come out quickly. Where is some string to tie the cord? Here is the sickle [*ansi*] to cut the cord after the placenta emerges.' Raju moves slowly. She picks up the screaming bloody mass and slowly puts it on a cloth. She is emotionally numb, exhausted. No one helps her. She works alone, in spite of being exhausted. She and the baby are very polluted from the birth process. Second to a corpse there is no greater impurity than that of the newborn and its mother.

I leave to get some string and more warm water. When I return Raju is forcing her fingers down her throat to make herself vomit and extract the placenta. Ama pours some mustard oil into a cup and passes it along the floor for Raju to drink. This too will aid in the passing of the placenta. Everyone remains at a distance from Raju. Then Raju weeps. She is disappointed that it is a girl, her second daughter.

Luharni massages Raju's stomach. Soon the placenta falls out. Raju cuts the umbilical cord with the sickle and ties string around the baby's stump. The Luharni continues with her instructions to Raju. 'There, put that over there. Move the coverings around. Isn't there another covering for the baby?' On and on. But what is truly incredible is that Raju must do all of this work herself. Even Luharni, who is low caste, is very careful to not touch anything Raju has touched. This avoidance occurs from the moment the baby emerges. Up until then, everyone was touching anyone and anything.

In the next room, the radio shuts off and the men and boys are silent. The father learns that he has a daughter and not a son. Only women are awake and working, talking in hushed voices as though this act of birth should be conducted with little ceremony or display. Only Luharni seems happy when she laughs at the baby's angry screaming. Raju and Luharni light small cigarettes and smoke. Raju complains to Luharni that her stomach hurts, and Luharni says 'There is still movement inside. And after so much work there is bound to be pain.' What one would expect to be a moment of joy seems sad and understated. Raju wants to wash the baby. A houseboy brings a bucket of water. Luharni shows with her hands how the baby was turned around and she had to straighten it out. 'It was turned like this, so I had to turn it to come out backwards. It is easier if it comes out upside down and facing this way.' Raju wants more water so I pour her some into a vessel that I thought she had not touched. As I test the temperature of the water with two fingers Ama slaps my hand. I was wrong; Raju had touched the vessel and now I am polluted. To cleanse the impurity Ama cups some water in her hand,

touches it to her gold earring to purify it, then sprinkles it on me. Raju laughs. Ama is not happy.

Preparations are made for Luharni to spend the night. Ama gives her a new basket and some freshly cooked vegetables before she sleeps. They put bedding together for her in the anteroom. As she leaves she says to Raju 'Now you are a Luharni'!, and laughs. What she means is that now she is untouchable, just like women of Luhar caste."

This long passage is included because it illuminates the danger of impurity, and is an event of cooperation between low- and high-caste women which the former controls (and is well paid for). It conveys the 'moment' of impurity, when the baby emerges from the womb and is visible. While the infant is inside, it is still connected to the mother. Pollution is associated with an assertion of 'individuality' on both the mother and the infant's part. There is danger at the moment impurity, and for ten days following it. The danger is associated with the real danger of death of either the infant and/or the mother. Danger is also associated with transgression, the breaking of the dyad of a woman pregnant with a child in her womb. The mother and the child are considered in a state of ritual impurity.

The impurity of childbirth is shown in the description above to be culturally malleable in that the impurity of the birth is analogous to the impurity of the untouchable midwife, Luharni.

Post-Partum Rituals

Post-partum rituals involve symbolic 'humanizing' of the infant who until this time is not considered fully human. The rituals include the naming ceremony, *nuaran*, and the rice-eating ceremony, *pasnay*. The naming ceremony occurs ten days after the child's birth, when the mother and baby are no longer in a polluted state. The ceremony is meaningful to the parents because the mother is, on this day, officially finished with the requisite period of impurity, and the father (as well as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and all other kin) holds his child for the

first time. The *bamin* performs the ceremony for low-castes, although a Brahmin is asked to give the child its name. A name is chosen according to the time of birth, with particular emphasis placed on the day and month. This name is written on a piece of cloth or corn husk and first whispered into the child's ear, then told to all present. The minimal participants are the mother, the father, the grandparents, an aunt who acts as a sponsor, and the priest. Many other people may attend.

Most, but not all, families of low caste observe *pasnay* or "rice-eating" in which a five to seven-month old infant is given its first solid food. However, one Damai woman fed her seven-month old son rice for a month without observing *pasnay*. The mother said she was not interested in performing rice-eating which requires calling a *bamin* and paying him in rice and/or cash. She simply began feeding the baby rice at her own discretion. I asked other Damai women if they, too, skipped the rice-eating ceremony, and they said no, they all performed it.

Women do not drink cow's or buffalo's milk after giving birth, nor do they eat green vegetables. The people of Bhalara do not believe that drinking milk will stimulate lactation. Rather they believe that the woman produces milk with the aid of ghee, a highly refined and expensive dairy product. Post-partum women eat unusually large amounts of ghee, much more than is normally fed to any single family member, and at a large expense to the family. Men boast their wealth by describing how much ghee a wife consumed after birth. Ghee is a precious and expensive commodity since it is the final product of milk processing and is considered the most ritually pure food product used frequently in *puja*. Ghee is a highly coveted food. Curiously, women claim they cannot remember how much ghee they ate. "Ask my *saasu* [mother-in-law]. She is the one who fed me". Deferring the question to in-laws avoids giving a potentially politically incorrect answer. To say she received alot would

imply she is aware of preferential treatment. To say she was denied ghee would show dissatisfaction with her in-laws. So, the mother-in-law provides the answer.

Thus, ghee acts a metaphor of relationship between mother-in-law, son, wife, and husband. Since a man's mother cares for his post-partum wife, he uses the symbol of ghee to describe how generous and nurturing his mother is to his wife. Since mother- and daughter-in-law relations are often conflicted, the man, through his discourse, attempts to deny these facts and paint a positive picture. Ghee is a key metaphor of the woman's new maternal status, her success at childbearing, and the generosity of the patriline. A public image of a unified and prosperous lineage is embodied in the symbol of ghee.

Raising Children: Conflicted Views on Motherhood

The demands of nursing infants restricts a woman's capacity to work for longer than two hours away from home and from other travel. Infants are nursed on demand by the mother until at least the age of two. Every three to four hours the infant must be nursed, thus disrupting long-term work in the fields and long excursions with female friends and relatives into the forest for firewood and fodder. Nursing mothers' capacity to do physical labor that requires strength is not limited, though, since this work by its nature – work such as carrying manure to the fields or hauling grain from freshly cut fields – does not usually involve alot of time away from home. Other work like carrying water, cooking, washing clothes and dishes, and certain kinds of short-term fieldwork are continued by women with infants and toddlers. Women say that children limit their travel. Inevitably, *maiti* visits decrease after children are born: "How can I go anywhere with all of these children?" Women are reluctant to ask their mothers-in-law to care for their children because they do not want to be indebted to them. Nonetheless, the mother-in-law

may spend considerable time caring for her grandchildren while the mother works in the fields.

The expectation that a mother be the primary caretaker of her children, and that this role entails diminished mobility than those without young children, is represented in a local expression, *chelaghaalya*, a "woman with babies". The people of Bhalara draw on the image of a woman with nursing babies who must remain at or near the home. One of my assistants, Madan, used this expression when he was asked one day if he had recently travelled with his nephew's wedding party. He answered: "No, with having to do Miss' [my] work I am like a woman with babies". He regretted that the work keeps him close to the area and prevents him from travelling, though, like the woman with babies who will see them grow to adulthood, Madan appreciates the fruits of his labor, namely a monthly paycheck. Still, he would have liked to go with the party if he had a choice. But like the woman with babies crying to be fed, Madan had no choice.

The people of Bhalara say it is impossible to raise children without mothers. The father may be absent, but the loss of the child's mother through death or abandonment is a crisis that must be overcome quickly through the father's remarriage. Even in-laws are not considered adequately prepared to take on the full responsibility of raising a motherless child. The love and nurturing of the mother is idealized. In poetry, literature, film, folklore, and mythology, mother's love is a special kind of love that is the prototype of all other love.

Mothers are responsible for the moral upbringing of their children. A child with *naraamro baani*, bad behavior, is considered the product of a bad mother. Such a mother perhaps did not nurse the child often enough or take care of it when it was ill. In fact, a mother is often blamed

for the death of a child through her real or imagined neglect.[7] Women are usually very happy about their first child, whether it is male or female. The intensity of the love for the first child was beautifully expressed by a new Damini mother. Jankhola Damai, a 25-year old woman who lived in India with her parents when she was young (and the only literate low-caste woman in the area), gave birth to a son after I had been in the village a year. One day she told me what her child means to her:

"This child is everything to me. Even though my parents are far away in India and I have no one at my *maiti*, this baby is 'everybody'; all the love I need to give and to receive is in this baby. Whenever I feel any suffering I can simply look at the baby's face and become happy".

She has reason to seek her sole source of happiness in her baby; her husband is in India, and her in-laws are very demanding of her.

The raising of children by women, and their affection for them, is not a 'natural' process, nor one characterized by consistent discipline. Rather, the intense love and meaning they have for the child comes from a situation in which they are alone in their husband's household, having been uprooted from their *maiti*. In contrast to American culture where separation from parents during late adolescence and early adulthood is 'rewarded' with substitute opportunities for developing intimacy with

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[7] There was one Thakuri family who tolerated the death of one of their newborns through the mother's intentional neglect of the baby. They were my friends; the grandmother called me "daughter", and the brothers called me sister. So when I heard of their new baby, I asked on several occasions to see it. They kept postponing. One day while at their house I heard the baby crying, even though their excuse that day was that the baby was sleeping. So I insisted on seeing my 'niece'. The grandmother became serious, and explained to me: "We really want you to see the baby but I have to tell you something first. The baby has no eyes". She did not use the Nepali word for blind, but said literally that it had no eyes. She reluctantly brought the child out. Where there should have been eyes there were simply indentations on the face. It was impossible to hide my shock, which was exacerbated by the emaciated and sickly condition of the baby. At that moment I realized that the baby was being slowly starved by its mother who claimed that the baby refused to nurse. It was a pathetic situation. The grandmother doubted that the baby would live; in fact, everyone was wishing its quick death. Such a handicapped child would be an intolerable burden on the family, or so they reasoned. Within a week the baby was dead.

other adults (usually spouses), the Nepalese woman, separated forever (except for occassional visits) from her parents at marriage, has few such opportunities to develop intimate relationships with her in-laws or her husband. Thus, the need to give and take love tends to be channelled into her children.

Certainly not all women profess infinite love for their children, or would talk about their children in the way Jamkhola does. In fact some resent their children because of the pain of childbirth, or their anger towards their husbands and in-laws, and because children are a burden that keeps them at home. Emotion associated with children is intensified due to a woman's life in the *ghar*. Jamkhola expressed this when she spoke of the child being a substitute for all that was lacking in her life.

Many women recognize that children can drain family resources, but there are few birth control options available to them. Limiting family size, though, is often desired by women. Goray Damai's wife Suntala feels that her large family is a burden on the family resources, and contributes to their poverty rather than eventually, through their labor, pulling them out of poverty. A few years ago Suntala decided she had too many children to care for on the family income and wanted to limit her family size. She tried birth control pills which made her bleed, were not administered properly, and did not prevent pregnancy. She gave birth to her eighth child while taking them. She despairs about the size of her family and how difficult life is when there are too many children:

"My life is very hard. There are too many children to take care of, eight at this point. I am over forty years old. We do not have any land to farm, and so my husband must sew clothing and earn enough money to buy food. But he has bad behavior these days. He smokes cigarettes instead of [free home grown] tobacco, and spends all of the money he earns on these types of things. We had land at one time, land that the king gave us, but it was not officially registered in our name. When the

king died some people [she gestures toward my landlord's house] took the land away from us. So now we have nothing.

Life is very difficult, alot of pain, because there are so many children to raise. Slowly they are leaving the house and going to other places. Three are in India working, and one has been in Mahendranagar working for a family there since he was small. About six years ago I took some of the family planning medicine that they had here in Kholi. Small pills in narrow, thin paper packets. There were maybe twenty to twenty-five in one packet. The doctor said that if I took the medicine then I would not have any children. So I took them for awhile, but then I just started bleeding. So much bleeding! I was really frightened. And then the medicine did not work because I had my eighth child, a son. So there are too many children to raise. Fortunately I have daughters-in-law to do some of the farm work. I usually stay home and watch the children and grandchildren. But I tried to not have any more. My husband was going to get a vasectomy but we heard that it was dangerous, that some men die from it, so we were afraid to do it. But since the pills did not work he has gotten a vasectomy. Life is very difficult. We are poor, we cannot get any land, and who knows what the future will be like".

The Meaning of Son Preference

In the matrix of beliefs surrounding the preference for sons in Bhalara, we see that the 'male' (as sons) comes to stand for the collective (patriline and honor) different from the 'female' (daughter). Son preference in South Asia is not culturally unique; the vast majority of patrilineally organized cultures exhibit ideological, cultural, economic, and social preferences for sons. Thus son preference has become a key symbol for patriarchy itself. But the discourse on son preference cannot remain critically unexamined because we must ask about the role of women in an ideology founded on their seeming exclusion. Simple dismissal of son preference as synonymous to structural patriarchy diminishes the complexity of beliefs, realities, fears, and hopes parents experience at the birth of a daughter.

Bennett's elucidation of the Nepalese dual concepts of the "sacred daughter" versus the "dangerous wife" is, at the level of religious ideology and practice, consistent with the culture of Bhalara (1983). However, in emphasizing this dimension, Bennett neglects contrary values associated with the daughter. The daughter, like the wife, is also "dangerous" to a patriline, only it is her father's and not her

husband's patriline. Because of her gender, her birth is not auspicious, though as an event the birth is auspicious. The daughter's birth is marked by sadness and fear – sadness that a son was not born and that the life of the daughter will be difficult, and fear because she is a potential threat to the honor of the parent's patriline. The "danger" of the wife that Bennett discusses involves threat to patrilineal prosperity whereas the daughter is a potential threat to her parent's patrilineal honor through her pre-marital (sexual) behavior. The daughter is expected to be chaste and obedient so that her marriage will not be difficult to arrange.

After the birth of the high-caste daughter described above, the disparaging comments were abundant. The mother said that her efforts were hardly worth it, and other villagers said that it was really too bad that Raju had a daughter and not a son. But the people of low-caste explained that they do not think this way about the different value of a son and a daughter. Two women, Okheda and Sarki, talked with me about this one afternoon. They explained that a son, for the people of high-caste, is seen as a son of the entire village since so many people are related as brothers. The Sarkini differentiated lower caste practice from those of the high-caste, saying "For us, it does not matter if a son or a daughter is born. We do not have land or high-caste honor to give to a son, anyway. So for us a daughter and a son are the same."

The two most frequent reasons parents give for the preference of sons over daughters are that sons take care of the parents when they are old, and the son presides over one's funeral. In order to reach heaven, a son is necessary to light the funeral pyre; without a son, one may not reach heaven. When asked why sons are preferred over daughters, ironically most Nepalese fathers talk about the untrustworthy nature of unrelated males. The most succinct explanation of this was given by a man from

Piket, Shiva Bahadur. Our conversation took place on the afternoon he received a letter from his wife in India. She is originally from near Bhalara but has been living in India since she married Shiva and they moved there for employment. She is educated. The letter brought him the news he had been waiting for – his wife had delivered. But, it was a girl. Shiva was at first not pleased; he even insulted his nephew who had rushed over with the letter to tell him and shouted the news when Shiva read it from the letter. He eventually recovered, and had this to say about why the people of Bhalara do not welcome daughters' births:

"The life of a daughter is very difficult. We love daughters more than sons, and that is why we are sad when they are born because we know their lives will be difficult. The men and boys of this area are naughty, *badmaasi*. They cannot be trusted. We fear for the honor of our daughters. That is why we aren't happy [when a daughter is born]. The daughter eventually goes to another's house when married, and if her husband is not good then we are sad. But we cannot do anything about it."

This passage represents well the dialectic between the gender system and society which generates a bias against the birth of daughters and a higher value placed on sons over daughters. Shiva's description of general attitudes towards a daughter's birth derives from prior knowledge about how society and men will treat her. Daughters may be steered off the path of proper behavior by seductive males, yet their trangressions threaten patrilineal honor. Shiva, as a father, shows concern that other men may damage the honor of his daughter and, as a consequence, the honor of his own family. His love for his daughter is unaffected by society and men, but he expects difficulty because no male is to be trusted when it comes to a man's daughters. Since Shiva is both a father and a husband he, in effect, projects his own attitudes (and behavior) about females onto other males.

The important point is that the cultural value is not one of dislike of daughters (and, by extension, all females), nor that individual parents dislike daughters. Rather society, through the family and its ideology

of honor, generates its own fears about the daughter. This is captured in Shiva's reference to honor and reputation, family-based and collective values; to say he fears for the honor of his "daughter" is to say he fears for the honor of his family. The daughter stands for the collective.

It is clear that the issue of son preference involves family honor and its associated meaning of daughters. Much has been written about the relationship between daughters and family honor in a variety of societies (Schneider 1971; Blok 1974; Brandes 1980; Campbell 1964; Davis 1983). However, there are no studies for South Asian society that explicitly address the question of the relationship between honor, the family, society, and gender; numerous studies, in passing mention of either honor or gender, connect the function of codes of proper female behavior with the cultural concept of honor, but these studies do not elucidate the issue of honor and gender. It appears that the cultural construction of honor that confronts us in the South Asian context resembles honor in other cultures. What is similar is an ethos of the collective – whether the Sicilian or Andalusian patriline (Blok 1974; Brandes 1980), the European peasant family (Pina-Cabral 1986), or Mediterranean pastoralists (Schneider 1971) – that is generated by its family members, with a particular emphasis on the sexuality of women. The burden of honor for women is apparent in the culture of Bhalara. Its narrative begins at birth. Parents do not fear threats to family honor when a son is born. On the contrary, honor is a direct 'product' of having borne a son. A son's birth is celebrated with the firing of rifles and a large communal feast. But the daughter's birth is quiet and unrecognized. Shiva said that even if he had a feast no one would come because "there is nothing to celebrate". It is important to realize that this lack of celebration says more about society's marking of females than it does about the <u>value</u> of the person. The girl's birth is not made

public. Like her life, she is kept hidden and, in the future, her status and identity will be inferred (through identification with a husband), as it is at her birth. There is no celebration for the community, no public display of prestige.

Unlike the indisputable honor of sons, the daughter's honor is ambiguous and emergent. The (future) honor of daughters cannot be determined and must be earned. Correspondingly, the honorable thing to do at a daughter's birth is to <u>not</u> celebrate. Daughters, like their honor, are hidden: their birth, while not secluded, is certainly not made public. Contrast this veiling of the daughter's birth to the firing of rifles and the thronging of well-wishers to the public feast celebrating the birth of a son. It is in every way a public event. The girl's birth is not. Like emergent female honor, patrilineal power is enhanced through the presence of loyal, fertile wives who bear offspring that are unquestionably the property of the patriline.

CONCLUSION: GENDER AND CASTE, THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A RELATIONSHIP

Introduction: Defining Concepts

The preceding chapters described and interpreted many aspects of the lives of people of low-caste. The focus on women of low-caste anchored the discussion to a position from which multiple trajectories of inquiry were pursued – low-caste women in relation to their male counterparts, and to the men and women of high-caste. The purpose of this approach was to accurately reflect the complexity of social and material relations within which low-caste people act and live. That they do act, in spite of the culture's and my own reification of hierarchical structure, was hopefully not lost. Action, as a part of low-caste personhood, was drawn out through the inclusion and analysis of short and long narratives that depict women's and men's religious beliefs, the value they place on the work that they do, and the history of their resistance to ideological and material domination by upper castes; descriptions of emotional experience around the vulnerability of marriage, the state of poverty, and sexuality; and attention to the 'person' as well as the 'gendered' aspect of uniquely female experiences of childbirth.

I restate the subjectivity of action, and the importance of it in contextualizing 'structure' and 'social organization', because I now turn to these latter two conceptual domains in the remaining conclusions. In this final chapter I propose a framework for examining gender in its relationship with caste. I draw from the work of Marilyn Strathern (1988) and her exegesis of the 'embeddedness' of gender within society according to its rules, structure and practice. Strathern discusses how gifts in Melanesian culture encompass essential features of social organization and social relationships. For example, Strathern argues that people are interested in gifts in order to expand social

relations, as opposed to a commodity oriented economy, in which people's interest in commodities is a desire to appropriate goods (Strathern 1988,143). The concept analogous to Strathern's gift in this study of the culture and society of gender among the people of Bhalara is caste, as caste stands for differentiating and ranking practices and images. What I will discuss in this remaining chapter is, to paraphrase Strathern's work, the 'gender of the caste', and I will draw from her theoretical formulations on the 'gender of the gift' to accomplish this. But first, the concepts involved in Strathern's model must be defined. These are reification, autonomy, and appropriation.

In the following analysis I use the concepts of reification, autonomy and appropriation to describe the relationship between gender and caste, specifically, how the culture of Bhalara presents them. Reification is a process of "presenting 'things' ... as people assume they ought to be" because these things (such as caste and gender) are deemed important and relevant to the social order and social processes (Strathern 1988,189). Caste and gender are instruments of reification that present the disordered array of persons as ranked and ordered. Caste reification is apparent in the culture of Bhalara when persons emphasize the purity, honor, 'bigness', 'occupation' or dharma associated with a caste rank. Gender reification is apparent in the culture of Bhalara when attributes implicitly or explicitly assigned to one of the two sexes are drawn out to make certain points. Reification is, therefore, a cultural practice engaged in by actors to draw certain distinctions among groups, using the culture's ideas about those groups. It need not involve rank; in Bhalara, however, it often does. In the text I have distinguished cultural from analytical reification as being analogous to the distinction between emic and etic; in other words, the analytical necessity of (over)emphasizing gender as caste is validated through its cultural value.

Next to be defined is the concept of autonomy. Here I wish to use this concept at a level of abstraction above its commonplace meaning, that of the extent to which an individual exercises control over herself vis a vis other social actors (Stoler 1977). I am not interested here in the actual autonomy of persons, but in the culture's rendering of gender – as a symbol, an idea, a group, a system, a hierarchy – apart from other similar domains of ideas, such as, in this discussion, caste. In other words, I will be asking, To what degree and in which contexts is gender kept apart as a separate concept – as autonomous, conceptually – from caste, and to what degree is it implicated in the structure and function of caste? What follows, then, is not a discussion of which gender is more autonomous than the other; it is a discussion of the autonomy of gender as a social and cultural construct, and a discussion of the contexts in which the people of Bhalara manipulate or 'appropriate' gender. That one sex or one caste may be more or less autonomous than the other can only finally be determined by examining how the general category is treated by the culture. When we see what constitutes the boundaries and nature of dependency and autonomy of the categories, we can determine, on the culture's own terms, who is most able to redefine those boundaries, and what the consequences are. A subtext to this study is the question of low-caste women's greater social and economic autonomy vis a vis high-caste women. Without knowing how gender and caste themselves move in and out of their own boundary-making projects, we cannot answer the question.

The social goal of (momentarily) setting gender apart from other domains is to allow for its own reification. By forcing gender into particular forms, society then appropriates it in certain ways. The focus throughout this study has been to see how gender is appropriated into caste paradigms such that the two take on a project of mutual

constitution; both 'complete' their projects of differentiation and rank.

The autonomy of gender is asserted in the culture of Bhalara in various contexts and discourses. The unity of females against males, often conceptualized in antagonistic modes such as the threatening nature of affinal women to the patriline or the danger of male sexual desire to virginal girls, is one such example. Here, caste is not an issue; the meaning of ordering the two sexes in such ways does not involve ideas of caste hierarchy. Hence, caste and gender do not, in these situations and contexts, have no "relationship"; gender is autonomous as a semiotic domain. The unity of females is not always antagonistic vis a vis males, however; the relationship can be representational of difference between the two sexes. For example, as female is identified by the people of Bhalara with *parma* labor, domestic work, biological functions (menstruation, childbirth, breastfeeding), the meaning that is conveyed is not in conflict with but in 'difference' to male (the 'work' of women, the *jaat* of female). Another discourse of gender that the people of Bhalara lay claim to occurs in the domain of sexuality, when male and female use the metaphor of sexuality to distinguish their roles in the development of the fetus, or in sexual intercourse.

Gender as a conceptual domain is radically autonomous in those instances when the plural 'woman' asserts herself as an 'individual' person. What is 'radical' about the latter assertion of autonomy by gender is that it escapes reification. The consequence, I argue in the last section, is redefinition of the social relations that originally constituted the plural person.

In contrast to the autonomous existence of gender as a conceptual domain are those contexts when it is actually in the appropriated service of

other cultural considerations. These include the gender division of labor, honor, prestige, *dharma*, *paap*, caste (hierarchy, exclusion, differentiation), domination, and class.

The boundaries established through the assertions of gender come originally from the presupposing relations that constitute the female as a person. Gender does not do original work; rather gender ideas draw from what is already there in the culture and in the society. The notion of 'inevitability' contained in the concept of caste, and its application to both caste and gender (and all other living beings), clues us into how embedded the idea of 'constituted person' is in South Asian culture. One cannot escape one's gender or caste. Thus, gender's autonomy is relative to those prior relationships.

Review of Chapters

The goal of this study has been to expand our ideas about how society, culture, and gender are mutually constituted (rather than amorphously "interrelated"). "Society" is an abstract idea; it must be defined, in whatever partial or whole manner, before proceeding with an argument. In Chapter 2, I substituted caste hierarchy for society, justifying this by way of what I call 'cultural reification'. The significance of hierarchy to the people of Bhalara in how they conceptualize their world (as one of hierarchy and differentiation, at most points, rather than one of sameness and equality of value). As stated above, caste is an instrument of reification that says the 'way things ought to be' to the people of Bhalara is ranked.

In Chapter 3, I drew into the model the dimension of landholding differences among castes. Admittedly, class is not systematically developed, but is used as an analytical tool to demonstrate the economic dependence of lower caste households on landowning upper castes. Class

remains underdeveloped for the practical reason that this is a preliminary study that, in effect, tests the waters of relevance of various domains of culture and society in western Nepal. In its unfolding, other 'variables' besides gender and caste emerge as significant to social organization, such as age, education, birth order, migration history, household development cycle, and marital history, to name a few. I consider these underdeveloped issues as work for the future.

Class is also not developed for certain ethnographic reasons. Unlike the uses the culture makes of gender and caste to differentiate and separate, the culture of the people of Bhalara does not use class differences to order, differentiate, and separate groups of people. Put another way, the people of Bhalara do not themselves mark class differences as they do caste and gender differences. If, as Strathern (1988,180) states "separations [differentiation] are intrinsic to the ability to perceive ('personify') relations", the relations the people of Bhalara are intent on perceiving are those dealing with caste rank and gender. Furthermore, "the relations are only recognized if they assume a particular form" (180); one does not recognize 'male' or 'female', or 'high-caste' or 'low-caste' unless they are forced into the forms the culture wants them into. This is what Marriott and Inden mean when they state that caste units are necessarily "defined by" occupation, descent, and marriage (1974). Thus, caste and gender are of the same level of cultural apperception. Class, even in its 'cultural' form of land, is not of this level, it is not emergent nor 'invented' nor reified, nor do the Nepalese force actual differences in landholding into other forms necessary to the differentiation of persons or groups. In Bhalara, it so happens that the privilege of caste has brought with it the privilege of property. But the culture does not need it to be

that way. This is not to say the parallel is coincidental or has not been resisted.

The culture does, however, reify 'occupation', as found in high-caste assertions that low-caste are 'service' castes. The upper caste notion that the low-caste person ought not to be a farmer (when in actuality they <u>are</u> farmers) is an aspect of caste ideology, and not an aspect of class ideology (though the former has served the latter well), even though it is used to justify land acquisition practices. The facts of landholding are incidental to the cultural construction of caste; they are not, however, incidental to the reproduction of the low-caste household, and are therefore integral to the study. Furthermore, it is because people do not have to see class in this form that allows for its resistance, and provides the possibility of lower-caste people breaking out of poverty. Thus, in fully discussing what I have called "everyday forms of dominance", it was necessary to bring class into the picture. In the following discussion I turn to the practice and embeddedness of gender within caste and class relations.

<u>Gender, Caste, and the Value of Labor: Productive and Reproductive Work</u>

To appreciate the dominating effect of caste over the peasant economy of Bhalara in general, and individual households in particular (and ultimately the members of those households), in Chapter 3 I chronicled the history of low-caste landlessness, the development and expansion of dependent *riti-bhagya* relations between low- and high-castes, and the practices of land rental. The record shows that the means and practices by which the low-caste household is reproduced today are limited and shaped by a history of material domination. It is by force of this history (as opposed to the ahistorical force of Hindu dogma) that intercaste economic relations between households and their members, and intercaste differences in household reproduction, are realized. At all

points in the realization and practice of these social phenomenon, gender is a factor. Let us turn first to conclusions about gender, household provisioning, and intercaste economic relations, the focus of chapter three.

The dependence of the people of low-caste on landowning high-castes situates the low-caste household in a less autonomous position of material reproduction vis a vis their high-caste counterparts. Within the domain of work we see gender difference apparent within the division of labor, in rates of pay, in the frequency of work and leisure activities, and in the greater heterogeneity of women's work over men's.

In its relationship with economic status of the household, gender becomes a dimension of a structural arrangement that sets the low-caste women apart from the high-caste women. The economic status of the low-caste household – one of complete or near landlessnes, and one whose members must trade their artisan commodities or their labor for food – confers social and economic autonomy on its women. By autonomy is understood the ability to determine the nature and meaning of one's actions, regardless of other forces. The Nepalese of Bhalara directly acknowledge the value of the productive work of low-caste women, not least of which is through the continuous demand for their labor and its direct cash and in-kind payments. Unlike high-caste women, whose work is not recognized, who may not seek waged employment, and whose honor (and the honor of their men) is measured by their <u>not</u> "going here and going there" to work for others, the labor of low-caste women, whether on the family farm or in the employ of others, is not hidden, concealed, or mystified into something else or someone else's effort. Even though in many respects the actual work done by lower- and upper-caste women is not different, the appropriated form of gender by class in intercaste

relations of production differentiates lower caste from upper caste women.

Within the context of productive work, caste appropriates gender in order to reify its own notion of 'low-caste'. Because of their work, they are "low-caste" women; part of their caste identity derives from recognition by the culture of the kind of work they perform. As stated above, 'occupation' (in the case of men, artisan work, and in the case of women, artisan, service, and employment work) is a necessary attribute of being low-caste. Furthermore, caste, through the *riti-bhagya* system, determines types of work, and for whom it is done. By this feature alone the work of low-caste women is put into the circulation of products directly, untransformed. It nearly appears that the women of lower caste, as in the western model of 'exploitation', "own what they do, that is, their own capacity to labor" (Strathern 1988,157), and thus are not 'exploited'. The difference between the western and the Nepalese model, however, lies in the assumption of an 'individual' in the first model which we cannot assume in the Nepalese model (Marriott 1989). Therefore I draw no conclusions regarding 'exploitation'.

The productive demands made on women of low-caste originate in the state of poverty, they do not originate from the prestige demands of men, as in the case of upper caste women. Low-caste women sell their labor to supplement their limited income from family farm production and harvest shares from *riti*. The facts of their economic contribution to the household are supported by the culture not masking lower caste women's labor. There is not what Strathern calls a "concealment" or "transformation" of the labor into something other than what it is (155). Rather low-caste women's labor is exposed as they move from their fields to the fields of others, from one *riti* to the next, asking for

payment, work, and food. The extreme example is the work of the Baadi woman whose performance and prostitution are masked only by the symbols of her ornate performance dress.

Once gender is situated within the categories of work, the value of the work is construed through caste and its complimentary set of values regarding gender, honor, and the patriline. Here we must acknowledge the indigenous method of discriminating and distinguishing among acts and persons based on relative ritual impurity. Like the system of honor, the system in which acts and persons engender more or less impurity or inauspiciousness operates at many complex levels in Bhalara, but is embodied in one word, *chow*, impure. The touch of those lower in caste rank than oneself, menstruating women, birth, death, and the artisan work that lower caste men (and to a certain extent women) engage in are examples of *chow*, impure. Just as frequently as we find acts or states of women to be 'impure' we find the work of men is also impure. Men's relationship to the land is to alter and transform it, to disrupt its natural form in ploughing. Processes that involve the disruption of a substances' natural state (gold- and silversmithing, for example), are impure forms of work.

Low-caste men are engaged as equally if not more than women in the work by which their caste is impure. Thus, to a certain extent, men of low-caste bear the burden of impurity of caste more than their women. Insofar as the (male) goldsmith, ironsmith, potter, and leatherworker transform nature, they engage in impure activities. Thus, the value of labor in the Hindu context comes not from any inherent quality of the producer her or himself, but from the work as its relative purity is construed through the same principles that organize caste.

To here I have argued that the degree to which a lower caste man's honor resides in the reproductive and productive services of his wife are curtailed by caste and class in the lower caste household. There is one social arena in which gender distances itself from both caste and class, and that is reproductive labor. Women in both high- and low-caste households do the vast majority of reproductive/domestic work. The work is the same – caring for children, cleaning, cooking – and there is no apparent caste-based difference in value of the work. How do we understand the complete association of domestic work to women? We have to turn to the language of work and labor to understand, specifically the idea of value of work in relation to the claims to one's own and others' labor. Who or what determines the value of the work rests in who has claim over the products of that work (Strathern 1988). To the extent that one's rights to one's labor can apply, one is acting as an individual. This notion corresponds to Stoler's use of autonomy, as applied to women's work in Java (Stoler, 1977). To the extent that one does not have claims to one's labor, one is acting on behalf of the collective(s). I use the plural because in Bhalara, there are several collectives with overlapping interests and ideologies: the patriline (*daaju-bhai*), the caste (*jaat*), the household (*moe*), and the family, (*pariwaar*).

Using this framework we can distinguish the different values of productive and reproductive work. I have established that the productive work of low-caste women is directed toward the household and its provisioning. While the patriline, particularly its male members, also makes claims to productive work, these claims are incomplete in the lower caste household due to caste and class interests. What of reproductive work? To which collectives is this work directed such that claims to services can be made? In chapter five I argued that the claims men make on a woman's reproductive services in the lower caste household

rests in a prior set of values that define 'female' as the composite site of her relationships. Thus, the 'claims' men make are only possible through a prior asymmetrical relationship between husband and wife in which the one doing the reproductive work, the 'wife', is also, according to these values, 'lower' than the husband. Put another way, it is 'wife' and 'mother' doing the reproductive work, not 'woman' (since daughters and elder mothers-in-law, for example, are not so required). It is such cultural levels or distinctions that require us, an anthropologists, to distinguish the cultural meanings of women's productive work from her reproductive work. Therefore what appears as an exploitative arrangement at a material level is also a cultural one in which the meaning of gender, as a symbolic system, is asserted. Working, in a sense, against the political implications of women's lack of concommitant claims over men's labor is the fact that the work women perform is valued by the culture because it serves the gender paradigm, it is 'what women (in the case of reproductive work, wives and mothers) do' (as distinct from what 'men do'). As discussed earlier, this assertion of gender symbolism is construed through other symbolic systems, such as those of the patriline and caste issues of honor, prestige, and purity of *jaat*.

But this is not the end of the story for reproductive work. I now turn to an alternative set of meanings associated with reproductive work as we find them transposed onto the practice of selling daughters. Here we find the gender paradigm, as reified above, appropriated further by caste such that patrilineal claims on lower caste women's labor is curtailed.

Reproductive Labor and Selling Daughters: Another Look

One form of prestige low-caste men access is the wedding. Symbolic reference in marriage rituals to the husband's privilege over the wife

are supported by his legitimate claims to her services, productive and reproductive. We can look to this aspect of Nepalese culture in understanding the significance and meaning of the preponderance of female-based reproductive work. We have established that a woman's service to her husband's patriline is one 'rightful' claim of the husband. The product of those services that involve women in food preparation, cooking, cleaning, feeding others, is precisely other family members: a woman (not a man) shapes them, through her work, into the *jaat*, the patriline, the household, the *moe*. In upper caste *kanyadaan* marriage, though, the product of a woman's reproductive or domestic labor, her daughter, is alienated from her, not in the simple fact of the daughter's departure, but in the idealization of her 'gift' status. The gift of the daughter in the *kanyadaan* marriage, the most prestigious and ideal form, mystifies the work that went into producing the daughter, namely the reproductive work of the women in a household. Although both the father and mother participate equally in the rituals of marriage, and in those associated with the 'gifting', namely washing the daughter's feet, and presenting her with wedding gifts, marriage is often talked about as the father's prestige. This is due to the fact that he is the 'owner' of the property that made the material aspects of the marriage possible. Thus we find in a daughter's *kanyadan* wedding the concealment of women's labor. *Kanyadan* marriage thus promotes the prestige of the parents, but in promoting the prestige of the patriline, as marriage also does, there is an unequal weight on the side of the men. Thus, the mother's labor of bearing and raising the daughter is transformed into 'merit' and 'honor', something which it was not originally.

When we contrast upper caste *kanyadan* marriage with the practice of selling daughters in low-caste families, we see that women's work 'reproducing' the daughter is not transformed into some other form, nor

is it concealed. Here, the parents are determining a value for what is not normally an 'object' of valuation, the daughter. In a culture that asserts there should not be, at the time of marriage, a value placed on the daughter, to do otherwise sets in opposition the labor distinctions I made above regarding the mother's labor. The mother's labor in 'producing' the daughter is not mystified as merit or as 'gift'. Indeed, mothers are quite 'rational' in justifying their selling daughters – "We have raised her, but now we must send her away. So why should we not take money for her"? This alternative form of marriage and its systematic practice rests in low-caste's inability to access those avenues of prestige available to the upper castes.

What is the effect of selling daughters on relationships between families? Answering this requires examining the difference in commodity versus gift exchange. Here the work of Gregory (1982) is useful. He distinguishes commodity from gift exchange as categories that "refer to the organization of relations. Commodity exchange establishes a relationship between the objects exchanged; gift exchange establishes a relationship between the exchanging subjects. In a commodity oriented economy, people thus experience their interest in commodities as a desire to appropriate goods; in a gift oriented economy, the desire is to expand social relations." (quoted in Strathern 1988,143). According to this formulation, low-caste families who sell daughters at marriage compromise the opportunity to expand on social relations. Marriage in South Asian culture is normally understood to create two somewhat conflictual sets of asymmetrical relations. One is the greater ritual status of the donor, and the other, in opposition to it, is the greater status of the recipient groom's family who stand in slightly higher caste status than the bride givers. Thus relations between in-laws are contradictory and simply avoided. In the alternative model of selling daughters, if the gift is voided, as in the case of selling daughters,

the hierarchy between families never emerges. Indeed, low-caste systematically eclipse the problem of in-law hierarchy by marrying with the *mamali*, the mother's natal home. Thus, selling daughters has the effect of eliminating the potential inequality between in-laws.

Gender, Caste and Sexuality

Corresponding to the reification of gender in reproductive work, gender is particularly culturally reified in the domain of sexuality. From the theoretical perspective that sexuality and sexual discourse are mediums through which the social order is recognized, antagonism and conflict between the sexes is frequently played out in sexual reference. Gender and caste mark differences between men and women within the construction of honor and sexuality.

These uses of sexual metaphor and antagonism serve to differentiate the sexes. In fact, the sexes remain physically separated because of sexual innuendo. Themes of women, honor, and honor's bearing on the household appear in the boundaries drawn between men and women. Caste interests in appropriating gender in this way lie in the fact that the ordering of caste is the ordering of legitimate sexuality. Furthermore, as we have seen above, the boundaries asserted by gender and caste derive from prior relationships, and are used to justify the boundaries of *dharma*, *paap*, impurity, and power.

On Persons, Collectives and Boundaries

The necessary distinction between the female sex (in its biological manifestation) and the female 'gender' (in its cultural and social manifestation) has been part of the analytical tools of gender research for some time. Strathern (1988) elaborates on the cultural and social manifestations of gender in her conceptualization of the female as person. By this is meant a socially constituted person, a "plural and

composite site of the relations that produced [her]". Thus, she stands not for female, but for lineage, wife, daughter, mother. In these representations her gender is subsumed by the relationship such that we have the *dharma*, *paap*, impurity, and honor of the wife or the mother or the daughter, not the woman. Each of these cultural ideas is constructed differently for each category of person; the daughter's impurity is not the equivalent of the wife's impurity.

Thus, the plural female or the female 'person' is a social female. When gender is used to differentiate male from female within these social categories it does so with reference to the codes from within those relationships: the wife's *dharma* is to serve the husband, the daughter's honor is to be obedient to the parents. An outcome of such assertions in the Hindu context is to differentiate the *jaat* of 'female' from the *jaat* of 'male': since this is the *dharma* of wife, it is also, by association, the *dharma* of female. However, this formulation is altered when it makes contact with the practice of caste, such that the *dharma* of the low-caste wife does not contain the same features as the *dharma* of the upper caste wife, as practiced in Bhalara. This is one way in which caste and gender mutually constitute new sets of relations.

Patrilineal interests continuously appropriate reified gender differentials. For example, son preference demonstrates how sons stand for the patrilineal collective in ways different from the daughter. The daughter's honor is emergent and ambiguous, but the son's is direct and presupposed. The public displays of prestige practiced by the high-castes at the birth of a son but absent from such low-caste births sets in relief an alternate model of patriarchy and patrilineal privilege that son preference otherwise implies. In the matrix of beliefs surrounding the preference for sons in Bhalara, we see that the 'male'

(as son) comes to stand for the collective (patriline and honor) differently than the 'female' (daughter).

Collective action in Bhalara is contrasted with the acts of plural persons. The collective involves a unity of persons in which differences are subordinated to the work of the collective. We find, in Bhalara, that these actions are directed towards patriline and household reproduction. The goal of these actions is honor, prestige, subsistence and provisioning, continuity, and, in the rituals of death, immortality. Various rituals are rituals of collectivity, and certain agricultural pursuits are collective pursuits. Examples from the text include marriage, *parma* labor, household rituals of birth and death, planting and harvesting, *kirtan* performances, and *maagnu* (begging, asking). All of these practices fall within the culture's concepts of *dharma*, honor, and merit.

Boundaries are drawn around collectives in a manner different from their circumscription around gender. Gender boundaries create opposition; there are only two possibilities, male and female, which at times assert features of analogy (females are kindhearted, males are rational; females transplant rice seedlings, males plough), and at times features of asymmetry (male is 'on the top', females are 'on the bottom'; men are fickle and unfaithful, women, trustworthy and monogamous). In contrast, boundaries around caste collectives are never analogies to one another; their guiding features are the processes of exclusion and inclusion, not difference. The social 'fact' of caste boundaries is rank and asymmetry. What differentiates caste society from other stratifying social systems is that there is no all-encompassing, non-differentiating collective (except, perhaps, the village), no assemblage of persons devoid of demarcating boundaries. Yet, there is an attribute of opposition within caste structure that the people of Bhalara recognize, and that is the

opposition between low- and high-caste. Low-castes have designations opposite to those of high-caste – 'small' *saano jaati*, 'low', *thalo jaati*, 'not touchable', *nachunay jaati*, 'service', *sayog garnay jaati*, as opposed to *tulo jaati*, big caste, *malo jaati*, top caste, *chunay jaati*, touchable caste.

There is a second form of collective action that, unlike those above, is not honorable and valued. These are actions that involve classes of persons who downplay differences to assert the whole. One example given in the text is the women's *jakram*, in which women as 'women' came together in a socially sanctioned way, to the exclusion of men, to mock men on the eve of a son's wedding. This collective action is not prestigious, though it is exceptionally meaningful. Thus, the autonomy of gender, away from its caste associations, is socially possible. The *jakram* bears no honor because it is persons mocking those relations by which they are constituted, and not because it is <u>women</u> performing. Thus, the *jakram* is transgression in the form of women acting as 'non-constituted', as individuals.

If the plural, composite person or individual is the site of multiple relationships and is conceptualized as such, what happens when a person breaks away from those relationships, or transgresses the normative codes associated with one's relationships? The example of the *jakram* is a socially sanctioned form because it remains collective in nature. The culture deals systematically with some transgressions, particularly those that are inevitable parts of human existence – birth, death, and menstrual impurity. Such persons are only temporarily marginalized; the impurity can be ritually removed, and the chaos resolved.

Low-Caste Women: Transgression, or Redefining Relationships?

There are many instances in which transgression of the social relationships that constitute the codes, markings, or 'identity' of the person are not systematically resolved through ritual action or other sanctioned action. Dominant and dominating ideologies are challenged by such actions. In the case of low-caste women, there is regular transgression of the ideal codes of relationship that constitute the female person. The obvious example is the Baadi prostitute who shuns the boundaries and behavior associated with the ideal Hindu woman. The Baadi transgress the boundaries of patriline, caste, and gender hierarchy by selling sex to men who are not their husbands, wearing the clothing of the upper, wealthy classes, mocking the moral economy of the peasants by stealing crops and not farming, and transgressing the boundaries of proper *riti-bhagya* relations by constantly begging for anything at any time. Baadi impurity and transgression are almost palpable.

That the Badini should show nearly complete disregard for patriline, lineage, descent, and the social order is not surprising given that they are themselves the composite site of transgressed codes and behaviors. This was made apparent one evening as the Baadi were performing for the community after being away for several months. A drunk Chetri appeared in their courtyard, and one Baadi, squinting to see who he was, jokingly said "Oh, I thought for a moment you were my dead father". Indeed, because of prostitution, no Baadi can ever truly know his or her own patriline; their lineage is always contestable.

The Badini are the most autonomous women in the community, by our standards. They come and go as they please, and answer to no one. Yet, like all other supposed states of freedom, their's is a myth. They are subject to extreme poverty.

Perhaps the most significant example of a systematic transgression of the relationships that constitute the person and that are the necessary markings of proper personhood within a collective is the low-caste practice of selling daughters in marriage. As described in chapter five, this form of marriage involves taking money for a daughter's wedding. This violates the gift quality of the ideal and prestigious form of marriage, *kanyadan*, thus altering the relationship between daughter and parents, and wife and husband from the ideal of hierarchy to more of symmetry.

Widow remarriage among low-castes, while not common, is also acceptable. Yet widow remarriage violates the principle of *patibharta*, that feature of women's *dharma* that prohibits sexual relations with anyone other than one's husband. This transgression, along with the next, threaten the solidarity and honor of the patriline. Certain codes of conjugal duty directed towards the household and patriline are equivocated by the women of lower caste. The example in the text is low-caste women not consuming their husband's impurity, as do high-caste women. One final type of transgression of gender codes is wage labor, which finds its transgression more in the fact that it is non-*parma* (and therefore non-ideal female reciprocal labor) than being paid work.

With such a large number of 'transgressions', it seems appropriate to conclude they are not so out of the ordinary or uncommon as the ideal would have them be. Rather, I suggest we see them as alternatives to the ideal codes of female behavior, codes that are premised on the model of the ideal upper caste female. That these might be thought of as alternatives leaves us with the conclusion that 'low-caste woman' is not an idea different from 'high-caste woman' simply because of the caste, but because there exists a different set of ideas attached to the 'woman' part as well. Through the mutual social and cultural

constitution of gender and caste, we find, in the case of the 'low-caste woman', a distinct social person.

GLOSSARY

The glossary contains all Nepali and Bajhangi words used in the text; it does not contain the definitions of words found in the Appendix lists.

aimaiko jaat	The "species" of female.
ainsi	New moon.
alchi	Lazy.
ang	Lit. "bone" of consanguinal kinship.
anyi	Sweet gifts of food presented to daughters.
artha	Wealth.
baar	Day.
baidya	Herbal doctor.
bamin	Low-caste priest; related to sponsoring family as the husband or nephew of the daughter.
ban	Jungle, dense forest.
barta	Religious vow or fast; hence, *patibarta* refers to a woman's vow or "fast" related to the husband.
barthaman	Initiation of upper caste males; given sacred thread; pre-nuptial ceremony in Bhalara.
bayshya	Prostitute.
bazar	Marketplace.
bhagwan	God.
bhagya	"Client". Low-caste family with inherited rights to harvest shares, payments, and charitable prestations from high-caste landowning families throughout the year.
Bhai Tika	Lit. "brother worship"; part of the autumn festival of Dasai during which sisters "bless" brothers with flower necklaces and forehead *tika*, and are given money in return.
bhitra	Inside.
bibaha	Marriage.
bidi	Small hand-rolled cigar.

buhari Daughter-in-law.

chaamal Husked rice.

chaiyo Shadow.

chalan Custom.

chamal Husked rice.

chia-paani Lit. "tea-water"; a small amount.

chinha Astrological chart drawn at one's birth, and matched for marriage.

chita bujnay To be satisfied.

choke lagda Cursed by another's jealousy.

choknay Pure, clean.

cholo Woman's blouse.

chori betchnay Lit. "selling daughters"; practice of requesting and receiving money by the bride's parents for a daughter's wedding.

chori pataunay Lit. "sending the daughter"; marriage.

chow Ritual impurity; "pollution"; state of being impure, or an object or person of impure state. same as *jutho*.

chulo Cooking hearth.

churi Daughter.

daaju-bhai Lit. "elder and younger brothers"; local conventional term for patriline.

daan khaannu Lit. "eat the gift"; less prestigious type of marriage arrangement than *kanyadaan*; refers to the request and acceptance of money by the bride's parents from the groom's parents for the daughter; "brideprice".

daijo Dowry.

dakshina Offering or gift made to those higher in ritual status, such as a daughter, a Brahmin priest, or a low-caste *bamin* priest.

dayaalu Kind-hearted.

debar Younger brother-in-law.

deora Line dancing by groups of women, men, or both.

deota	God.
dhaami	Shaman.
dhaan	Unhusked rice.
dhan	Wealth.
dharma	Duty; religious duty, caste duty, gender duty. Used in a variety of contexts, including ritual action, ethical behavior, and social position, and asociated with one's place in the order of the universe.
doko	Large carrying basket with forehead strap.
dosh manay	To respect and observe the effect of inauspiciousness.
dukkha	Suffering.
dume, dom	Refers to those of lower caste; derogatory term.
ekadaasi	First day of new month.
gaagri	Water vessel, made of brass, bronze or clay.
gaali garnu	To insult.
gauko manchay	Lit. "village people"; implies subsistence agriculturalists; peasants of Bhalara refer to themselves as village people, in opposition to those who live in cities.
ghar	House, home; a woman's husband's household members.
gharko ijat	Honor of the house, family.
ghee	Clarified butter.
gotra	Clan; an exogamous agnatic unit.
grhsta	Householder.
guna	Quality, as related to the defining qualities of *jaat*.
gunyo	Woman's full skirt.
gupha basnay	Lit. "sitting in a cave"; girl's menarchal 10-day period of seclusion.
haad	Lit. "bone" of consanguinal kinship.
hadelo	Tumeric root.

hakim	Professional.
haliya	Plough worker; refers also to land taken in exchange for ploughing another's fields.
hangsa	A pesons's spirit "voice" that travels while sleeping.
ijat	Honor, prestige.
ishta mitra	Relatives through marriage.
itcha	Desire.
jaari	Payment to a woman's husband in restitution for her eloping with a second man.
jaat	Generally used in the text to donote "caste", and frequently used with gender designations; is analogous to "species", and denotes a category comprised of persons or objects homogenously or analogously related.
jaatko ijat	Honor of the caste.
jaatra	Festival.
jakram	Women's satire, dance, and songfest performed on the eve of a son's wedding, from which all males are barred.
janai	Thread; refers to the sacred thread by men and women of upper caste.
janta	Groom's wedding party.
jeta	Eldest brother-in-law.
jetani	Eldest daughter-in-law.
jole	Liquid.
jotnu	To plough.
jutho	Ritual impurity; "pollution"; state of being impure, or an object or person of impure state.
jyala	Cash payment.
kaagaj leknay	Lit. "write a paper"; to have a transaction or ownership officially registered.
kaam	Work.
kancha	Youngest male.

kanyadaan	Lit. "gift of a virgin"; orthodox and most prestigious and ideal form of marriage.
karma	Actions, "fate" based on prior actions.
katha	Story.
kaytilai magnay	Lit. "ask for the girl"; request of marriage from the groom's matchmakers to the prospective bride's parents.
khalo maagnu	To ask, "beg" for a share of harvest from a *riti* at spring or autumn harvest.
khalo	Harvest share, rice or wheat; given to low-caste *bhagya* for products delivered and services rendered throughout the year to the harvesting family.
kheti khardnay	Dig and weed the soil.
kirtan	Semi-religious public performance of male singing and dancing.
komal	Gentle.
kota	Room.
kriya	Funeral rites.
kuldevta	Lineage god.
kumari	Virgin.
kurautay	"Matchmakers"; male relatives of the groom who negotiate the couple's wedding with her parents, including brideprice.
kuta dunay	Lit. "foot washing"; ritual washing of the feet in deference to their superior ritual status.
laaj	Shame, embarrassment, modesty, shyness.
laato	Stupid, ignorant.
lati	Wooden stick.
lekh	High-altitude forest; plateau.
lingam	Phallus, a symbol of Shiva.
lobi	Greedy, selfish.
lognayko jaat	The "species" of male.
maadal	Two-faced drum.
maagnu/maagnay	Ask, request, beg.
maalaa	Necklace of flowers.

maana	Unit of measure, approx. two cups.
maataji	Lit. "holy mother"; a wandering female ascetic or devoutly religious women.
maatya	Land rented as collateral on a loan.
madat	Help, assistance.
maiti	Woman's natal home; consanguinal relatives.
majaa	Pleasure.
malmaash	Mismatched or inauspicious days; corrupt.
mamali	Mother's natal home; preferred location for lower caste brides.
man	Heart, soul, spirit of a person.
mandala	Lit. "circle"; sacred space demarcated with a closed drawing; used to demarcate the "altar" of worship.
mangal	Auspicious song.
masal	Large wooden pole used for beating rice.
maya	Love; mother.
milnay	Lit. "match", as in matching astrological charts at marriage.
moe	Household; the collective of family members living the same house.
moe	Household.
naali	Unit of land measure, approx. half an acre.
naata maata	Possessions of value or significance
nachunay manchay	Lit. "not touchable person"; refers to the ritual impurity of persons of lower caste vis a vis higher caste people; refers to a person of lower caste.
nau graha puja	Lit. "worship of nine planets"; performed the evening before a wedding at the groom's house, to create auspiciousness.
-ni	"Female"; prefix added to a work to designate female; e.g., Badini refers to females of the Baadi *jaat*.
nimak	In-kind payment.

nuaran	Naming ceremony for newborns; occurs on tenth day after birth.
paap	Sin, transgression, or vice.
panchakanya	Lit. "five virgins"; five unmarried girls who perform ritual services during weddings and other life-cycle events.
pariwaar	Family.
parma	Female reciprocal labor.
pasnay	Ceremony to mark the first feeding of rice to the infant; occurs five months or six months after birth, if a girl or boy, respectively.
phokso haalnay	Carry organic fertilizer.
phutyo	Broken.
poil gaya	Elopement.
pothay	Necklace of glass and plastic beads.
puja	Worship or religious ceremony.
puphu	Paternal aunt.
purnima	Full moon.
pusta	Generation; approx. 18 years.
rakshina	Witch.
riti	"Patron". Generally high-caste landowning family with inherited rights to the products and services of low-caste families in exchange for harvest shares, payments, and charitable prestations throughout the year. May also include low-caste families who make labor exchanges with other low-caste clients.
riti-bhagya	Patron-client system and relationships within; close equivalent of *jajmani* system in India.
roti	Unleavened bread.
rtu satmya	Appropriateness of time and place.
saalay	Brother-in-law.
saano	Small.
saano jaati	Lit. "small caste"; refers to persons of lower caste.

saasuraa	Father-in-law.
saati banaunay	To make a friend.
sai rakayko	Lit. "to make a relation"; marital engagement.
samaaj	Society, community.
sayog garnu	Give service.
shakti	"Power", energizing principle, conceptualized as the power of the goddess; the female principle.
sharirik	From the body.
shriman	Husband.
shrimati	Wife.
sojo manchay	Lit. "straight person"; good, honest, sincere person.
subha	Auspiciousness. A condition of blessedness, merit, health, well-being, and happiness derived from the balanced and proper articulation of performances, actions, persons, and objects, with time and place.
sukkha	Happiness, well-being.
swabhaab	Disposition, character, or 'nature' based on one's *jaat*.
taapdaan	Wedding litter in which first the groom, then the bride is carried from her natal home to her husband's home.
talo jaati	Lit. "lower caste"; refers to persons of lower caste.
taruna	Sexually mature male.
taruni	Sexually mature female.
tayki	Wooden vessel used for storing milk and milk products.
thar	Clan or surname.
thulo manchay	Lit. "big person"; person of prestige and importance.
thulo	Big.
thulo kaam	Lit. "big work"; prestigious work.
tihar	Snacks or a meal of special sweet breads.

tika	A mark of blessing placed on the forehead; made of colored powder, water, and sometimes rice.
topi	Traditional male hat.
varna	The four major divisions in the orthodox caste system.

APPENDIX

Table A.1 Conceptions of Auspiciousness and Purity, by Caste

Key - low-caste/ high-caste

Event, activity, object *	Auspicious	Inausp.	Pure	Impure
birth (*janma*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	+ / +
death (*mrta*)	NA	+ / +	NA	+ / +
touch of low caste (*chunu*)	NA	+ / +	NA	+ / +
pilgrimmage (*tirtha*)	+ / +	NA	+ / -	NA
place of pilgrimmage (*tirthasthana*)	+ / +	NA	+ / -	NA
foods ** (*khaana*)	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
travelling (*yatra*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
religious festivals (*utasava*)	+ / +	NA	NA	NA
deities (*deota*)	+ / +	NA	NA	NA
marriage (*bibaha*)	+ / +	NA	NA	NA
day (*deen*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
month (*mahina*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
seasons (*rtu*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
metals (*daatu*)	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
ploughing (*jotnu*)	NA	NA	NA	+ / -
menstruation	NA	NA	NA	+ / +
sexual intercourse (*kaam;*)	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	NA
human waste/impurities of the body (*tana*)	NA	NA	NA	+ / +
omens (*sakuna*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
altars for worship (*puja-kaksa*)	+ / +	NA	+ / +	NA
crossroads	NA	+ / +	NA	NA
water (*paani*)	NA	NA	+ / +	NA
planets (*graha*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
directions (cardinal points)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA

thoughts (*maan, bichaar*)	NA	NA	+ / +	+ / +
human actions (*kriya*; (performance, intentions, presence, generosity)	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
sights (*sanket*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
time (*kaala*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
place (*sthaana*)	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +	+ / +
signs (*sanket*)	+ / +	+ / +	NA	NA
sin (*paap*)	NA	NA	NA	+ / +
cow (*gai*)	+ / +	NA	+ / +	NA
dogs (*kukure*)	NA	+ / +	NA	+ / +
kitchen (*chauka*)	NA	NA	+ / +	NA

Codes

+ the quality is recognized.

- the quality is not recognized; note that this symbol is used only if there is a difference between the two groups

NA - the quality is not applicable; for example, a cow is auspicious and pure, but is never inauspicious and impure. conversely, the meaning of signs can only be within the auspicious and inauspicious coding, but they are not conceptualized as pure or impure.

* List is from fieldnotes, Madan 1985, and Marglin 1985.

Table A.2 Local Prices of Commodities

STORE PRICES		HOUSEHOLD PRICES	
Item	Cost Rs.	Item	Cost Rs.
matches	1/box	rice	4-6/maana
tea (cup)	1	wheat grains	3.50/maana
tea leaves	7/100 g.	wheat flour	3/maana
salt	6/kg.	corn flour	2/maana
oil	50/liter	corn grains	2/maana
sugar	22/kg.	millet grains	2/maana
kerosene	17/liter	millet flour	2/maana
cumin	3/muti (hand)	soybeans	3/maana
incense	5/package	maas lentils	7-10/maana
molasses	40/2.5 kg.	gahat lentils	5/maana
beads	1/string	masoro lentils	5/maana
hair ropes	5-15	mung lentils	10/maana
sindur		kolayaa (?)	10/maana
hand soap	8/bar	red pepper	5/maana
clothes soap	7/bar	salt	5/maana
batteries	16/two	milk	4-5/maana
candles	1/one large	goat meat	50/kg.
tin oil lamp	2-3/one	chicken meat	80-90/kg.
umbrella	90	fish meat	30/kg.
notebook	5-30	tirkulo oil	20/maana
pen	5	mustard oil	25/maana
bidi	1-2/packet	chyura oil	20/maana
cigarettes	10-20/packet	clarified butter	25/maana
		broom	2

The *maana* measurement can be either liquid or dry. If dry, the maana is filled to overflowing. If liquid, it is filled to just below the rim. There are standardized maana, but many people have their own made locally and thus there is slight variation in actual amounts of products sold, particularly in households.

Table A.3 Caste Demographics

Jaat/Caste (Varna)	Number of Families	Total Persons	Females	Males
Pandey (Brahmin)	2	8	2	6
Joshi (Brahmin)	2	14	6	8
Jaishi (Brahmin)	1	3	2	1
Singh (Thakuri)	2	16	11	5
Bista (Chetri)	1	3	2	1
Rokaya (Chetri)	5	26	12	14
Khaati (Chetri)	1	7	3	4
Kadayat (Chetri)	2	13	6	7
Saund (Chetri)	2	18	9	9
Giri (Chetri)	2	13	7	6
Luhar* (Sudra)	4	28	15	13
Parki* (Sudra)	4	24	13	11
Oudh* (Sudra)	3	23	11	12
Damai* (Sudra)	10	77	40	37
Sarki* (Sudra)	8	46	24	22
Baadi* (Sudra)	2	19	7	12
TOTALS	51	337	170	167

* = indicates low-caste

Table A.4 Cost of Baadi Pottery Products

Name of object (Nepali-English)	Name of object (English name or description)	Price in Nepalese Rupees
gaagri gunyo	large water vessel	Rs. 20-25
ganaylo	small water vessel	Rs. 5-10
makal	coal bin	Rs. 10
sulpa	tobacco pipe	Rs. 1
chilum	water pipe	Rs. 2-5
saraulay	vessel for livestock food	Rs. 10-15
maat	very large grain or water storage vessel	Rs. 60-100
matya	small pot for curried pickle	Rs. 8-10
bujaango	small pot for snacks	Rs. 8-10
kahatura	decorated pot for new houses	Rs. 18-20

Table A.5 Cost of Damai Clothing[1]

Item - Nepali/ Bajhangi	Item - English	Cost $
cholo	woman's blouse	0.40
gunyo	woman's full skirt	0.40
pyant	men's Western pants	1.60
shirt	men's shirt	0.80
kurta-sulwaal	girl's tunic and pants	1.00
daura-sulwal	men's tunic and pants	1.20
coat	men's jacket	2.00
haf-pyant	men's shorts ("half pant")	0.24
waistcoat	men's vest	1.20
petticoat	women's cotton slip	0.40
topi	Nepali men's cap	0.40
jumper	girl's jumper	0.80
botay	long dress	0.40
phatu-sulwal	men's pants and top	1.20
katu	men's underwear	0.24
twili	?	0.12
?	blanket cover	0.20
blouse	woman's blouse	0.60
paijama	men's pajamas	0.40

[1] These costs are for labor and exclude the cost of material, thread, buttons and other "raw" materials. The Damai tailors charge the same prices to their riti only payment would be given in grains at the time of delivery. Riti rarely pay in cash. Non-riti may also pay in grains. The Damai have no consistently stated preference for grains or cash, and their preference will vary according to their current situation. If they are in need of food then grains are preferable. Cash is more flexible for low-caste since they cannot usually trade grains for other commodities, as the high-caste can.

Table A.6 Cost of Parki Products

Item - Nepali/ Bajhangi	Item - English description	Cost $
doko	carrying basket strung from head	$0.80-1.20
supo	winnowing basket, also used as a standard grain measure	1.20-1.60
challo	wheat, millet or cornflour sifter	0.80
chaapro	round grain or bread storage basket, medium size	0.80-1.60-4.00
bhaad	large square basket hung above cooking hearth for drying wood, etc.	0.80-1.20
jaylo	large round basket	0.25-2.40
joichallo	millet and tobacco sifter	0.80
pyang	fishing basket	0.80
koto (kota)	large grain storage bin	4.00-8.00
duru	small storage basket for salt, peppers	1.60
chingri	bread basket	0.60
palango	large floor mat	16.00-17.00
maandro	small floor mat	2.00-4.80

All of the above are made from bamboo.

Table A.7 Cost of Sarki Leather Products

Item - Nepali/ Bajhangi	Item - English description	Cost $
halando	plow strap	0.40
paana	leather sandals	1.00-1.20
juta	leather shoes	4.00
challo	leather sifter	0.60

Few of the items above are regularly manufactured. New *halando* are needed only after several years; leather sandals and shoes have been replaced by rubber Nepalese or Indian manufactured thongs, and few people have a need for a leather sifter because they prefer the bamboo sifters made by Parki.

Table A.8 Cost of items made by Luhar[2]

Item - Nepali/ Bajhangi	Item - English description	Cost $
kodaali	large spade	2.40 -3.00
kuto	small spade	0.40
aasi (large)	large sickle	2.00-2.40
aasi (small)	small sickle	0.40-0.80
bancharo	ax	2.80-3.20
bausho	sharp-pointed spade	2.00
pauro	shovel	2.00-2.40
phaali	plough tip	0.60
bhede	handle	0.20
chimtaa	tongs	0.40-0.60
hoop	door latch or hoop	0.25
saakla	door latch	0.25
kila	nail	0.05
saamo	rice pounder tip	0.20
ghattako biyo rakaayo	water mill joint	2.80
kaaday chimta	tweezers	0.10
kan chimta	ear cleaner	0.10
swiyau	needle	0.10
jaant (large)	large stand/tripod for cooking fire	4.00
jaant (small)	small fire tripod	1.60
deu	oil lamp for worship	0.80

Total 21 items produced, ranging from Rs.1 to Rs. 100.

[2] The prices of the tools, *aujar*, are based on iron and wood supplied by the Luhar. If the *riti* supplies the materials then they are charged very little. For repairs, the *riti* is charged a rupee or two. *Baayo*, in kind payment, may be given in place of rupees.

Table A.9 Coding Categories for Time Allocation Survey (TAS)

Notes regarding methodology and data entry
Nepali dates were changed to English dates. Groups were rearranged after mid-February, 1989, to ease travel time. Activities being started at the time of observation were entered as the actual activity from the coding list below. The activity of going to the forest to collect fuelwood and fodder was entered twice as fuel collection and fodder collection. The activities of the Baadi are less specific and delineated because they spend alot of time in other villages of some distance away and for several days at a time

Field No.	Activities	Code No.
01	ANIMAL HUSBANDRY	
	- Milching Animal	1
	- Minor Animal	2
	- Herding/Watching away from home	3
	- Fodder Collection	4
	- Collection and maintenance of hay	5
	- Care and feeding in compound	6
	- Milking	7
	- Other	8
02	AGRICULTURE	
	- Tool maintenance, repair, acquisition	01
	- Ploughing	02
	- Land preparation, stone removal (excludes ploughing)	03
	- Terrace maintenance	04
	- Preparing organic fertilizer- cutting leaves, making piles, etc.	05
	- Applying organic fertilizer - carrying to field, etc.	06
	- Planting seed, sowing	07
	- Transplanting seedlings	08
	- Weeding, hoeing, digging	09
	- Irrigation - repairing and maintaining canals, applying water	10
	- Harvesting - preparing drying space, cutting, drying, carrying	11
	- Post-harvest operations - storing, threshing, winnowing, husking corn, drying	12
	- Kitchen gardening - all activities	13
	- Crop protection	14
	- Other	15
	- Activity not clear	16

The following were also selected :

CROPS	
- Paddy	a
- Wheat	b
- Corn	c
- Millet	d
- Other - soybeans, lentils, oil, etc.	e
- Not given or unclear	

LABOR
- Own family f
- Another family, high caste g
- Another family, low caste h
- Parma/Exchange i
- Other j
- Not given or unclear k

03 OCCUPATIONAL (LOW) CASTE ACTIVITIES - MANUFACTURING
- Preparation for manufacturing - bringing dirt/mud for pottery, bringing bamboo for basket weaving, obtaining coal or iron for ironsmithing, obtaining material or thread for sewing, leather preparation 01
- Sewing - all activities 02
- Basket weaving - making mats, etc. 03
- Pottery making - all activities 04
- Ironsmithing - all activities 05
- Goldsmithing 06
- Leather-making - sandals, etc. 07
- Assisting manufacturing of above 08
- Other 09

04 ENTERTAINING (Primarily Damai and Baadi)
- Preparation 1
- Actual entertaining - singing, dancing playing drums, at weddings, informal, etc. 2
- Other

05 OFF-FARM AND NON-OCCUPATIONAL CASTE INCOME EARNING
- Professional - teaching, health delivery 1
- Portering 2
- Building construction 3
- Other 4

06 FUEL COLLECTION AND MAINTENANCE
- Preparation - sharpening sickle, etc. 1
- Fuel collection - "going to lekh or jungle" 2
- Wood chopping, stacking, drying, sharpening ax 3
- Other 4

07 FETCHING WATER

08 FOOD PROCESSING
- At water mill 1
- Pounding rice 2
- Drying and cleaning grains, etc. 3
- Extracting oil 4
- Making sour juices 5
- Collecting vegetables and fruits 6
- Other 7

09 HOUSEHOLD CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR - OWN
10 COOKING/SERVING
11 WASHING DISHES
12 CLEANING HOUSE AND COMPOUND
13 LAUNDRY
14 OTHER/NOT IDENTIFIABLE

15 CHILD CARE AND REARING
- Playing with and holding children and babies 1
- Nursing babies 2
- Other 3

16 EDUCATION
- At school 1
- Studying/reading at home 2
- Other 3

17 PERSONAL MAINTENANCE
- Bathing, toilet, washing teeth or face 1
- Eating 2
- Sleeping 3
- Putting on/wearing clothes 4

18 SOCIAL ACTIVITIES - includes going to Kholi, attending weddings and puja, visiting relatives

19 LEISURE - resting, smoking, talking, sitting

20 ILLNESS

21 AWAY FROM HOME
- for begging/collecting *khalo* 1
- for legal work (Chainpur) 2
- for employment 3
- for visiting relatives 4
- for visiting *maiti* 5
- for other or unknown 6
- India 7

Table A.10 Conversion Units

	Research Unit of Measure	Converted to	Conversion Unit
<u>Grains</u>			
unhusked rice	*paathi, supa, muri, maana*	kilograms	3.62kg./*paathi*
corn	" "	" "	3.16kg./*paathi*
wheat	" "	" "	3.16kg./*paathi*
millet	" "	" "	3.63kg./*paathi*
barley	" "	" "	1.82kg./*paathi*
lentils	" "	" "	3.27kg./*paathi*

8 *maana* = 1 *paathi* 2 *paathi* = 1 *supa* 10 *supa* = 1 *muri*

<u>Land conversions</u>	*naali*	hectare	78.64 *naali*/ hectare

4 *naali* = 1 *ropani* 19.66 *ropani* = 1 hectare

Table A.11 Daily Average Food Intake, Family of Five

Food consumption rates

3.5 *maana* husked rice
0.5 *maana* lentils or soybeans (5-6 *muti*/handfuls)
4-5 *maana* flour (1 *maana* flour=4-5 *rotis*)

Cost if purchased

rice: 3.5 maana x 5 Rs./*maana* = Rs.17.50 ($0.70)
dal: 0.5 *maana* x 6.4 Rs./*maana* = Rs 3.20 ($0.13)
vegetables: generally not purchased
bread : 5 *maana* x 2.5 Rs./*maana* = Rs.12.50 ($0.50)
salt, spices, corsaani, ghee/oil: Rs.4.00 ($0.16)

Rice and wheat bread meals may be eaten with vegetables, spices, ghee/oil, and milk products. Most families eat two main meals for three-quarters of the year and increase to three meals during the rice planting and harvesting period since the days are longer and the work is more intensified. Snacks of roasted soybeans or rice, corn, fruits are always eaten throughout the day.

There is a seasonality to consumption. *Chait* (March 15 - April 15) is the "hungry month", in between harvests when wheat is not yet harvested, and rice stores are depleted. During *Jeth* (May 15 - June 15), *Asaar* (June 16 -July 15), and *Saun* (July 16 - August 15) villagers have three daily meals because the days are long. The first meal is bread and leftover vegetables or a milk product such as diluted buttermilk in the early morning. By 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon rice is eaten as the main meal, then people rest until the day cools down. Wheat, millet or corn bread is then eaten again in the evening.

Table A.12 Uses Made of Women's Income

The following are in percentages of "yes" responses.

	Married Once (82)		Multiple Marriages (6)
	High-caste (31)	Low-caste (51)	Low-caste (6)
Spends income on food	54.8	68.6	83.3
Spends income on children	67.7	78.4	100
Sends income on self	87.1	82.4	83.3
Saves money for future	48.4	41.2	83.3

Table A.13 Names and Descriptions of Women's Jewelry

Nepali Name	Description and Wear	Metal
pauro	ankle bracelet of linked patterned designs; thin, dulcet; special occasions	silver
kalli	ankle bracelet, thick band, no patterned design, heavy; daily	silver
munuri	nose ring worn in septum; single loop; daily	gold, brass
bulaakhi	detachable nose ring piece, hangs from munuri; special occassions	gold, brass
khanto	nose ring worn on side; daily	gold, brass
mununaa	simple loop earring worn at lobe tip; daily	gold, brass
dukuri	flat earring worn in center of ear; patterned designs, large insertion, often has decorative stone; daily or special occassions	gold, brass
baali	large thin loop earring worn at top of ear, hangs down to lobe; daily	gold, brass
gal bandi	choker of linked patterned squares sewn on red or black velvet; special occassions	gold
phul	"flower". large 4-6" diameter disc, ornately patterned, red stone in center, worn on head; special occassions	gold
nat	large nose hoop; special occassions	gold, brass
shirbandi	tripartite head piece; two pieces surround the head and one piece goes straight back; patterned linked squares; special occassions	gold
tilhari	ornately carved wheel locket strung on glass beads; daily or special occassions	gold
maalaa	necklace of solid silver coins, rupees or paisa; daily or special occassions	silver
chunri	thin bracelets; daily	gold, silver or plastic

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