5. Social Reform and the Women's Question in Marwari Public Life

The question of social reform for the Marwari community, and especially for Marwari women, has always been entangled in the web of the group's negative associations, dating back to the early nineteenth century. This has been especially so in Bengal, home to India's supposedly most emancipated women, the Bengali *bhadramahila.*

One Marwari woman, for instance, told me that while growing up she would often tell people only her first name because she did not want them to "know." Sarite did very well in her graduation examinations at an elite convent school in the late 1970s, and the school posted the exam results on television. She said that Bengali parents were so amazed that a Marwari girl had done so well, they rang up the school to find out whether it could actually be true! In another instance, when I was doing research in the library at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta, I ran into Prabha, a Harvard student I had once met at a party. I went up to her to greet her. Without thinking, I told her I had a bad memory and asked if she could please remind me of her last name. She flushed red and told me her surname in a whisper, then suggested that we meet at noon to go out for lunch. Later, at a nearby South Indian restaurant over a lunch of vegetarian *dosa* pancakes, Prabha confessed to me that she had felt *mortified* when I asked for her surname at the Centre. Though she said she would not hold it against me, the last thing she had either wanted or expected was to have to be identified as a Marwari in this elite space of Calcutta's intellectual world.

This pair of vignettes suggests the Marwaris' public struggles in both developing pride and negotiating a new space for Marwari women in Bengal. I would like to explore the historical conditions that make stories like these commonplace. To do this, I give a genealogy of the way that Marwaris came into the problem of "social reform" and ultimately began to resolve the woman question.

Marwari intellectuals' debates over widow remarriage, women's seclusion, female education, and dowry did not arise until the second quarter of the twentieth century, about eighty to one hundred years after Bengalis wrestled with very similar issues. Indeed, many Marwaris themselves regard Marwari women—or even their own community as a whole—as simply "backward" and "conservative" compared to their proximate and pioneering Bengali neighbors. The classic story of nineteenth-century social reform of conditions for Bengali *bhadralok* women, from the Bengali social reformer

Rammohan Roy onwards, is often read as a well-rehearsed script for women's modernity all over India. Thus, one might view Marwari debates in Bengal and their subsequent resolutions as working themselves out simply along lines established by Bengalis. Timberg, for example, makes the following assumption: "The story of Marwari social reform may seem familiar to those who have read much Indian social history. With the details and names changed, it was modeled, consciously to a considerable extent, on the experience of social reform characterizing almost every Indian community as it enters a modern consciousness." [1] This chapter is an attempt to grapple with these and related historiographical problems, which I abbreviate as "being late" and "being the same."

First, the appearance of coming late to reform is actually a problem in the formation of a public and collective Marwari identity under colonialism. Christopher Bayly and B. R. Grover, among others, have shown how various collective organizations existed among North Indian trading groups during the eighteenth century. [2] But as I have been arguing throughout, the early twentieth century was the first time that
Marwaris represented themselves *as Marwaris* in etching out a political identity in the colonial public sphere. To put it another way, the label "Marwari" had to be attached to a community participating in modern public life before it could take itself as an object of reform. In fact, the apparent "lateness" of the women's question among the Marwaris gives credence to my claim that the modern Marwari identity is actually relatively new. One could argue that, because the Marwaris were only formed as a modern community from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, with the women arriving in Calcutta during the 1910s—1930s, their not confronting the women's question until the 1940s hardly makes them "late."

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Second, once Marwaris formed themselves as a political community through discussions held in the voluntary associations of civil society, the Bengali paradigm still did not "naturally" hold sway. In the most general sense, of course, social reform for all communities in colonial India is similar in that it constituted a public performance of modernity crucial to the community's changing public role as a new aspirant to a share of political power on a national stage. In these performances, the status of women has been central to whether a community could be judged as "modern." While Marwaris may have raised sets of issues similar to those raised by Bengalis, the specific resolutions they negotiated—in the same city but in quite a different historical and social context—have enacted and produced a set of very different public meanings. These differences are partly due to the economic disparity between the two communities, and also to decisions about whether or not women's income would be considered advantageous overall to the family. [3]

There were also differences of degree in the acceptance or dismissal of

certain reforms for women. The most vehemently disputed set of social reform issues for Marwaris, interestingly enough, have been those that affect the exchange of women and wealth through marriage alliances. Initially, great contestation and social ostracism arose when two people married from different subcastes. Later legal attempts to prevent the marriages of young girls, particularly the 1926 Sharda act, were considered disastrous by conservatives, who fought them tooth and nail. Around this same time, multiple generations of families were ostracized in cases of widow remarriage or marriage outside the subcastes of Agarwal, Oswal, and Maheshwari.

Dowry, which has grown to astronomical proportions throughout this century, is perhaps the most disputable practice. Wealth worth several thousands of dollars is exchanged among traders through dowry. Among industrialist families, the amount goes into the millions. In the event of such exchanges, divorce is extremely rare, although it has now become a more public issue among some industrialist families, including the Birlas. Marriage is perhaps the single most important form of social linkage in business dealings, on which rests the future fortunes of trading lineages, business empires, and corporate consolidations of multimillion-dollar industries. Naturally, many other communities, even the less economically well-off Bengalis, are also interested in money, status, and power, but the financial stakes are nowhere near as great.

In fact, it was the nationalist movement, particularly the influence of Gandhi and the Hindu conservative Madan Mohan Malaviya, that inspired Marwari leaders to take up questions of reform and status, particularly for women. In addition to being played out in relation to the Bengali experience, Marwari social reform was drawn into the national political currents of that period. The resurgence of twentieth century Hinduism, inspired in part by the practice of enumeration in electoral politics, was an undeniable influence. This was not restricted to conservatives. The cultural identity of Marwaris among both conservatives and reformers alike has been closely tied to communal issues in North Indian politics. Specific influences and ideas once associated with Jainism have been appropriated and characterized as "Hindu" in the broader public sphere, and such distinctions have not persisted. Conservatives and reformists both lay claim to a broader Hindu identity, especially in relation to the 1947 Partition. Even very recent social reform literature reflects this logic. One contemporary reformer, connecting marriage reforms to demographic competition between communities, writes: "The result of the fact that Hindu widows cannot remarry is that the number of Hindus is gradually decreasing in comparison to other communities. … From a political point of view, this inequality can be dangerous, as is clear from the tragic incidents before and after the partition of this country." [4]

Caste and Civil Society in Colonial India

As Veena Das has theorized, in India communities themselves became political actors seeking representational space in a larger public arena. [5]

According to this model, communities in the colonial culture of India formed entities that made claims on the state, using a model of reform from within the community. In India we generally see a politics of identity, based on a community affiliation, as the norm for political action. Excepting the unique case of the Bengali *bhadralok*, there has been little interest in legislating for everyone. Though these communities engage in the continuing deployment of colonial ethnological knowledge about the peoples and cultures of India, we shall see that their appropriations of colonial discourse may be for very different ends than those that the state intended.

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The history of Marwari social reform is unlike that of the nineteenth-century Bengali *bhadralok*, who made appeals to the colonial state for the legislative implementation of universalizing modes of social reform. Of course, both communities lived under the same conditions and terms of colonial law, which affected certain social customs and set certain minimum legal standards against which offenders could risk criminal prosecution. It is important to understand why law, in fact, was the major sphere in which the nineteenth-century *bhadralok* reformers worked out their project of social reform. For the Marwaris, the question of making new laws to promote changes in the treatment of women never arose. This was only partly because major laws, prompted by the work of Bengalis and other social reformers in India, were already in place. Marwari social reform was played out in a somewhat different set of social spaces. Almost a century after the Bengalis, Marwari leaders situated themselves in a caste-based arena for social change in which they appealed to the politics of group identity.

Nicholas Dirks has argued that colonialism created forms of civil society in India by reinventing new kinds of "traditional" institutions, caste in particular. Dirks contends that caste became "the most critical site for the textualization of social identity, … for the specification of public and private domains, … and the legitimating conceits of social freedom and societal control." [6] Dirks' insight can aptly be applied to the Marwari debates about social reform in order to show how the Marwari caste community is actually produced through and within the sphere of these disputations and debates. Community comes into being through the mutual engagement of people with opposing opinions. It is this very engagement, not indifference, which produces the caste community as a part of civil society. The complexity of the Marwari debates shows that there are many different and overlapping constituencies to whom the issues are addressed, ranging from national interests in the case of indentured labor to more internal questions about the age of consent for Marwari boys and girls. Although the Marwari subcastes, such as Agarwal and Maheshwari, had their own organizations, they had many questions in common.

Scholarly Approaches to Bengali Social Reform under Colonial

Capitalism

The topic of colonial "social reform" has in recent years been a source of frequent discussion and debate in the field of Indian cultural history. Much of the scholarly discussion has focused on the changing role of Indian women as a primary site for social transformation, often with unintended negative consequences for the so-called beneficiaries of this social action. [7]

This literature has pointed out how "social reform" often imposed the norms of one community (usually the Brahmins) on communities for whom they did not traditionally apply. This process happened through the deployment of law, which uses a universalizing model to regulate social customs that were perhaps once restricted or limited to the practices of a small number of groups only. [8]

So why did the *bhadralok* use law instead of advocating reform within their community through social boycott and other local disciplinary techniques? In his study of the Bengali social reformer Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Asok Sen has argued that the negative effects of economic imperialism—including deindustrialization, agricultural economic stagnation, economic drain, and the alienation of land ownership from cultivation—thwarted the development of a middle class of intellectuals who could effectively lead the way to social transformation. Bengal, Sen argues, never had a civil society in the European sense of the term, in which the fulfillment of an economic function would advance social progress ("social production" in Sen's terms). [9] Since the Bengali middle classes were alienated from the means of production, middle-class leadership was characterized by a lack of hegemony. As a result, Bengali intellectuals exerted only a very weak influence at best; the middle classes could not be persuaded by Vidyasagar to pursue and achieve a program of social reforms. Vidyasagar had to rely on British support and legislative changes in civil law, which would create a legal space to perform enlightened practices (such as widow remarriage). [10]

Sen writes:

> The Bengal economy had fulfilled none of those conditions of capitalist development whereby the doctrines of possessive individualism and market relations obtained their significance as progressive social philosophy in British history. For a middle class with no positive role in social production, the theories of Locke, Bentham and Mill acted more as sources of confusion about the nature of the state and society under colonial rule … the complex of colonial law and order accounted for a perpetual rift of private property from adequate commitments to social production. Growing in this context, the middle class had neither the position, nor the strength to mediate effectively between polity and production. There lay the travesty of imported ideas of individual rights and rationality. [11]

While few would disagree with Sen's argument that colonialism created a modernity that might look incomplete when measured by certain European standards, his argument runs the risk of becoming reductionist in its creation of a base-superstructure framework that ultimately rests on economic principles. It is important to consider how social reform among Marwaris took a very different shape than among their Bengali predecessors, even under ostensibly the same overarching economic environment.

The Marwaris, unlike the Bengali *bhadralok* of the nineteenth century, did not resort to the sphere of law as a way to propagate social change. Instead, they acted as a caste community in creating public life, with goals of doing charity, philanthropy, and social reform *for* themselves and *by* themselves, without relying on a state-supported, universalizing legal framework. Though resident in Calcutta, the Marwaris drew their inspiration for reform from Gandhi and his program of nationalist uplift. There is very little, if any, reference to the famed Bengali reformers in Marwari self-representations of social reform. The Marwari approach to reform—aligning themselves more with a nationalist orientation, without acknowledging the accomplishments of their Bengali forebears—was itself seen as a type of parochialism within Bengal. As we shall see, when promoting reform for themselves, the Marwaris did not attempt to appeal to the state or try to mobilize governmental power in pursuit of their own social goals. For the Marwaris, there was no explicit model of universal citizenship that they deployed in the service of social change and social improvement.

Early Calcutta Institutions of Marwari Public Life

From the 1830s onwards, there were considerable waves of migrants from Shekhawati and Bikaner who flocked to Barabazar. These early migrants traveled to Calcutta on riverboats that belonged to Marwari firms with branches on the eastern end of the Ganges. [12] New arrivals stayed in *basa* (charitable kitchens), which provided them with free room and board, although these filled no ostensible political function. [13] As noted earlier, new arrivals slept on the *gaddi* of more established businessmen who were helping out their fellow caste members from home. The growth and development of these informal organizations initially helped Marwari migrants in setting up and running their trading businesses in Calcutta.

The first public organization for Rajasthani upcountrymen in Calcutta, the Bari Panchayat, brought together traders by late 1828 to discuss business matters and some social concerns. There was a very close connection between business organizations and community organizations. The *panchayat* was run under auspices of the firm of Sojiram Hardayal, its founder, and arbitrated commercial disputes, particularly those concerning bills of credit (*hundi*). After the Sojiram

Hardayal firm closed in 1860, the *panchayat* was rebuilt in 1861 by the firm Tarachandra Ghanshyamdas. [14] The governing board of the *panchayat* was Agarwal, and the disputes seem to have pertained to the Agarwals. [15] In 1887, Adodhyaprasad Chowdhary, a "Marwari" Agarwal, had married a *deshwali* Agarwal girl, upsetting the symbolic boundaries of acceptable marriages, which ultimately caused a split in the organization. [16]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century there was a shift in the structure of public organizations from caste *panchayat* associations to modern voluntary associations. One very early such organization was the Calcutta Pinjrapole Society, established in 1885 for the protection of cows. The Calcutta Pinjrapole was the very first social organization of the Calcutta Marwaris. [17] The Calcutta Pinjrapole was established by Ramchandra Goenka, Swaraj Jhunjhunwala, Jugal Kishore Ruyia, Bhadridas Mukim, and Raja Shirbaksh Raiji Bagla; its members also included a number of Rajasthani and upcountry Hindu and Jain merchants. [18] Bhuder Mull Rooiya and Chatur Bauj Rooiya, sons of Suram Mull Rooiya, donated part of their building and profits, and wrote in their legal deed that they "consider kindness to and relief of suffering of cattle to be acts of great importance and high merit." [19] The goals of the Pinjrapole were to provide good milk, nourish milk cows, and protect aged and dry cows from slaughter.

[20]

The Pinjrapole was at the forefront of a large variety of cow protection societies that sprang up across the whole of India. As a result, Marwaris were closely associated with cow protection when minorities objected to it. Among the various groups involved in cow protection in Calcutta, the Marwaris were singled out by the Muslim press as being "inclined to settle all the [cow protection] problems themselves without taking any account of Moslems…. we believe Marwaris, if they could, would forthwith forcibly stop cow-killing by legislation under deterrent penalties." [20] This is a good case of a community using of law to fight other communities, not for regulating affairs seen as "their own."

Representative Voluntary Associations

The socially conservative Marwari Association was started in 1898 in Calcutta "for the gradual betterment of the moral and material well-being of the community." The first meeting was held on December 8, 1898, at the home of Babu Rung Lal Poddar. The association extended membership to Marwaris, Agarwals, Maheshwaris, Oswals, and trading Brahmins. Acknowledging the blessings the goddess Lakshmi showers on trade (her "favorite temple"), the ninety association members passed resolutions to promote social, economic, and educational improvement for their community. The association was concerned that the community was falling behind in education, particularly in English. Their many philanthropic

activities were also discussed, including the Vishudhhananda Saraswati Vidyalaya boys school teaching Sanskrit and English, the Burra Bazar library in 1900, and contributions to both famine relief funds and the Calcutta Pinjrapole–financing the cow-protection society with over 100,000 rupees per year. [21]

The Marwari Association also called for government intervention in the improvement of law and order in policing thefts and break-ins, as well as in attending to municipal problems of railways, traffic, roadwork, water supply, and sanitation infrastructure. Other matters had to do with what we might classify as "identity politics," that is, asking the state for special privileges on the basis of caste and Hindu religion. These issues included refreshment rooms for Hindus on the Eastern Indian Railroad and at the High Court, objections to the storage of animal hides in the *godowns* with other items, objections to missionaries preaching at the Hindu bathing *ghats*, requests for Hindi-language rail timetables, and the need for platform passes for men "to pilot the timid and shy Hindu ladies of the higher classes" through the crowded railway station. In response to the Marwari Association's letters, especially regarding matters of sanitation, the lieutenant governor agreed, but also took the opportunity to chastise: it was "not reasonable that a community of great wealth and so great intelligence and shrewdness should live amidst surroundings of a dangerously unsanitary character." [22]

The age of consent for marriage, a subject of legislation during the 1920s, was of great concern to members of the conservative Marwari Association. The association claimed that the 1922 bill was against the tenets of the Hindu religion, and that reform on these matters should come from within society and not from law. Initially, it was argued that passage of the bill would cause more women to be effectively widowed:

> The effect of the measure will be that even a husband will be liable to the punishment of transportation for life or 10 years rigorous imprisonment on a charge of rape for having intercourse with his wife if she happens to be under 14 years of age. … Punishing the husband on such a charge would mean condemning the wife also to lifelong misery. To her all prospects of happiness in life would be gone for ever. It is not likely that the husband after serving out his sentence would be able to live happily or would like to live again with the wife who was the cause of his imprisonment, and as Hindu girls are not married more than once, the wife will practically have to lead the life of a widow…. [23]

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Later on, arguments were made that "to introduce a late system of marriage" would disrupt the joint family because the Hindu bride needs to

"identify herself thoroughly with the family and under the loving care and guidance of the other female members of the family she … learns to consider the house and the family as her very own." If she married and joined the family later, the association worried, she would insist on breaking off from the joint family. [24]

The Marwari Association arose precisely at a point when the community was rife with disagreement and dissension over a variety of economic and social issues. At the same time, these organizations were necessary links to the government. The Association became the forum for getting government titles as well as providing a meeting place for government officials and capitalists. As a result of dissension, there arose many breakaway and alternative organizations espousing different viewpoints that often worked at odds with the Marwari Association. Because of economic disagreements, the piece goods wing of the Marwari Association became the Marwari Chamber of Commerce in 1900. Membership was supposedly open to all, though the overwhelming majority of its members were Marwari *baniyas.* The Chamber handled 1,198 arbitration cases during its first year, and handled eighty per cent of the Calcutta import trade of piece goods. [25]

A large number of voluntary organizations sprang up after the turn of the century. The Marwari Association had taken a particularly conservative view on women's issues, arguing against widow remarriage, for example, which prompted much internal dissent. In opposition to the Marwari Association, there also arose a movement among youth workers of the community, who established a Vaishya Sabha in Calcutta, which later merged with the Arya Samaj. The Vaishya Sabha, intended to be more inclusive than other groups, was formed by Ramkumar Goenka in 1902 and, like the Marwari Association, attended to various municipal and social issues. [26] These included posting guards beginning at 3 o'clock in the morning to protect women going out to the toilet, setting up a store to sell reasonably priced funeral cremation supplies, and speaking out about dowry and the marriage of young girls to elderly men. [27]

Up to this point, although women's concerns (such as in their travels on the railway) arose in these organizations, the women's question–of how Marwari women should become modern–was not yet on the agenda. There is evidence, however, of some individual attempts by Calcutta businessmen to provide for destitute women's welfare in Rajasthan. Ramchandra Goenka established a Vidhowa Sahayak Samiti (widow helper association) in 1899, and donated proceeds from rents from a building on Harrison Road and a cash sum of Rs. 15,000. This institution also helped orphan children below the age of fifteen. From the report of 1904 we learn that in that year, "146 widows of 21 villages of Rajputs got help from this fund." [28]

Indentured Emigration & Beginnings of Marwari Political Action

The Marwari Sahayak Samiti was formed in 1913 as a result of the politicization of the issue of Indian emigrant indentured labor. Gandhi's return from South Africa in 1896 and publication of the miseries of the coolie system helped make indenture part of the nationalist agenda. Ramdev Chokhany is claimed to have first petitioned the protector of immigrants, Dr. Banks, about the coolie system in 1913 and to have helped found the Samiti when he received no satisfactory response. [29] Largely inspired by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a right-wing Hindu conservative, several prominent Marwari businessmen became involved in the politics of the indentured labor system, which had been established by the British after the end of the British slave trade of Africans in 1834. Malaviya was a politician who championed the Hindu cause and traveled and lectured promoting communal sentiment and physical fitness to fight the Muslims. [30] The anti-indentureship movement in India was originally restricted to the English-speaking political elite, but changed greatly because of the Marwari involvement. [31]

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The anti-indenture issue is most likely the earliest example of Calcutta Marwaris' making a concerted effort in civil society for the benefit of others and of their assuming that they had a larger role to play in the "Indian" issues of the times. The community was first attracted to the problem when one of "their" women was forcibly recruited, but the indentured workers generally came from outside the Marwari community. [32] The Marwari Sahayak Samiti was highly instrumental in helping the newly indentured coolies gain release from unfair contracts by swearing that they were unwilling to travel overseas, giving them access to free legal assistance, and paying for return journeys to their home villages. [33] The colonial government, however, claimed that the Marwari Sahayak Samiti was not directly involved with the struggle against indentured emigration. [34]

Initially, the colonial government actually paid more attention to the Marwari Association, which was perhaps more recognizable as the Marwaris' official representative body. [35]

The Marwari Association corresponded with the colonial government in an attempt to persuade the British of the importance of banning indentured emigration. The Association claimed that indentureship was tantamount to slavery and should be abolished. [36] In 1919, Honorary Secretary Ram Dev Chokhany sent a copy of a resolution passed by the Marwari Association to the colonial government's summer headquarters at Simla. The resolution read as follows:

The Marwari Association beg to call the attention of the

Government of India to the fact that a very large number of Indian emigrants, who have earned their return passage to India under the indenture contract, are being kept beyond the time of their contracts in the colonies of Fiji, Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guiana and Dutch Guiana; and, although the war was ended and the seas made safe for travel in November 1918, no steps at all have been taken by these colonies to fulfil their repatriation engagement; that accounts of great hardship have been brought to the notice of members of the Marwari Association and that individual attempts to obtain fulfilment of the contract have failed. 37

The Marwari Association Committee claimed that the recruiters put pressure on the recruited coolies to claim to the magistrate that they had chosen to emigrate under their own free will, when in actuality the circumstances of work were not laid out in a manner that was comprehensible to the recruited villagers. 38 Letters in the colonial archive containing translated selections of the reports of released indentured workers offer evidence of the coercion used in labor recruitment. These letters produced an outcry when originally published in the Hindi language daily *Bharat Mitra* from October 28 to November 5, 1913. The *Bharat Mitra* newspaper accounts tell the stories of fourteen persons, illegally recruited as indentured workers, who were rescued by the Marwaris and given justice.

The stories began with a newspaper boy who, in his task of selling the English papers in the docked steamer ships, had encountered Lakshmi, a woman from the Hiralal Motilal family who told him to give word to "the Marwari gentlemen of Burrabazar" to seek their help in arranging for their release. Lakshmi was traveling to Ajmere (Rajasthan) from Agra with her young daughter and was approached by an *arkati* (recruiter) when the person meeting her at the station did not arrive. 39 The *arkati* put them up and gave them food and lodging for a week while attending to other business. Lakshmi was then tricked into agreeing to go to a place called Jamaica, which the *arkati* told her was very near Calcutta. He purportedly kept her jewelry with him for safekeeping but disappeared once he got her and some other recruited men and women into the coolie depot in Calcutta. As she was instructed, she told a sahib that she was going to Jamaica of her own free will, after which she was to board the ship. In her deposition, Lakshmi claimed:

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> After this the *Arkati* went away and when I looked about for him and could not find him anywhere, I began to weep. Subsequently I came to know from the coolies in the depot that the man was an *Arkati* and that having made me over to the cooly recruiting company, he had left with his remuneration. My grief then knew no bounds. After a few days I thought that if I could

send word to the Marwaries of Calcutta, they would surely rescue
me. So I sent word through that newspaper seller and you came
and got me released. [40]

The secretary of the Marwari Sahayak Samiti, Babu Onkarmull Shroff, made
arrangements to pay for the woman's release. It turned out that Lakshmi
had devised the Marwari name of "Hiralal Motilal" as a guise to send out a
message to any Marwari who would help. Upon meeting the women in the
coolie depot, the Marwari Sahayak Samiti realized that a very large number
of people detained in the coolie depot were there against their will. In all of
the cases they examined, trusting villagers were told that Jamaica was very
near to Calcutta. The Marwaris took special note of instances in which the
recruitment policy went against Hindu custom. In the depositions given to
the colonial government are several examples of Brahmins forced to eat with
low caste men, and women were reported to be single when in actuality
they were married to husbands back in the villages. In all the cases of
persons who were rescued, they had appealed to the Marwari community for
help and were given food and shelter in one of the community *dharmasalas*
(guest houses). [41]

Why would the Marwaris take such a strong interest in the problem of
indentured emigration? Karen Ray has argued that self-interested economic
motives most likely played an important part. She wrote that Marwaris had
accepted the theory that emigration had so decreased the numbers of
laborers that the price of labor had become greatly inflated. Because they
were so dependent on the jute trade, through which many fortunes were
later made through the "sandbag war" of the First World War, the Marwari
merchants, dealers, and brokers would be greatly disadvantaged by a
decreasing labor supply. [42] Indeed, the Marwari Association Committee
expressed their concern over the lack of any "surplus population now among
the labouring classes." They believed that a labor shortage would have a
highly detrimental effect on the industrial development of the country. This
angle signified the way that Marwaris began to see themselves as civic and
business leaders.

There is no doubt that such economic considerations did play some role in
the decision of wealthy Marwari industrialists to become personally involved
in the indentured emigration question. Other arguments were based on a
notion that Indian culture was under threat. The Marwari Sahayak Samiti
decried the destruction of Hindu caste laws by working conditions that did
not respect the sensitivities of Indian caste society. Mixing arguments about
"living wage" and caste, social, and religious customs, the Samiti wrote:

They are allotted to the different estates and become subject to

the colonial labour laws which, although framed to protect the labourers, have, it is no exaggeration to say, been in practice unparalleled in their severity. … The result is that they suffer the penalties prescribed by the laws and cannot earn even a living wage and at the end of the indenture period, many find themselves in an absolutely penniless condition and in debt. It is not only in this respect that the indentured Indian people suffer in those foreign lands. Their social and religious customs are held in utter contempt. All distinction of caste, creed or even sex is ignored in housing them. Their marriages solemnised in accordance with their religious doctrines are not recognised as valid and even the dead bodies of Hindu labourers have to be buried in the absence of any arrangement for cremation. Thus they are reduced to a state of abject servility and all manhood and sense of self respect are crushed out of them … the great discrepancy in the proportion of men and women has naturally led to the prevalence of immorality and irregular unions between men and women of different castes, with the result that a race of base-born Indians with a shameful heritage and of lax morals have sprung up in colonies. [48]

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As conservative Hindus, these Marwaris argued that many aspects of the indentured emigration system were antithetical to the values of the Hindu religious system. The problems of crossing the black waters of the ocean, breaking caste by eating with caste inferiors, and forcing marriages among men and women of mismatched castes violated many of the most important, politicized, and public tenets of Hinduism. I do not mean to imply that these questions of caste were merely a pretext for the purely economic considerations of Marwari business interests. The two concerns may, in fact, have worked in tandem. Thus, the Marwaris learned to put a communal spin on their social agenda. The rhetoric of Hindu community identity was deployed in the service of effecting legislative reforms. The Marwari argument that the politics of indentureship violated custom (ostensibly an area off-limits to British power) proved to be a useful tactic in getting the government to regulate, and eventually stop, forced labor migration. When the British colonial government clamped down on several freedom-fighting organizations that operated under the name of Samiti, the "Marwari Relief Society" was born as the successor to the Marwari Sahayak Samiti. Taking shape after 1914, the Marwari Relief Society grew into a thriving medical and social service institution serving hundreds of patients each day.

The involvement of the Marwaris in the anti-indentureship campaign demonstrates that the Marwari community was involved in "village-oriented political activity" long before Gandhi had popularized such activities. The anti-indentureship campaign, therefore, became a useful link between the Calcutta Marwaris and Gandhi. In fact, Gandhi was invited to Calcutta by the Marwaris to discuss the indentureship question soon after his arrival in

India, thus beginning his involvement with anti-indentureship campaigns in the Congress session held in December 1916. Nevertheless, Pandit Mohan Malaviya was probably a stronger force in the shaping of Marwari politics than was Gandhi. In the context of widespread anti-colonial agitation, the national politicization of the indentureship issue was not lost upon the British.

The initial mobilization and protest against Indian indentured emigrant labor practices was critical to forging ties between Marwari community leaders and nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Malaviya. The indentureship movement allowed Marwari leaders to participate in the disciplinary politics of social reform on a national basis with respect to relatively powerless laborers without placing their own community image at risk or exposing their own social habits to external criticism. Ray's suggestion that Marwari involvement in the anti-indentureship issue could even be explained by their own worries as capitalists about the labor supply may, however, be too extreme in its assessment. In any case, the movement was one of the first occasions that Marwaris acted as "Marwaris" in the arena of social and political reform. Further, it was the indentureship movement that formed a common set of concerns between some Marwari intellectual leaders and M. K. Gandhi. With Gandhi's encouragement, these leaders were the ones to raise the Marwari women's question.

Gandhi's Shadows: Marwari Reformists and the Nationalist Movement

Many Marwari industrialist-nationalists worked very closely with the Congress Party and greatly influenced Gandhi in forming an anti-colonial nationalism. The Marwaris' relatively new interest in politics arguably arose in part from the large trading and speculative profits made during World War I, particularly by prominent businessmen like G. D. Birla, who encouraged diversification of Marwari investment. Beginning in the 1920s, Marwari firms bought up shares of European companies in jute and coal, and by the 1930s and 1940s they began establishing new presences in industries such as paper and sugar production. The massive accumulation of capital through speculation created the conditions for some top Marwari families to make the transition from traders to industrialists. As industrialists, they increased their visibility on both the national and international stages. The kinds of commercial linkages that Marwari industrialists needed in order to produce a product and sell–to any willing customer–were distinctly different from and probably less extensive than the needs of traders, who required very wide social networks to keep their systems of *hundi* (credit) and trading businesses solvent.

From the 1920s onward, Marwari businessmen and industrialists incorporated various Hindu causes into nationalist political agendas, including animal protection, vegetarianism, local cloth distribution, and the improvement of the status and education of Indian women. This

engagement and interest in Hindu revivalism was quite pervasive, and cut across divisions between reformers and conservatives within Marwari society. (Even the reformers, as we shall see, brought a Hindu consciousness to bear on their appropriations of colonial discourse about the community's relative social backwardness.) These nationalist programs relied on and drew inspiration from a growing modern religious imagination of Hinduism, which ultimately developed a communalist edge in its stance toward non-Hindus.

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Hindi and English-language biographies of such prominent individuals as Gandhi's right-hand man G. D. Birla, P. D. Himmatsinka, Ishwar Das Jalan, Bhagirath Kanoria, Jamnalal Bajaj, B. M. Singhi, and Sitaram Seksaria are excellent sources on Marwari involvement in nationalist politics. By the 1920s, these men and their wives had become unwavering followers of Gandhi, joining the civil disobedience movement, wearing and promoting homespun cloth known as *khadi*, promoting youth development and military training (especially after the 1918 riots), and aiding in the relief of famine, floods, and earthquakes (such as in Bihar in 1934). Many of these men had careers in politics as members of the Indian National Congress Party. P. D. Himmatsinka, a solicitor, was a member of the Constituent Assembly from 1948 to 1952, the Rajya Sabha from 1956 to 1962, and the Lok Sabha from 1962 to 1971, representing the Sontal Parganas in Bihar. [49] Jamnalal Bajaj was a top Congress leader from 1924 to 1942, serving as the treasurer of the All India Congress Committee, and was one of the foremost Marwari politicians in western India. Originally from Rajasthan, Bajaj settled in Wardha, which is near Nagpur (then in the Central Provinces). Jamnalal Bajaj donated both land and money to Gandhi, who set up his ashram at Wardha. Of this group of people, G. D. Birla was by far the most prominent figure in aligning Marwari economic concerns with the politics of the Indian nationalist movement. Medha Malik Kudaisya has argued that Birla's alliance with Gandhi, even more than Nehru's, helped foster a vision of independent India based on nonviolence, support of *khadi*, and the promotion of Indian industry. [50] Gandhi first met Birla when he came to Calcutta in 1916 and was a guest at the Marwari school Vishudhdanand Saraswati Vidyalaya. [51]

It was Gandhi who inspired Marwari leaders such as Birla and Bajaj to raise the women's question for the Marwari community. Gandhi held a very large meeting for Marwari women on January 25, 1921, to raise both funds and consciousness among his *baniya* supporters. He asked them to give up the luxuries they were accustomed to and to wear homespun *khadi.* [52] He opened a shawl and asked the women to spontaneously give what they loved most, their money and jewels. One newspaper reported that, "at this stage there was a shower of gifts which literally filled up the chaddar." [53] As important as the Birla-Gandhi alliance was in the shaping of Indian nationalism, I will not discuss Birla further, and instead direct interested readers to the abundance of published literature that outlines his national and industrial accomplishments. [54]

Although he has received less national attention than Birla, Sitaram Seksariya is gaining recognition as having been one of the foremost reformist Marwari leaders, active in the nationalist freedom movement and as a social reformer, especially in the promotion of women's education. As discussed in chapter two, he also contributed financial help to the national language movement to popularize Hindi. He was born into a Marwari Agarwal family in 1891 in Nawalgarh, Rajasthan. Sitaram's father died in 1903 of plague (Author: what kind? Bubonic plague?)in Burabazar. Even as a teenager, Sitaram was reportedly already engaging in projects of social uplift. At the age of seventeen, Sitaram opened a library in Nawalgarh. [55]

After the death of his parents, he spent twenty years earning money in business. In 1921, at age thirty, he separated from the family business in Calcutta and became a "sleeping partner" in the Ramrith Sitaram firm. Until, 1928 he was engaged in business and the stock market, then reportedly left business altogether at the age of thirty-six. [56] He then joined the national freedom movement and was arrested and jailed five times between 1930 and 1942.

Along with Bhagirath Kanoria, Sitaram was a pioneering figure in female education; together they established the Marwari Balika Vidyalaya (girls' school) in 1920. The Marwari Balika Vidyalaya (MBV), which taught both Sanskrit and English, had a Bengali woman as the headmistress. This was, for the time, a radical decision. The Marwari parents regarded Bengali women as "modern," and were afraid that if their daughters came into contact with them, they would lose their morality. [57] Sitaram's son Ashok told me in an interview that in the early days his father walked door to door, recruiting students from conservative families who were afraid to send their daughters out of the house. Women's education was controversial, and Sitaram had to beg parents to send their daughters to school.

In addition to his work on the MBV, Sitaram opposed the "adoption custom," and in the 1920s he and some other "youth" published a letter in newspaper against adoption. [58] Sitaram left Burabazar in the early 1930s, when he was ostracized because of his support of widow remarriage. It was not until the post-independence period that Sitaram Seksaria made the transition from social ostracism to widespread respect. After leaving Burabazar, he first built a house in Tollygunge, and then in 1958 purchased the house on Lord Sinha Road where his son and extended family still live. Seksariya felt that the MBV was located in an unhealthy environment, and he wanted to build a school in a healthy environment with playgrounds and a big hall. He collected donations from former students of the MBV who were then the wives of famous industrialists. The girls' school Shri Shikshayatan, just adjacent to his Lord Sinha Road mansion, was founded in 1954. Later additions to the school included a swimming pool, hostel, and college.

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Sitaram Seksaria's wife, who died in 1965, was an illiterate woman involved in social reform and the movement against *parda*, and went to jail in the civil disobedience movement. A few of the wives and married daughters of Marwari freedom fighters took part in public protests, and their stories are proudly described in the history of contributions Marwaris made to the nationalist movement. Janaki Devi Bajaj described herself as an "illiterate innocent" whose personality slowly developed under her husband's and Gandhi's influence. Engaged at age four, married in 1902 at age eight to then twelve-year-old Jamnalal, Janaki Devi's initial years
were spend in *parda.* She studied Marathi with a tutor but did not enjoy it and gave it up. Later, she was taught by a Parsi teacher to learn words from the newspaper, which she said greatly broadened her perspective on the world. [60] Under the influence of Gandhi, Jamnalal told Janaki Devi to give up her ornaments and wear homespun *khadi* cloth, and join him in burning foreign cloth on the occasion of *Holi* in 1923. [61] She participated in civil disobedience movements and was jailed. [62] After Bajaj died in 1942, she presided over the Goseva Sangh, the cow-protection society associated with Wardha. [63]

Less is known about other Marwari women freedom fighters; unlike Janaki Devi, none of them wrote autobiographies. Indumati Goenka (1914—1971), the daughter of Padamraj Jain (1882-1946) and daughter-in-law of freedom fighter Kedarnath Goenka, was the first woman in Bengal to be imprisoned in connection with the freedom movement. Her marriage to Keshavdev in 1929 at age sixteen was characterized as "ideal" by the *Vishwamitra* newspaper of Calcutta because it reportedly broke with customs of *parda*, dowry, jewelry, and ostentation. She was a student at Bethune College and studied in the Bengali medium, which was unheard of for Marwaris at the time. She promoted *khadi*, participated in the Nari Satyagraha Samiti (a Congress women's movement), picketed foreign shops, and burned foreign cloth. She supported women's education and was an activist against *parda* and dowry and for widow remarriage. [64] Indumati was arrested and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for being listed as the secretary of the Rashtriya Mahila Samiti on a pamphlet that called for the resignation of the police. Burabazar shops closed for a day to protest her arrest. A corporation meeting noted her imprisonment, but they knew nothing about her: Was she a citizen of the city or an outsider? To honor her, the girls in Bethune College did not attend their classes. [65] Among other activists, Shrimati Puspawati Kotecha was the first woman in Oswal society who took part in the civil disobedience movement, and Srimati Champadevi Bharuka also took an active role in the national movement and went to jail in 1932. [66]

Subcaste Organizations: Marwari Agarwals and Marwari

Maheshwaris

As I have noted earlier, public identity for Marwaris as "Marwaris" was never singular. They also sometimes identified themselves publicly by their subcastes—Maheswari, Agarwal or Agarwala, and Oswal—and formed voluntary associations, with subcaste names, that fostered social change, especially in the area of education. Why these organizations did not take up the "Marwari" banner is an interesting question. Since Sanatani conservatives overwhelmingly dominated the Marwari Association, perhaps their appropriation of the term "Marwari" led the reformist leaders to stress other kinds of linkages and alliances. To a certain extent the subdivisions were symbolic. The leaders of the subcaste organizations all worked very closely together, so the discussions that went on in such organizations influenced each other. With rare exceptions, until the 1930s there was very little intermarriage between the subcastes, and those exceptional cases prompted major community discussion and dissent.

Jamnalal Bajaj was an important influence in promoting social reform among the Marwaris in Maharashtra, and was one of the few major national Marwari leaders to be located outside of Calcutta. Working alongside his friend Srikrishna Jajoo (who engaged in parallel activities among the Maheshwaris), Jamnalal Bajaj concentrated on enabling change and reform through education, and established a hotel for Marwari boys at Wardha in 1910. His attempts to raise funds and gain support from Marwari businessmen for a Marwari College in Bombay were initially met with great resistance. [67] In 1912 the All India Agarwal Mahasabha was founded by Bajaj and others, against the Marwari Association's wishes, partly in order to promote the remarriage of widows, although there was a great deal of controversy about this within the group. [68]

In 1918, Jamnalal Bajaj attempted to end the struggle between the conservative Sanatanis and the reformers, but the Sanatanis were not receptive. Bajaj established the Marwari Agarwal Mahasabha at Wardha, Maharashtra. [69] His major concerns were to counter the trends toward extravagant living among Marwaris (which sent many families into debt) and rising unemployment among Marwari youth, as well as to raise the age of marriage to prevent child widowhood and to promote intercaste marriage among Marwaris in order to widen parents' choices of prospective brides and grooms. Bajaj also used the forum to propagate Gandhian programs for homespun *khadi* cloth and to eradicate untouchability, which irritated other Maheswaris and for which he risked "excommunication." Under Gandhi's tutelage, he opened his grandfather's Lakshminarayan temple to untouchables. [70] At an Agarwal Mahasabha conference in Delhi in 1926, Jamnalal spoke out against the veil, and Janaki Devi and her sister-in-law removed their *gangut* (veils) as he spoke. In her autobiography, Janaki Devi commented that it was very "bold work" for women of the time to remove

their veils, because wearing the veil was a sign of status, culture, and decency. [71] It was Janaki Devi Bajaj, on the insistence of Gandhi, who later went to Calcutta to urge women there also to remove their veils. [72]

Sitaram Seksariya, an Agarwal, described his involvement with Bajaj in the Marwari Agarwala movement for social reform. I have paraphrased his description:

> We had some success in streamlining the marriage rituals into a one-day affair, and got rid of the 4 A.M. ritual breakfast on the day of the wedding. At this time (1920) there were great disputes in the Marwari Agarwal Assembly in Bombay. The reformers proposed a rule that the age of a boy and girl, respectively, should not be less than sixteen and twelve. The proposal was not passed until Jamnalal suggested an amendment that the boy should be at least sixteen, but a girl can be married before she is twelve. Over a dozen of the members, all from Calcutta, resolved that they would not participate in the marriages of boys and girls below sixteen and twelve, and attempts were made to create an atmosphere against child marriage. In Calcutta, black flags were hoisted by these protesters to demonstrate where a child marriage was being performed, then the Sharda act passed with opposition from the orthodox. … The debates over widow marriage were even more vehement. At first, one could not even speak of widow remarriage, so proposals were discussed that men over forty should not be allowed to marry virgins. The group sent scouts to marriage places, who would try to take the girl away from the wedding place in order to forcibly stop the marriage. [73]

Significantly, the issue of widow remarriage was resolved, more or less, by voting on resolutions at the meeting. Majority ruled. However, there were also occasions, such as the Agarwala widow-remarriage scandal described below, when caste mechanisms like "excommunication" or techniques of social boycott and ostracism were also at play in the very same circumstances. The use of these techniques gives evidence of Marwaris' participation in two kinds of public culture, and controverts Milton Singer's argument about the compartmentalization of modernity and tradition in different realms. [74] Here is what happened.

The marriage of Agarwal child-widow Janaki Devi with Babu Nagarmal Lahila of Jharia was held in Calcutta, creating much internal tumult between reformist and Sanatani leaders. The conservative Agarwals who were against the marriage spread rumors that it was held with the help of Congress. The Sanatanis "raised great hue and cry," but the marriage was performed

without any difficulty, albeit under police protection. The question of widow-marriage came up again in the Agarwala Mahasabha, but the proposal to permit it could not be passed. [75] The Sanatanis started a new conservative society, the Akhil Bharatvarsiya Agarwal Mahapanchayat, which was formed to protest the marriage. This *panchayat* expelled and cast out the twelve members (including Seksaria) who had helped to orchestrate the widow's remarriage. [76] The ramifications were not merely symbolic; this social ostracism reportedly prompted Seksariya to leave his residence and move out of Burabazar. [77]

Although Maheshwari leaders were active in institution-building in Calcutta, they had their own disputes over social changes. [78] Up to 1934, the Maheshwari Sabha would not permit widow remarriage. [79] An intercaste marriage dispute arose regarding the Birla family in 1924—25, when Rameshwardas Birla married Kumari Sharada Devi of the Jhawar family. Enemies of the Birlas, still upset that the Birlas had canceled another one of their family marriages a few years back, claimed that this girl was Kolvar, not Maheshwari. The agitation lasted for more than twelve years. Factions were formed, and some people ostracized the Birlas. [80] Partly as a result of turmoil, the Maheshwari Vidyalaya School was founded with Birla money. This episode suggests how Marwari charity could not only be used to lay claims on social power generally but could also arise from internal tensions and competition within the group.

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Though debates over marriage were probably the most hotly argued aspects of Marwari social reform, there were a large number of other issues as well. As in other Hindu groups, there were debates about the inauspiciousness of traveling abroad, a practice banned by custom and religious texts. The first Marwari foreign journey took place in 1886, when Indrachandraji Dudhoria and Indrachandraji Nahata went abroad. When they returned in 1889, there was a violent agitation in Oswal society. Modi notes that the social ostracism resulting from crossing the "black waters" lasted past 1923, when the children of Indrachand Dudhoria were accepted by Oswal society but children of Nahata were not. Later, these practices became commonplace. B.M. Birla, for instance, went abroad with his wife. [81]

Disjunction and Discord: Discursive Production of Caste Communities

The rise of internal debates over issues of social reform in association meetings prompted the publication of a number of tracts that expressed a variety of positions along the conservative/reformist spectrum. Although we cannot be certain about how many people might have read or been influenced by such literature, such texts do indicate the kinds of intellectual concerns that were raised among Marwaris. Tulasyana wrote a ten-page

pamphlet decrying the administration of the Marwari Agrawal Mahasabha. According to the pamphlet, he wrote that the self-made reformers had formed a group of autocrats consisting of some prominent people and were deceiving the society. He claimed that Jamnalal Bajaj, who started the Mahasabha, was untrustworthy because of his role in establishing a hostel for untouchables at Wardha, where they could study and not be treated as untouchables. The work of the reformers was antireligious, it proposed, in that it went against the principles of "Sanatan Dharm," attempting to alter the time-honored traditions associated with the ban on widow-remarriage, the marriage engagement system, and holding women's meetings, such as in Fatehpur, where the idea was even promoted that the rights of women were no less than the rights of men. Besides, he argued, even these reformers did not practice the reforms that they preached, especially in arranging marriages for their children below the suggested age requirement of sixteen for boys. He gave the example of one Marwari Agarwal man who vomited in the middle of the meeting *pandal* when he discovered that two cobblers were serving water to the visitors. He asked, Can the views of reform-loving gentlemen of Calcutta be applicable to All India social reforms? No, he wrote, not at all. Finally, he claimed that the administration of the Marwari Agrawal Mahasabha did not provide public detailed accounts of the expenditures of the charity, which thus functioned in a corrupt manner. [82]

Tulasyana's argument pulled together a number of claims that addressed a variety of publics. On the one hand, he raised questions about the financial accountability of the organization, focusing on questions of bureaucracy, corruption, and disclosure. On the other hand, his critique focused on how the reformers themselves privately upheld the tenets of the Sanatan Dharm religion by arranging child marriages and vomiting in response to known intercaste pollution, even though they were publicly trying to destroy time-honored customs like the ban on widow remarriage and mixing with untouchables.

Another such tract is Bhimsen Kedia's 1947 *Bharat Mein Marwari Samaj*, which outlined the major positions of the conservative Marwari Sanatanis. Kedia defined Marwaris as a group of people who follow Sanatan Dharm, believe in nonviolence, wear homespun *khadi*, are pure vegetarian, love the poor, establish institutions in different parts of India, and know the ins and outs of business. [83] He described at length various social customs involving marriage, childbearing and pregnancy rituals, and engagements, defending these practices as part of family traditions "in which repetition of the deeds of ancestors are done." [84] Kedia used contemporary discussions on health to defend Marwari women's practice of sexually explicit joking in gatherings with pregnant women. Even if the talk is bawdy, he argued, it at least keeps the pregnant woman happy, which is good for health. [85] His only significant critiques in the book concerned: 1) the lack of educational training given to Marwari youth, which led to widespread illiteracy (he pointed out that there

were no registered accountants in the community); 2) wasteful expenditure on marriage, Brahmins, superstitions, giving bribes, and ornaments and clothing for women; and 3) the irresponsible management of Marwari public institutions. [86]

As I noted earlier, distinct communities did not exist before these debates. And one can see how differentiated communities were; issues such as marriage were better discussed along caste lines, while the "community" that intervened on a national issue such as indenture was called "Marwari" without any subcaste qualifiers. An All-India Marwari organization would emerge in the 1930s to handle various social issues, especially those relating to marriage. Before getting into that, however, I would like to take up Nicholas Dirks' argument about the textualization of caste disputes, and consider why such salacious (and often mud-slinging) discursive claims were used both to construct and criticize a prototypical Marwari identity. There are a large number of such tracts, but I will limit my discussion in order to go deeper into the types of language and narrative strategies that were deployed.

Chand Magazine's Marwari Number

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In November 1929, a special issue of the Hindi literary magazine *Chand* featured articles on the present condition of the Marwari community. [87] This anonymous issue, probably edited by social critic Rajagopal Mohatta, [88] caused a major uproar among urban Marwari leaders, reformist and conservative alike. The unsigned articles, plays, poems, and short stories constituted an overwhelming condemnation of Marwari culture in places ranging from Rajasthan to Calcutta. This issue of *Chand* is an excellent example of the ferocity of debate within the Sanatani/reformist battles — attempting to show the need for reform within the Marwari community.

According to this issue of *Chand*, Marwari backwardness was rooted in the "feudal culture" of Rajasthan, which was sorely lacking in hospitals, village sanitation systems, medicine, and educational facilities. There was only one state school in Rajasthan to provide female education, and as a result only a handful of women could read and write. For men, one primary school might serve dozens of villages, resulting in three per cent literacy, with two per cent limited to signing their own names. [89] The fault for these conditions, it was argued, lay in the despotism of the rulers, who were reluctant to open schools and provide education that might challenge their authority. [90] Because of the lack of such basic facilities, this critique continued, the people of Rajasthan were subject to superstition, ignorance, and blind faith in religion: "If there is a famine or an unknown disease from which people die, they curse their bad luck and go for quack medicines from the temples." [91] As in other parts of India, the same article contended, child-marriage and marriage outside the *mel* (appropriate marriage circle) was rampant in

Rajasthan, especially among the *Vaishya* trading castes. Out of 4,659,493 women in Rajasthan, 2,129,155 were married, and among those who had been married, 883,259 women–a full forty-one per cent–were widowed, with the number of child widows alone being well over 100,000. These nefarious practices of child marriage and even polygamy had led to the "fall of Rajasthan." [92]

An interesting feature of *Chand*'s critique is the use of colonial statistics and other kinds of knowledge to justify conclusions about the social condition of Marwari women that the original data probably did not warrant. The women, *Chand* decried, were bribed with luxury to forget about their problems; the girls were married off at young ages to wealthy older men irrespective of the men's age or physical condition, and kept happy by gifts of jewelry, good food, and clothing. [93] By blindly following custom, this critique said, Marwaris did not hesitate to marry a girl of seven or eight years to a man between fifty and sixty, and even considered this to be a religious act. [94]

Chand argued that wealthy Marwari women were unlike the wives of artisans and peasants, who stayed healthy and cheerful by participating in agricultural cultivation and tending buffalo and cows. Census data were cited to show that the number of Jains was diminishing. The wives of Jains reportedly fasted quite frequently to the point of weakness, threatening the very vitality of the community.

Chand also prefigured the role of modern literature in reforming familial practices and producing new kinds of sentiment. For example, a story called "Osar" (meaning "heifer") connected the two concerns of child marriage and the economic burden of funeral feasts. This story tells of a sick man who dies, leaving his wife, widowed daughter-in-law and child, and an unmarried daughter, aged ten. The people of the village come regularly to the house, urging the widow that she should arrange for the ritual funeral feast, because otherwise it would be difficult for them to get her daughter married. The widow refuses on account of lack of money. Some time later a marriage broker comes to the house with a marriage proposal from an old man who agrees to arrange the funeral feast if he can marry the daughter. The widow is reluctant, unwilling to sacrifice her young daughter to a life of almost certain widowhood. But when the broker argues that the family will face social ostracism if she does not agree, the widow is pressured into assent. The funeral feast is held, followed by the wedding of the daughter. After two years, when the girl is twelve, her husband dies and the daughter returns to the village as a widow. Again the villagers pressure the family to hold a funeral feast and come to enjoy their food, never inquiring about the girl's welfare as a widow. [95] Overall, "Osar" is about wastefulness, wasting lives and wasting money; discussions of the virtues of saving and avoiding ostentatious displays or "show" were a major theme of social reform.

Though charity is in their blood, argued the *Chand* article "Qualities of Marwaris," Marwari benevolence is never systematic. It cites many examples: Marwaris wanted to do good acts for animals, but the *Pinjrapole* cowsheds established for such purposes did not maintain the cows very well; [96] Marwaris would informally establish funds to help widows, but would never agree to get them married; [97] and since the money that they gave to charity was made through usury from poor peasants, the donated money could ultimately not be particularly beneficial to the very people who were impoverished to begin with. [98]

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The most vicious parts of this issue of *Chand* made blatant claims about the sexual practices of the community (both men and women) that were guaranteed to shock and disgust its readers. The descriptions were meant to stoke the fires of sexual jealousy, fantasy, and possessiveness in its male readers in order to urge them to consider reform. The Marwaris, *Chand* contemptuously noted, were particularly prone to sexually lewd behavior. The Marwari men were said to especially prefer the prostitutes of Jodhpur, renowned for their music and dance, who were available to travel with them to places like Calcutta and Bombay. [99] These Calcutta men, argued *Chand*, left for their offices early in the day, and did not return home at midday, but had their lunch on their *gaddi.* Left to themselves, Calcutta Marwari women followed routines of early morning bathing in the river, followed by visits several hours long to temples, returning home for lunch and perhaps out to temples again in the afternoon. *Chand* stated, "The young wives wait for the return of their husbands and also expect some satisfaction from them. But when the husbands do not return the women use the servants for physical satisfaction. The women say that they are sick–they call the servants for massaging and slowly they engage the servants to satisfy them. … Even in the name of going to visit a temple after going for a river-bath they engage in this type of adulterous activity." [100]

A temple house called Govind Bhavan was cited as an example of this type of behavior. Its chief priest, Hiralal Goenka, was reportedly infamous for dressing up like the amorous god Krishna and satisfying the lusts of his women visitors, especially widows. When Hiralal became ill, it became known that many women were visiting him, and many women were discovered to be using Hiralal's photo in their lockets instead of Lord Srinath, leading to scandal and a public exposé in the newspaper *Hindu Panch,* which published Hiralal's photograph. [101] *Chand* also claimed Marwari women were known for singing festive songs using abusive language "without parallel in any other Indian state." [102]

Chand ended its discussion by complimenting and naming some of the Marwari reformers in Calcutta as providing the engine of social reform for

the national community. *Chand* contended that the community in Calcutta was divided, with one group opposing any type of reform. The other group (the younger generation) sought reforms in every sphere, from politics, to religion, to social life. They sought literacy, widow remarriage, the removal of *parda*, and national independence, and some were even willing to marry widows themselves. These leaders, according to *Chand*, sought to reform not only Marwari society but Hindu society as a whole. Their ideas included independence for women and abolition of the caste system. Some men were actively involved in such activities, while others primarily donated money for the purpose. 103

The response to this issue of *Chand* by most Marwaris was one of extreme outrage. Most copies were burned. Banarsidas Caturvedi, the editor of the Calcutta Hindi monthly *Vishal Bharat*, proposed
a motion condemning *Chand* at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Ghanshyam Das Birla pushed Gandhi to write about the issue, and a defamation case was raised in the court. Ramnaresh Tripathi wrote a piece called "An Answer to *Chand*'s Marwari Ank [volume]," in which he protested the negative portrayal of Marwari literature, songs, and culture. 104 Though it is true
that Marwari women sang obscene songs at weddings, so, said Tripathi, did women in Uttar Pradesh. In fact, Tripathi claimed that no other community had improved as much as the Marwaris, both in economic entrepreneurship and in education. He wrote that both this issue of *Chand* and Ragagopal Mohatta's tract *Abalaon ka Insaf* [Against the Idea of the Weaker Sex] derived from G.W.M. Reynolds' novel *Mysteries of the Court of London* and were just as useless in improving Marwari society as Reynolds' book had been for the English. Tripathi contended that the only reason that the editor of *Chand* dared to publish this issue was that Marwari society was not strong enough to defend itself. 105

Synchronicity: The Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon

After the scandalous publication of *Chand*, and amid the war of words by various Marwari factions, there was a perception by Marwari Sanatanis and reformers alike that Marwaris needed to work out their ideological differences and be more united against such ferocious outside attacks, especially in the light of new political changes brought about by the Government of India Act of 1935. The reconciliatory Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon (also called the All India Marwari Federation or AIMF) was established under the presidency of Ramdev Chowkany in 1935. The Sammelon brought together geographically-scattered Marwaris, defined as "such persons who represent the way of life, language and culture of Rajasthan, Haryana, Malwa and the adjoining areas and who or their ancestors have settled in part of India or any foreign country." The stated goals of the AIMF were to promote economic and social development, arbitrate disputes, and provide for social uplift. 106

A considerable amount of discussion contributing to the growth of the AIMF involved the Government of India Act of 1935, a plan to consolidate the provinces of British India and the Princely States, had provisions that some Indian subjects would be considered federal and some provincial. [107] The act had created fear that the Marwaris, spread out all over India but belonging by origin to some of the Princely States, might lose their rights of citizenship. They appealed to the Working Committee of the All India Congress Committee that the Marwaris should have the rights of citizenship, whatever their place of residence. On this issue, there was also concern expressed that the rulers of the independent states should give citizenship rights to their people. [108]

The official history of the AIMF organization divides into four periods. The first period, from 1935 to 1946, was spent trying to reconcile the various factions in the group. Issues that related specifically to the condition of women were kept out of the discussions during this period. [109] Instead, the AIMF worked on issues related to government regulations in commerce, politics, education, and health. We might note here that government constituted the "outside" to the community; women belonged to an imagined inner space. But both this "outside" and "inside" were matters of performance. At the second conference held in 1938, speakers such as Padampat Singhania expressed their hope that the organization could sooner or later "tackle and solve the social problems," such as village reforms and family planning. [110] At the third session, proposals were passed to promote education in the traditional Marwari system of accounting, to encourage all families to house and nourish a cow for general cow protection, and to eradicate the famine in Sikar District of Shekhawati by addressing the crises of grain, kerosene, and sugar. [111]

One of the major concerns of the Marwari organizations in this period was confronting the negative deployment of the term "Marwari" in certain contexts. Some debate in the AIMF around 1937—38 was given to the definition of "Marwari," which originally appeared in *Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary* in 1857. The dictionary defined Marwari in three ways: first, as relating to Marwar, "a country lying to the north of Gujarath"; second, a native of that country "applied esp. to men who employ themselves as corn handlers and grocers"; and, third, (as mentioned earlier in the preface), "applied allusively to a cunning and knavish fellow." [112] Contesting negative definitions of "Marwari" in this and other dictionaries of Indian languages became an important activity for Marwari voluntary associations when increasing nationalist consciousness gave rise to discourses of both "pride" and "improvement" of the community's well-being. [113] The role of the AIMF in policing negative uses of the word "Marwari" has in fact continued to the present. [114]

The second phase of the AIMF extended from about 1947 to 1961, and at this stage the AIMF began to address social issues. The AIMF passed proposals to include both men and women as advisors, promote literature that addresses women's issues, and involve women in projects of social development and awareness. The AIMF meetings were used as forums in which women could remove their veils for the first time. This shedding of the veil at AIMF meetings signified that their liberation was in the hands of the organization. Proposals were passed to bar any member whose female family members were required to veil. [115] At a session of the AIMF in 1948, Sushila Singhi announced a proposal for an anti-veiling " *Parda Nivaran Satyagraha*" with the provision that no one should be allowed to become an AIMF member if the women in the family lived in *parda.* [116]

The endeavors of Sushila Singhi, one the of the foremost women activists in the Calcutta Marwari community, were inspired by Janaki Devi Bajaj, who worked with Gandhi in Wardha. Sushila, who passed away in 1999, was herself a widow who remarried. She was born in Lucknow, and her first marriage was at the age of fourteen. The following year, when Sushila was fifteen, her husband died of typhoid. He was eighteen. After that, Sushila studied in the Marwari Balika Vidyalaya, and Sitaram Seksaria arranged her marriage with B. M. Singhi. In describing to me her gratitude and debt to Sitaram, Mrs. Singhi said that he had literally "saved her life" by helping her to remarry after she became a widow. According to what Sushila told me in our interview, from the 1920s through the 1940s, North Indian and Marwari women were very bound by *parda.* She said that, besides being required to veil outside the house and in front of male or older family members, the behavior norms in this system meant that a married woman was not allowed to go out, to stand in front of her father-in-law, to talk to her mother-in-law directly, to talk to her husband in front of her mother-in-law, and was not supposed to talk too much in general. At her second wedding, in 1946, which raised eyebrows just for being a widow-remarriage, Sushila also did not follow *parda* and wore no veil.

In a public lecture addressed to a Bihar Marwari women's meeting in 1983, Sushila Singhi described her experiences in the 1940s anti- *parda* movement. She told her audience:

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> In April 1949 I came to Bihar in the midst of your mothers and mothers-in-law and on their request I accepted the presidentship of the Purdah Virodhi Saytagraha Conference (against veil). Mahatma Gandhi had brought women out of homes and asked them to accompany him. I remember the days when I myself had determined to join the anti- *parda* movement after unveiling my face in one such meeting. While thinking of *parda* I am reminded of the days when I used to visit small towns and villages of different districts of Assam, Bihar, and Orissa for the anti- *parda* movement with the late Basant Lal Muraka, late Sitaram

Seksariya, Shrimati Ramam Murarka, and Shri Singhiji. In the movement started by the conference, through the "social reform" committee, in between the years 1948 and 1957, efforts had been made to unveil the women and inspire them to speak in the meetings. During that period I toured a lot in Bihar, and brought many social struggles. The villagers did not accept us and would not even offer us a drink of water. Today we don't find *parda*, but even today aged people of some villages or small places want to retain *parda* or veil as a symbol of shyness, and compel newly married daughters-in-law to cover their faces. Though a new generation is ostensibly against it, they mesmerizingly cover their faces a little in the name of *parda.* … The dolls of yesterday, decorated with jewels and clothes, … are considered incapable by men of doing many jobs…. Despite education and fashion this situation has not changed, because she has been made helpless in the name of housewife and mistress of the house. [117]

Parda, as Sushila presented it, is not an issue internal to kinship or to the home. One's performance of it happens outside, in the arena of nationalism. *Parda* is thus an example of how a practice relating to domesticity and male-female relations is performed as a theme of public life. This public performance of the "internal" life of the community is different from the Marwaris' negotiation with the government on gambling, for example. It was also affected by discussions among European women about the dangers of *parda* for a woman's health and the well-being of the family. [118]

Compared to other issues, such as dowry, the eradication of *parda* was a highly successful campaign among the Marwaris. Yet even though women's education has arguably increased, many people feel that Marwari women's lives have not necessarily changed for the better. Sushila Singhi once publicly claimed: "I am sad to say there is no change in the values of life. When the girls meet each other, the topic of their conversations is nothing else but jewelry, fashion, fashionable shops, etc. Their ambition in life has become lust for very costly clothes, new means of luxury, and to go to clubs where they drink and play cards with their husband and his friends. … It is often seen that the husband who comes home late fools his wife by giving her clothes and jewelry." [119] Her modern aim, reflecting the influence of Victorian principles, was for women to have a more contemplative, intellectual life and a companionate marriage.

The third and fourth periods of the Sammelon, from 1962 to 1973 and from 1974 to the present, continued many of the same social reform projects from earlier days. At the AIMF's session in 1973 in Ranchi, Bihar, proposals were passed to promote education by improving the standard of education and reducing expenditures, and to raise literacy among women, as well as political awareness. There was further discussion about removing *parda*,

especially in small villages and other "backward areas." The dowry system needed to be stopped, the group argued, so boys and girls were encouraged to take a public vow that they would not take or give dowry in marriage. The AIMF expressed awareness that Marwaris were blamed for corruption, bribing, and adulteration in the countryside. Proposals were passed in the twelfth session in Bihar to stop wasting money on extravagant weddings, and to start a system of collective marriages to avoid wasting money. Special meetings were organized for women, with programs and discussions about the promotion of Rajasthani culture, literature, and art. [120] From November 9, 1975 to December 12, 1975, there were Samaj Sudhar Days, including the passage of fourteen proposals to simplify marriage ceremonies, to offer food relief in Assam, to give financial help in the marriage of poor girls, and to tackle the new problem of men who desert their wives after only a few months of marriage. [121] Concerns about dowry, veiling, libraries, cow protection, disaster relief, medical care, and education remain on the AIMF's agenda today.

Housewives and Citizens: Educating Marwari Women

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Negotiations over women's education have been an important part of the resolution of the women's question in Marwari public life. Ramdev Chokhany, the first president of the All India Marwari Federation, wrote that:

> The development of any caste depends on women, but the condition of Marwari women today is horrible. Marwari women don't know how to maintain family and they are not fit for giving birth to a perfect or healthy child. By spending all day gossiping and eating, they are prone to all kinds of disease. Lack of education is one of the major causes for this condition, so it is the duty of men to provide facilities for women to learn and then they will be able to maintain their families perfectly. [122]

Chokhany's statement indicates that, in debating the issue of female education, Marwaris have participated in a larger national discussion about the survivability of a people amid degenerate native customs. Women offered the key to the future, and much of the impetus for reform came in the field of education. [123]

The Marwari promotion of female education has focused primarily on domestic skills and home science. Domestic science was once seen, even in the West, as a very innovative form of female education and a creative way of bringing girls and women into education. But by the 1950s, when the Marwari women begin to seek education beyond high school and to need education facilities for modern subjects like English, the study of domesticity was already seen as backward and retrograde, especially when

compared to the courses of study available to their Bengali counterparts. From the earliest days of Bengali female education in the Bethune School in 1850, Bengali girls read out of English textbooks. By the 1930s, Bengali women were earning master's degrees in every conceivable subject, not just in home science.

Because there has been little need among the upper-middle-class and wealthy factions of the community for women to earn an income, home science has been the perfect subject for reproducing the family household. Marwaris have lacked an economic incentive to impart professional or vocational education to women. Further, Marwaris have had the kind of money it takes to set up private schools in general, and they have started several institutions for domestic education, particularly in Calcutta. The politics of women's education among the Marwaris of Calcutta have thus been inflected by the language of class and status. Indeed, domestic education and home science students have come to be perceived as "Marwari."

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The stress on domestic education suited the housewifely lifestyle of Marwari women, for whom there was no real impetus to seek gainful employment. A 1961 speech given by Shrimati Heda at an AIMF meeting stressed the importance of domestic subjects for girls. She noted: "arts and cultural education have a unique place in the life of girls. The useful teaching of music, handicraft and interior decoration brings about a new grace and dignity in their domestic life. So, every girl should get such education–later she may *voluntarily* go in for any professional and higher education. Her education in arts, culture and religion will keep her aloof from the evils of modern materialism. Home and school should complete such education. … A thoughtful and enlightened housewife can make a pleasant home and a proud society. If each house is happy and prosperous, the society is also prosperous and developed" [my emphasis]. [124] Heda left the question of professional and higher education to a woman's own choices;
later she may voluntarily make such choices, but there was no reason to create the expectation of advanced education for all girls.

Even Marwari boys, after all, faced similar forms of resistance to their obtaining higher education, as in the case of Jamnalal Bajaj's efforts to start a Marwari College in Bombay, discussed earlier in this chapter . In Calcutta today, many of the colleges offering business degrees at bachelor's and master's levels have special, early-morning programs so that young men can attend classes and then spend the rest of the day in the office and at work. This represents a major change from how Marwari boys were prepared for business careers in the early days of the twentieth century, when boys received little formal education. Now many Marwaris come to the United States for business school. It is rare, however, for Marwari men to be educated beyond the M.B.A. level. Since there is the expectation that

women should not be more educated than men, women are generally discouraged from doing Ph.D.'s, especially before they are married.

By contributing extensively to the promotion of domestic science courses, Marwaris have found an interesting solution to the women's question in education. Women can be educated, it seems, not for future employment, which would stigmatize the family, but rather in subjects that will actually help maintain the family, and not threaten it. There are home science degree courses in institutions such as the Rani Birla College of Home Science, which in 1997 was discussing plans to extend its curriculum to combine domestic education and business subjects. In addition to formal degree-granting institutions, there are also many informal classes given in Calcutta in domestic subjects. Saroj Kaushik, a Sindhi woman and graduate of Lady Irwin College in New Delhi, operated one such course. In the 1970s and 1980s, she ran Saraswati Niketan Finishing School for Girls with a six-months certificate or one-year diploma course in the following subjects: visual poise, personality development, international cooking, slimnastics and fitness, interior decoration, home management, Western dance, beauty care, dressmaking, and handicrafts. [125] Although there were students from many communities in the courses, according to Kaushik most of the students were Marwari. These subjects helped women become appropriate wives for top industrialists, capable of entertaining their business friends and keeping up an intelligent conversation.

A movement to provide English-language education for Marwari girls came in the 1950s. The first such Marwari girls' school was Modern High. Both Modern High School for Girls and Rani Birla Girls' College were started by Hindustan Charity Trust of Braj Mohan and Shrimati Rukmani Devi Birla. Modern High School for Girls was established on Jan 3, 1952, "in fulfillment of Mrs. Birla's vision of the need for a girls' school where a balanced education, combining the best aspects of Indian and western cultures, could be imparted through the medium of English." [126]

The school eventually moved to the central area of Ballygunge and was placed on land adjacent to one of the Birla Calcutta residential complexes, consisting of several mansions that house members of the extended family. An indoor ice-skating rink at Modern High was opened in 1968, but it has since been converted into a large theater for school performances. Modern High School teaches all subjects, including sciences, home science, art, needlework, and geography, and is one of the most popular girls' schools in Calcutta, [127] competing with the convent schools for students from upper-class families. In a recent school magazine, the task of the school was described as "to continue educating girls to fit gracefully into society; as enlightened and responsible women." [128]

Other such schools include G.D. Birla Girls' School, Mahadevi Birla Shishu Vihar, and Ashok Hall Girls' Higher Secondary School, which are part of the Ashok Hall group, looked after by Manjrushee Khaitan, the daughter of Basant Kumar and Sarala Birla. The Birla family now owns a great many of the private schools in Calcutta, including South Point, which is the largest high school in the world. Not surprisingly, middle-class Bengali parents who send their children there point to the unbelievably high enrollment, rising tuition fees, and the morning, afternoon, and early evening three-shift student ("factory") scheduling as evidence of how so-called Birla "philanthropy" in education is at heart just a money-making scheme.

Women's Clubs and Organizations

There are a number of women's institutions—ostensibly open to all but which mainly serve adult Marwari women—that are basically social clubs that exist to create linkages among women from similar economic backgrounds. In Burabazar, there is the Mahila Parishad, which runs a Montessori school and various social activities. [129] The Ladies Study Group (LSG) was founded in the late 1960s and is a club for women of family of members of the Indian Chamber of Commerce. The women come from some of the wealthiest families. By 1974, they had donated over 700,000 rupees ($20,000) to relief work. [130]

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I was invited to attend an LSG meeting held at the Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1996. There were about forty women there. The day's program was a debate held between invited speakers about a bill being considered in Parliament at the time on whether women should get a day off every week from doing housework. The highly educated and articulate Bengali panelists debated the matter in a lively fashion, followed by a rather halting discussion with the Marwari and North Indian women in the audience. Afterwards, there was a reception with lovely North Indian vegetarian snacks of tea, coffee, fried *puris*, and *alu dam* (seasoned potato). To my surprise, most of the women fled immediately after the debate ended, but a few stayed, so I chatted with one or two. The official LSG forum, after all, is a completely English-speaking event. One wealthy, elderly Marwari woman told me that she did not like going to LSG meetings because she was uncomfortable being in an English-speaking environment. [131] After the LSG meeting I got a ride back to Ballygunge with the Bengali speakers on the panel, a rich and sophisticated Marwari housewife, and a Murshidabad *saharwali* woman, who seemed especially shy and had a lot of trouble speaking in English. The Marwari woman who owned the car got off at her house first, then had the driver drop the rest of us. After the Murshidabadi woman got out of the car, the two Bengali women started talking about the two others right away, saying "Oh, how they are really coming out now," and "Yes, they do ask such intelligent questions." Though the Bengali women were happy to participate in the debate, and no doubt earned a little bit of money for their efforts, their condescending attitude spoke volumes to me about how Bengalis view the progress of their Marwari sisters.

In addition to the LSG, the Jyotirmai Club was founded in 1962, described as "the culmination of the aspirations of a few socially aware housewives who desired to improve their social environment." An undated printed "Members List" for Jyotirmai listed about 500 couples, all of whom have Marwari or North Indian surnames. [132] In an interview I did with Mrs. Manjula Tantia, one of Jyotirmai's founding members, she described how the club was formed among housewives during business hours when their husbands were away at work. [133] One of their primary activities is charity. During the war with China in 1962, Jyotirmai donated 6,740 grams of gold and Rs. 50,000, which were given to the chief minister of West Bengal to aid the war. In 1965, blankets were provided for flood victims in Bihar and Kashmir, and wells were dug for drought victims in Rajasthan. One of their primary goals has been to work toward uplifting the underprivileged through organizing medical services, charitable homeopathic dispensaries, immunization, and camps to fit limbs with prostheses. Jyotirmai also emphasizes the "personality development" of its members through literature, cooking lessons (with chefs from five-star hotels), drama, music, dance, poetry sammelons, and "Happy Hour" courses to teach religion and culture to children between six and thirteen years old. [134] The Shilpam Sevika Scheme provides courses in masala grinding, knitting, embroidery, cold storage and gift-wrapping, to train lower-class girls to be housekeepers and nannies. A club brochure claims that, "the demand for girls trained under this scheme has been very heartening indeed." [135]

Not all Marwari women, however, are housewives. Some work, but in very particular kinds of professions. The prominent Marwari women who are involved in running charitable concerns illustrate the distinction, made not only by Marwaris, but by most Indians, between business (*vyasay*) and service (*chakri*). This is the difference between working for oneself versus working for others. One way that Marwari women avoid service is by being in business, either working in the family business or else running their own boutique, shop, restaurant, or factory. One female professor, who confessed she was very embarrassed to speak to me "as a richy-rich Marwari," told me a story about how she had confronted the stigma of women's work. As a teenager she was desperate to be independent and have her own money and, after badgering her parents endlessly, began tutoring school children. After a few weeks, however, her aunt told her that there were many rumors circulating about her father's business firm. The family couldn't be doing very well, people were saying, otherwise why would he send his daughter out to work? Work was not just about her, she had realized, but a reflection on the entire family. She stopped her tutoring, but eventually went on to marry outside the Marwari community and has formed a very different sort of life from the one she grew up in.

The Spectacle of Neelam Jain's Death

The focus so far on the historical development of Marwari institutions and

organizations might suggest that the impetus for social reform has developed primarily within the public sphere. In recent times, however, Marwari management of their social and public identity, particularly in relation to women, has been brought into dramatic crisis by events occurring within the public sphere.

On September 4, 1980, the dead body of a young upper-middle-class Marwari woman named Neelam Jain, better known by her nickname "Pinky," was found lying on the sidewalk of Calcutta's fashionable Camac Street. Many reasons were given for Pinky's death, ranging from suicide to rumors of threats to expose smuggling operations by the family. We will never really know exactly what set off the events that led to her falling several stories and ending her life with a fatal crash onto the cement of the street below. Her in-laws, initially charged with the crime, have since been exonerated.

Whatever the true reason for Neelam Jain's death, the event was picked up in the press and became part of a wider genre of women's deaths commonly known as "dowry death." Neelam Jain was not the first Marwari woman to die a so-called dowry death, nor was she the first woman in Bengal whose death became an object of considerable public concern and debate. [136] But since the 1908 death of Snehalata, a poor Brahmin girl who killed herself rather than see her father become impoverished on account of her dowry, no other dowry death in Bengal has attracted as much attention as Neelam Jain's. [137] In fact, a series of sensationalist articles called *Jananta ki Adalut* ("The People's Court") in popular Hindi tabloids drew many parallels between the deaths of Neelam Jain and Snehalata. [138]

The tabloid press reported in great detail how Neelam had often fought with her mother-in-law and had desperately wanted to leave the house. On the fateful day of her death, she was allegedly dragged from her flat up the seldom-used stairway leading to the terrace on the twelfth floor, from which she fell. A few days after the episode, Neelam's mother-in-law, Mrs. Jain, and her two sons were put in jail after being arrested by the Calcutta police. A large amount of silver was recovered from the Jains' flat, stashed away in a secret compartment in the frame of a bed. Even today, nearly twenty years later, there remain rumors that the Jain family had been deeply involved in smuggling. Perhaps an unwilling witness, Neelam Jain may have proved herself to be a dangerous liability because she could not keep the family secret.

Much was made in the Hindi newspapers about the irony that such torture and violent death could happen in a family of Jains, who are traditionally described as pacifists. The person who received the most blame for the

death, interestingly enough, was not Neelam Jain's husband, but rather his mother. ₁₃₉ Stories abounded about the horrible way that Neelam Jain's mother-in-law treated her, forcing her to do very menial chores. When her body was discovered on the sidewalk, she was wearing the cheapest kind of cotton sari, which only a maidservant would wear, and there were strange marks on her body. It was rumored that on the night of her death Neelam Jain had received multiple electric shocks. The discussion of Neelam Jain's funeral became as much a spectacle as her death itself. Newspaper reports chided the husband's father for trying to bribe Brahmins to come to the *shraddha* (funeral) ceremony and take *dakshina* (literally, "south," here referring to the fee that a Brahmin would charge for performing a certain ritual). This discourse about the instigation of Brahmins is not unlike, to a certain extent, what happened in the 1917 scandal over ghee.

The subsequent debate, which raged on for weeks in the sensationalist tabloid newspapers, focused on the dubious origins and circumstances of a letter Neelam Jain wrote to her husband. The last letter that Neelam wrote to her husband, which became known as her "suicide" letter, was published in *Chapte Chapte*, a local Hindi newspaper. Here is my translation:

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Dearest "Little" [the nickname of her husband, as youngest son of the family],

> Whatever I spoke yesterday—whether you believe it or not—please remember that I was asked to say it by my sister-in-law. … Let bygones be bygones. Now I promise I shall never lie in my life. You ought to get married again. If mother is happy because of it then I am also happy. It is for my happiness that I am asking you to remarry. But you make sure that she does not undergo what I have undergone….
>
> Lastly, all I say is you should be happy always. In mother's happiness lies my happiness. I could bear no more and hence I'm committing suicide. One is bound by destiny.

> Neelam

The public discourse about Pinky's death reflects a strong public interest in determining the source of the letter. Was this letter really written by Neelam Jain? And of her own will? Whether this "suicide" letter was real, fake, or coerced, whether it was written "purely" of free will or under tremendous pressure, we shall never know. Yet even when the court's

expert determined that the letter was genuine (in the sense that it had been written by Neelam's own hand), this fact did not quell the widespread disapproval accorded to the Jain family in light of the deadly events. [140]

In the aftermath of Neelam Jain's death, the newspapers reported with a tone of some surprise that there were public gatherings of large numbers of textile merchants. Normally these merchants would probably not oppose the dowry system, and furthermore they did not have a strong history of activism in general. But social boycott, a traditional form of punishment (discussed earlier in the context of widow remarriage), was used as a way to bring public condemnation upon the Jain family. The newspapers printed a list of sari and cloth shops owned by the Jain family, with the dictum that no one should purchase from them. Social ostracism in this case took the form of economic boycott. Yet rumors abounded that the shop managers had put everything on sale in the shops in order to combat the boycott, with the result that many consumers forgot any sense of social justice and rushed into the shops hunting for bargains.

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The most striking aspect of the public debate over Neelam Jain's death was the way that Neelam Jain's name became synonymous with the problem of dowry death in Marwari society. Many editorials claimed that there were a thousand more Neelam Jains in the community who faced similar fates if there were no interference. Neelam Jain's death, although it was not the first dowry death among Marwari Jains, brought to light the problem of the exorbitant dowries and ostentatious marriages that had become common— and infamous—among Marwaris.

Women's groups all over Calcutta and Bengal began discussing the problem of dowry death and how it might be combated. These meetings called for action to be taken against dowry, at both the legislative and the community level. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, in particular, was seen as ineffectual and in need of revision. Two community organizations, the Marwari Association and the Haryana Association, held marches in which over two hundred persons participated in a procession against the dowry system that had purportedly led to Neelam's death. [141] Fifty prospective bridegrooms at a meeting organized by the West Bengal Provincial Marwari Federation took oaths, along with their parents, that they would not accept any dowry. [142]

The early 1980s saw the convening of numerous discussions about the dowry problem among women's and intracommunity groups. Community leaders came out with public statements condemning the practice of dowry and the ostentation displayed at marriage ceremonies. They acknowledged that the problem of the torture of daughters-in-law for additional dowry was

on the rise, such as in the infamous case of Neelam Jain, and that the community needed to take action. Calls were made for people to boycott marriages that would be celebrated with an excess of pomp and show. Leaders such as Mr. Nand Kishore Jalan cited the cases of widow remarriage and anti- *parda* social reform movements as evidence of the community's ability for self-reform. [143] At the same time, the national feminist magazine *Manushi* called for a boycott of dowry marriages. [144]

As the work of many scholars on other regions and times in India testifies, the critique of dowry is not new. At a general level, the social critique of dowry stems from a cultural conception of marriage that has changed from material or economic to spiritual and companionate. The change may be attributed to colonial culture, in which regulations over the expense of marriage date back to the nineteenth century, when the colonial government itself took a keen interest in the Rajput marriage customs described by Colonel Tod. Proposals included placing caps on expenditure and prohibiting child marriages. [145] To the colonial idea of frugality, ideas of romantic love and companionate marriage were added over time. Dowry has been an object of reformist critique since the early-twentieth century death of Snehalata.

In recent years, dowry has become more identified with public identity, and more attention has been placed on *baniya* trading communities such as Marwaris and Jains and their practices of staging ostentatious and elaborate weddings. Even a cursory look at the invitations to Marwari weddings suggests a tight relationship between capitalism and kinship. Unlike Bengali invitations, which normally list only the home phone number, invitations to Marwari weddings commonly list the businesses associated with both the bride and groom's families.

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Public spokespersons for Marwari social organizations assert that the controversial social practice of expensive marriages associated with the Marwari community is directly responsible for the one hundred dowry deaths that have occurred among the Marwaris in West Bengal alone. Marwaris are said by their own community leaders to have more cases of dowry death than any other community. Rajesh Khaitan notes, "The ostentation of the Marwari community is the reason for the high rate of dowry deaths in the fold." [146] Social reformers who criticize the high expectations that Marwari families have for dowry (demands which often include a minimum of Rs. 50,000, cars, gold jewelry, and even apartments) have taken several steps within the community to prevent the escalation of dowry. Newspaper reports tell of community boycotts against families who torture their daughters-in-law for money. [147] In September 1986, fifty couples participated in a dowryless mass engagement ceremony organized by the All India Marwari

Federation held in a *dharmasala* in north Calcutta. <u>148</u>

Making Hindu Marriage Public: Marwari Community Marriages in Bengal

Ever since the highly publicized 1981 "dowry death" of the young Marwari bride Neelam Jain, Marwari community organizations have taken it upon themselves to find ways of combating the negative publicity their community has earned from their enormous dowries and the disturbingly frequent cases of "dowry death" within their fold. Since 1981, dowryless mass marriages have occurred in a variety of Marwari community organizations in Calcutta, in addition to the All India Marwari Federation. <u>149</u>

These marriages have attracted wide local publicity and have brought considerable public recognition to the organizers. The cultural capital arising from such an event arguably accrues to the organizers of the event much more than to the couples who take their wedding vows in this manner. I participated in the planning of one such "community marriage," which was a major project of the women's wing of the Akhil Bharatiya Marwari Sammelan. I will refer to the women's group as "Sammelan," the name that the women generally used to describe themselves.

Under the auspices of the All India Marwari Federation's women's association, an introduction gathering for prospective brides and grooms was held on September 6—8, 1996. This *parichaya sammelan*, or "acquaintanceship gathering," was held to facilitate the introduction of marriageable Marwari boys and girls from all over South Asia. To a certain degree, the public format echoed the way that wealthy Marwari families now sometimes meet in public spaces (such as the lobbies of five-star hotels) to negotiate marriages, which has the event of neutralizing the power dynamics of the event by circumventing the more traditional (and perhaps more stressful) home visits. Those lucky enough to find a match would eventually be married in a mass wedding ceremony held in the first fortnight of the following December. This *samuhik vivah*, or "collective mass marriage," takes as its core assumption that brides and grooms who choose to participate in the community marriage vow not to give or accept any dowry. Furthermore, the drastic reduction of ceremonial expenses (which for these couples would be borne by the organization) is an additional sign that this is an effort to attend to the common critique that Marwaris spend too much money on ostentatious weddings and other public displays of wealth.

The Mahila Samiti, the women's wing that organized the event, was made up of an energetic team of over two dozen Marwari women. The meetings were held on Saturday afternoons inside the heavily air-conditioned Calcutta Chamber of Commerce. The group gathered many times to discuss and plan a community marriage, by which suitable Marwari boys and girls would be matched in a communal introduction and engagement function, to be followed later by a community wedding. The women in the group

came mainly from upper-middle class Marwari households. While the majority of the women in the group could be described as housewives, a handful of them pursued careers in business and a few in teaching. Being part of a Marwari women's community group gave them an appropriate social forum in which to socialize and contribute to worthy causes.

When I first attended the Sammelan meetings, I initially hoped to be a mere "observer," sitting on the sidelines without becoming too involved. The meetings were very lively affairs, and bordering, for me, on the chaotic. We sat around a large oval conference table, with participants reaching for the table microphones to voice their opinions. The meetings were conducted in a mixture of Hindi dialects, languages that I could reasonably understand one-on-one, but which I found bewildering when twenty-plus women all spoke at the same time, sometimes into the microphones, competing with one another to voice their opinions. At the first meeting a sign-up sheet was passed around the room, listing the various committees that needed volunteers. When it came to me, I tried to pass it ahead, only to have it returned. "We need more people either in fund-raising or in the reception committee," the President said to me sternly and in English, "and you also need to submit your membership dues." I could not pretend that I did not understand. Silently cursing the anthropological tradition of participant observation, a technique that now threatened to turn me into a card-carrying Marwari social reformer, I put my name down to work for the reception committee and wrote out a check.

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From the first meeting onward, a couple of men sat on the sidelines, as unobtrusive observers of the Marwari women's public space. These men, I later learned, were the leading officers of the All India Marwari Sammelan. Though the meetings were ostensibly led by the president of the women's wing, and though the marriage was officially organized by the women's wing, it quickly became clear that the male officers had their own agenda for how the function should be organized. The men became more and more vocal in articulating their plans and concerns. It seemed that they knew exactly how they wanted to do things and that their role was actually to organize the function while eliciting the women members' consent. There were many aspects of the discussed plans that needed to be accomplished to make the community marriage a success. Carefully-worded advertisements needed to be posted in Hindi dailies all over India in order to attract the attention of Marwari parents who wished their sons and daughters to participate in the event. The prospective brides and grooms were recruited through these advertisements in the Hindi press and also through relatives, office contacts, work, and other networks. We had discussions ranging from decorations, food, and catering to heady issues of legal responsibility and financial liability in case of any possible marriage troubles. For instance, the fine print of the engagement contract stated that the Marwari Sammelan would not be held responsible for any death resulting from participation in the AIMF community marriage. Though this statement was undoubtedly necessary to protect the organization from any

legal responsibility, that it was even thought of is evidence of a lingering doubt in the organization about the success of a dowryless marriage. The statement suggests that dowry may, in fact, be essential to a secure married life.

Notably, not a single woman in the group suggested that her son or daughter also participate in this community marriage. Though it was never made explicit, it was clear that this mass marriage was aimed at the lower and lower-middle classes. Though the organizers could eventually claim valuable cultural capital and social credit for dowryless marriages, the politics of class privilege were clear. This was clearly a case of elite women deploying less-privileged people in the service of social reform and self-improvement. The wealthy Mahila Samiti volunteers arranged these community marriages for lower and lower-middle-class Marwaris, not for themselves. This familiar pattern of paternalism in social reform, practiced by the social elite in "reforming" the lives of their less fortunate brethren through public performances of community ritual, is an old trope in the history of charity, philanthropy, and social reform in both metropolitan and colonial contexts. The system of individually arranged marriages, accompanied by large and often undisclosed amounts of dowry in the form of money and gifts, is still very much the norm. In fact, it is families like those of the Mahila Samiti who themselves put on the lavish weddings that poorer people struggle to emulate. Some of them were tremendously worried about providing for their own daughters' dowries. [150] As I became more involved in the group, I heard rumors among the women that there had been a dowry death in the family of one of the leading Samiti volunteers, but this volunteer was not ostracized, at least not publicly.

The Sammelan wanted to create a new kind of public wedding. Weddings in India, and especially for the Marwaris, are usually a very expensive business. Calcutta's five-star hotels, such as the Taj Bengal or the Oberoi Grand, where elite Marwaris hold introductory meetings to discuss potential matches, are also the sites where the wealthy hold their weddings. At these elaborate, all-day events, thousands of guests, dressed to the nines, mill in and out from the ceremony to the buffet table. (I found that weddings were an excellent way to speak to people informally and sometimes make contacts for my appointment anthropology.) Obviously, not all Marwaris have their weddings at the Taj. Middle-class people rent spaces in privately-owned marriage halls, with catered food and lively entertainment shows of dancing and singing performed by relatives of the bride. Rich people in India often use illegally-earned "black money" to pay for their weddings, while middle-class people are much more likely to go into debt. The Sammelan explicitly sought to create an alternative to this "show."

The introduction ceremony was held at the Vidya Mandir auditorium attached to Hindi High School, a boys' school in central Calcutta. Our

reception committee set up booths and greeted the hundreds of potential brides, grooms, and their extended families, registered them, and collected their Rs. 250 fees. Some young men from a Marwari youth organization were also there to help us with the work. I had to concentrate to understand the variety of regional accents of Marwaris arriving from all over the subcontinent, and I worked very hard for several hours trying to quickly hunt down registration materials and nametags. [151] Although a considerable number of the participants had been willing to travel all the way to Calcutta to take the chance, at least half registered late on the opening day, possibility suggesting the marginality of the event as a realistic pathway to marriage.

A catalogue was distributed to each of the families with a photograph and brief description of all the preregistered participants. Descriptions of the potential brides and grooms listed the candidate's name, age, birth date, *gotra* (clan), father's occupation, height, subcaste, educational qualifications, and father's name and address. [152] Photocopies of information for the ones who registered at the door were quickly made and distributed. In all, over 200 young men and about 150 young women ended up participating in the event. In her opening address, Alka Bangur, president of the Samiti, explained that the young women were spared from having to appear before numerous suitors and their fathers were spared the expenses of entertaining the boy's family, who were themselves searching for a prospective bride. Mrs. Bangur was later quoted in the press as saying: "Here, the girls chose from among over 200 men." [153]

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At the introduction ceremonies, the potential brides and grooms each walked across the stage and introduced themselves, repeating some of the information given in the catalogue. I was quite struck by the class disparity between the participants and the women organizing the function. None of the participants looked very rich. A small number of the potential brides and grooms were afflicted with various physical disabilities, such as muteness, deafness, blindness, and limps. Some of the men were divorced or widowed. While the self-introductions were going on, families in the audience watched the people on the stage and at the same time flipped through their catalogues to read the descriptions, making comments to each other and marking the names of those who might make potentially compatible spouses. After the parade of potential spouses, actual negotiations took place during the program breaks, when families mingled and chatted with each other, often going off by themselves for more private conversations. The conversations were not between the boy and the girl but between families. The tone of the conversations I (over)heard was remarkably blunt, especially in discussing income and family business.

During the introduction weekend, only a couple of matches

were made, but the stage was set for several more couples to become engaged in the months that followed. By the time that the mass wedding rolled around in December 1996, ten couples ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-five years had made their pledges to not accept dowry and to be married at the event. Each couple paid the sum of Rs. 1000 ($30) to participate in the wedding. 154 Each couple was allowed to invite about a dozen close relatives who stayed in local Marwari *dharmasala* (guest houses). The rest of the expenses—for priests, flowers, food, and a handful of presents—were provided by the organization. There were other marriages arranged at the introduction ceremony between couples who chose to marry privately and not have their ceremony with the other couples. According to Asha Maheshwari, secretary of the Mahila Samiti, these couples preferred to marry separately because of "certain family obligations." 155

Rituals of Mass Marriage

The overall concept of the mass wedding ceremony defied tradition in many ways. First of all, it involved a shift in social authority from a familial public to the more anonymous public of a caste association in civil society. But within the framework of the larger structure, many of the so-called traditional rites and rituals were maintained. Wrapping red turbans on the heads of the grooms before the ceremony started was an important part of re-creating community tradition within this unusual framework. Scenes of the traditional wedding rituals were played out on a long raised platform, divided up into one stall for each couple, their families, and a priest to do the rituals for each couple. The first stall had a Bengali man notably wearing the *topor,* which is considered to be the traditional Bengali wedding hat. This Bengali couple, who had connections to one of the Marwari women on the committee, had decided to marry at the Marwari function in order to avoid the high cost of wedding expenses. The inclusion of the Bengali couple within an ostensibly Marwari gathering was initially somewhat surprising to me. The symbolic boundaries of community drawn by their participation suggest that Marwari social reform is more fractured than we might think, and perhaps relies more on class than on community definitions. Though some couples, like these Bengalis, were from Calcutta, other brides and grooms came from such far-away places such as Nepal, Bihar, Darjeeling, Siliguri, and Cuttack.

Each stall was decorated with hundreds of strands of flowers, creating a picture-perfect wedding setting. Within each couple's separate platform, which demarcated boundaries of individualized ceremony, the observing families took an important role. The parents of each couple, as well as some siblings or other close relatives, sat closely around the couple in order to watch the proceedings. The worship rituals did not differ greatly from those

performed in the usual sort of individual-couple ceremonies. Since the couples had promised not to exchange any dowry, the organization provided gifts, including some clothing as well as pressure cookers, water filters, and suitcases. 156 One can only speculate about how the participating brides and grooms felt about this "collectivity" made up of themselves and other couples. The sense of community, manufactured here by the simultaneous marriage ceremonies, arose only in the public articulation of the event, especially as represented by the press. Although mass wedding ceremonies reflect a shift in the construction of social authority from the family to the social organization, even with this shift in social settings, the family's presence played an important role, creating a familial space that broke up the space of the collective mass.

The creation of separate stalls for the couples and their families demonstrates how the space of the mass wedding could be individualized, and was indeed planned to be so. a href="../images/haa06m.html" target= "new"> One of the couples very creatively, it seemed to me, de-emphasized the "mass" aspect of the event. For them, having the immediate family around was not enough, so they hired a film crew to make a videotape of the event. Their decision to record their wedding raises interesting questions about how the couples themselves gain cultural capital from participating in this kind of mass wedding. < There are certainly other ways of getting around the high costs of marriage. After all, many couples choose to have a civil ceremony and are married by a representative of the state. But getting married in a mass ceremony, organized under the auspices of a caste organization, grants couples a certain degree of respectability (and, of course, gives them a good story to tell their friends and children in the future). But by cutting out other couples, this couple can create the space of their own public, for later representation.

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The presence of a video camera and video crew to film the wedding rituals of one particular couple suggests that the mass wedding was simply not complete for them without that quintessential object of modern representational techniques: the video camera. The imaginary of the video could create a much more romantic narrative of the wedding. By editing out the "mass" aspects, the video could even represent the event as one couple's "private" wedding. Whereas the publicity photographs published by the press stress the authority of the organization, and show all the couples together, the video captures a more individualized narrative—a traditional wedding story created out of the mass event. By videotaping, the couple

may have been able to recoup some of the cultural capital that they lost by not providing a lavish wedding of their own to display their prosperity, wealth, auspiciousness, and generosity. After all, the videotaping of weddings, which has become commonplace worldwide, represents another way that the practices and customs of the elite have established higher standards for what counts as a respectable wedding ritual.

Though ten couples had registered for the mass wedding, only nine couples ended up getting married in the public ceremony. One man stood in front of his place on the platform waiting angrily for the arrival of the girl he had pledged to marry. Unfortunately for him, the bride and her family never turned up. The same thing almost happened to one of the brides. As the ceremonies of other couples began both to the right and the left of her, the bride-to-be sat and cried loudly on the edge of the platform, crumpled up in painful sobs at the thought of being stood up at her wedding. The idea that the family had broken the marriage alliance was devastating to her and her family's honor. This did not seem to be something that could merely be blamed on the organization. Luckily for the bride, her wedding story had a different ending. Halfway through the ceremonies taking place for the other couples, her groom and his parents came rushing into the ceremony, full of excuses that their train had reached Howrah station extremely late.

Let us return to the question of the form that these weddings took and the sites of individuality that were negotiated within the space of the group. Mass marriages are unlike the modern story of love marriage, which is sometimes portrayed as another attempt to beat the cost of dowry and lavish wedding ceremonies. Mass marriages are mediated by the structures of civil society and a numbers mentality that are products of global modernity but that obscure questions of individual choice. Love marriage, as the Sammelan women themselves said, is not seen as a suitable solution to the problem of dowry. Instead, the Mahila Samiti depend on gaining consent to a radical shift in social authority from the family to the voluntary association in civil society. The disciplinary and authoritative gaze is shifted to the community, as represented by the community organization. The mass marriage, however, had a relatively small overall impact for poor Marwaris; only nine marriages were formed from 350 participants. Perhaps the organization's quest for cultural capital, acquired in part through newspaper representations of the event, was the ultimate goal. The fact that public representations of the event depended on emphasizing Marwari women's charity in public life also reflects a desire to counter stereotypes of Marwari women's confinement in the home. Social organizations are probably the most visible kinds of social commentary and "social reform" that exist in the historical and ethnographic archive. And yet, these "public" social organizations represent only a small fraction of what

and how Marwari women think, reflect, and act upon their own "social condition."

Literature and the work of sentiments

 Literature may also serve as an ethnographic source, offering evidence of and insight into ways that women have made small changes in gendered relationships and family space. Even though literature certainly engages in aestheticizing experience, it has the advantage of highlighting, and even exaggerating, sentiment as a key component of the narrative. As such, literature can make sentiments the object of analysis for the anthropologist and historian. [157] Literature documents the productive work of sentiments, while out of necessity magnifying them, and thus makes them visible to the reader. The sentiments expressed in literature are not necessarily invented ones, for their effectiveness comes from their quality of being shared by author and reader. The intersubjective hermeneutic between author and reader is what makes such sentiments documentable.

Let us turn to two short stories published in Alka Saraogi's 1996 collection entitled *Kahani ke Talash Mein* (In Search of a Story.) [158] The first story, entitled *Lal Mitti ka Sardak* (The Red Dirt Road), discusses a woman's experience taking a short trip away from her husband and children, when she accompanies a female friend to a Bengali resort in Santiniketan. Vandana, the protagonist, lies restlessly in bed early one morning, unable to sleep because of the nervous thoughts circulating in her head. She contemplates the guilt she feels over temporarily leaving her family to go off with a friend. Conversations she had with her son before departing for the station replay themselves in her mind:

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"Mommy, did Grandmother ever leave you like this, the way that you are leaving me?" Surprised at this unexpected question, she fell silent.

Suresh, her husband, quipped, "Your Mom is modern, pal!" Was there some irritation behind the way that Suresh was joking around?

"No Bittu. No one can become modern by putting on airs. And see, when you grow up, then you will do a lot of things which I have never done. In this way everything keeps changing all the time. I am not like Grandma, and in the same way you are not like me." Vandana said this in a confident tone without any expression on her face. [159]

In this poignant vignette, Saraogi demonstrates the way different generations of a single family can encounter modernity. Vandana's son points to the standards of the past in expressing his emotions, asking whether his grandmother had ever done this to her. Vandana's husband, however, tries to make a joke out of her modernity that will placate the son but perhaps add to the guilt that Vandana is meant to be feeling. Against these familial claims on her, Vandana must find a way to negotiate the guilt that her son and husband place on her for leaving them, if only for a couple of days. In her clever response about "everything changing all the time," Vandana points out the way that the reproduction of gender roles never remains constant. Instead, the definition of appropriate behavior for kinship roles is always mediated via generations, within a seemingly personal experience of modernity.
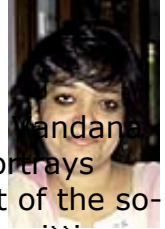
The emotional pain that results from resisting tradition stays with Vandana throughout her adult years. A second excerpt, also a flashback, portrays Vandana's teenage days and documents the family's management of the so-called pollution associated with women's menstruation. Vandana is sitting with her mother, sister, grandmother, and father in the living room, relaxing and talking. Vandana's mother whispers to her:

> "Look, for two days don't sit on the bed and don't touch anything. Spread out the mat and sit on it, and at night take out the blue silk sheet and sleep on it. You understand, don't you, just as your older sister does, huh?" Mom whispered in her ear very responsibly. Vandana thought about the secret of the mat and the blue sheet many times, but without knowing everything she could not reach any decision. When she asked her older sister about it, she became very irritated. As soon as their mother went away, Vandana climbed into the lap of her sister and went to sleep on the bed.

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> [Vandana said,] "I will not sit on the mat, nor will I sleep on this sheet, and when I touch you, you will become polluted yourself. Now what will you do?" Grandma sat quietly and ran her fingers through Vandana's hair.

[Her father said to the grandmother.] "Mother, what is this, aren't you going to explain it to her? What are you doing? She is touching everything." Vandana became very startled at hearing her father's words. Does he want things to be like this?

Grandmother ignored her son's rebuke. "Now, she is only a girl, slowly she will begin to understand, son." Months and months passed like this. But in spite of the displeasure of her mother and father, she stood firmly on her decision, with the support of her grandmother.

In the end her older sister also protested, "What is this? Different rules for her and different rules for me." At first Vandana's protest was successful, then it became clear that her weaker position had intelligence as its only weapon, and this was a very unstable base. Vandana eventually became so insulted that she lost her stubbornness and afterwards she just always went along with her father's will.

One could well read this account as Vandana's expression of feminist resistance to her father's patriarchal insistence on the secret of the mat and the blue sheet. Climbing onto her sister's lap, sleeping on the bed, announcing out loud that she will intentionally touch things and pollute others during her menstrual period are part of Vandana's tactics to press change on her family. More surprising are the story's intergenerational alliances. The sister takes her time in coming to Vandana's defense and does not adopt strategies of resistance herself. Mother and father represent the patriarchal status quo. The grandmother is the one to support and defend Vandana, interestingly enough, rather than championing tradition in the threatening face of modernity. Admittedly, the grandmother's alliance with modernity may not be permanent, and she does not claim that Vandana will always be this way: "Slowly she will understand, son."

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The intergenerational component of "The Red Dirt Road" suggests new ways to think about the relationship between the forging of Indian feminisms and the construction of the past. Although the nuclear family has been characterized as modern and fundamentally progressive, the feminism articulated in the story does not form a revolutionary break with the past. Instead, Saraogi's story highlights how sentiment itself links past and present in the form of solidarity between the grandmother and granddaughter. This alliance with the past, rather than a struggle against it, creates an affective relationship to the past that is expressed through practices of affect, with the grandmother "running her fingers through her hair." The figure of the grandmother represents the bonds of kinship inherent in constructing an emotive present in relationship to a lived past.

The second story, *Ek Vrat Ka Katha* (The Tale of a Fast) portrays a woman's practice of ritual fasting, known in Hindi as *vrat* (literally, "vow"). This particular fasting day is called *Bachwaras*, a day when Hindu women fast for the well-being of their sons. Amita, the main character, recognizes the importance that her mother-in-law places on keeping the fasts, so she follows the rituals just to keep her mother-in-law happy. But Amita's habit of feeling hungry as soon as she gets up always causes her trouble on the days of fasting, and she sometimes forgets about the fast and mistakenly has something to eat. Her mother-in-law tries to quell her habit of eating right when she gets up. The mother-in-law tells Amita that it is the duty of women not to eat before men, and that she should eat only after all of the male members of the household have eaten. Amita has hardened herself to such unspoken disapproval from the very beginning and never waits for her

husband to eat before her. She cannot imagine living life the way that her mother and mother-in-law have: incapable, she feels, of raising any objections. How could they tolerate so much?

On this *Bachwaras* day, Amita fights with her brother-in-law, with whom she generally shares a close joking relationship, about not making him a hot breakfast when all of the women are fasting and can only eat cold *roti* (chapatis). Amita jokingly tells him that he should just have the cold *roti*, and he becomes very upset and protests. After Amita angrily snaps that he should grow up if he can't take a joke, the brother-in-law storms off without eating breakfast. I now quote from the final paragraph of the story:

> Amita looked over to her sister-in-law and her mother-in-law for support. She thought that her mother-in-law would scold him for getting so angry about such a small matter, but who knew how many untold complaints were written on her expressionless face. She thought that her mother-in-law was reliving some old event in her mind. The sister-in-law put her head down and kept on eating. In Amita's loneliness her heart felt as dry and heavy as the flour in the *rotis.*

Saraogi emphasizes the loneliness that results from Amita's resistance to the codes of womanly behavior that her mother-in-law and sister-in-law promote. The sister-in-law, after all, is jealous of the close joking relationship that Amita shares with her husband. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law do not join her in a sisterly alliance against patriarchal norms. Instead, Amita's behavior at least temporarily alienates her from everyone else in the family. For Amita, the experience of modernity becomes a prison sentence of emotional isolation.

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Saraogi depicts the production of sentiment in conjunction with an engagement with both feminist values and history. Rather than attempting to promote specific changes in women's lifestyles, the author attempts to articulate the emotional turmoil of women who seek to make subtle but significant changes in the practices of their domestic lives. [160] By portraying practices of feminist "social reform" within the intimate site of the household, Saraogi sensitively captures the nuances of emotional distance and deep resentment that go along with such challenges to patriarchal familial authority. While examining the predicament of changing values in modern conjugal relationships, Saraogi's stories question the relevance of male viewpoints in reflecting women's experience. They also raise questions about the predicament of modern feminism for women living in kinship networks and family life. The stories do not just sentimentalize family relationships; they document a complex set of intergenerational and gendered relationships, and suggest that the practice of everyday feminism can maintain a positive relationship with the past and can draw upon it for

strength. In this sense, tradition is not so separate from modernity. The grandmother, for instance, may be old, but she is not irrelevant to the formation of the new. Intergenerational linkages, through
lineage and the *kul*, are not simply the "weight of tradition," they are actually the basis of women's support and continued action.

The critique of patriarchy in Saraogi's writing focuses on her characters' feelings of pain and disappointment. For Saraogi, social reform, or change, does not necessarily require revolutionary heroes who valiantly smash tradition in the march to the modern. She employs more subtle tropes—of compromise, hurting, accommodation, and resistance—to suggest how social arenas such as the family are changed. This aspect of Saraogi's work may not be unique, but it is the reason that it is so important. Saraogi's fiction also serves as a measure of the evolution of the Marwaris' engagement with questions of social reform since the vehement debates over the condition of Marwari society, particularly for women, that marked the beginning of the 20th century.

When reading about these disputes in hindsight, we tend to think of these fights and debates as dividing the community, in the Marwari case between reformists and Sanatanis. Rather, I argue that these debates themselves created the community. Agreeing to disagree was at the heart of the issue; reformers and Sanatanis alike agreed there should be a debate about the status of various cultural customs. Furthermore, these debates did not just create one community among Marwaris. Many publics and public constituencies were created. The existence of various kinds of groups, such as the Marwari Agarwal associations and Maheshwari Marwari organizations, suggests that there are different constituencies involved who negotiated change among sub-castes. In the case of the Marwari Sahayak Samiti work on indenture, a national body was invoked. Alka Saraogi's contemporary fiction also circulates in the realm of the pan-North Indian Hindi public sphere.

The final chapter of this book is a theoretically-informed case study of an ongoing dispute between some Calcutta Marwaris and the Indian state over the question of whether or not *sati* worship should be legal. This chapter is an attempt to synthesize many of the themes that I have has covered so far: negative stereotypes of the Marwaris as backward, mapping community in Rajasthan, the uses of history in constructing the past, temples and money-making, and appropriate gender roles for Marwari women.

Notes:

Note 1: Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 73. Back.

Note 2: C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); B. R. Grover, "An Integrated Pattern of Commercial Life in the Rural Society of North India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Money and the Market in India 1100—1700*, ed. Sanjay Subramanium (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).Back.

Note 3: Satyajit Ray's film *Mahanagar* is a good example of the intergenerational negotiations made in a struggling Bengali family when a woman decides to take a job outside the home.Back.

Note 4: Dinanath Sidhantalankar, "Vidhwa Vivah. Samajik Santulan ki gahri aawashwakta," *Samaj Vikas*, 45:6. (Aug.–Sept., 1996), 35.Back.

Note 5: Veena Das, especially in her *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), has been a pioneering thinker in this area.Back.

Note 6: Nicholas B. Dirks, "The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India," *Identity, Consciousness and the Past*, ed. H. L. Seneviratne (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135.Back.

Note 7: Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849—1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); J. Krisnamurthi, ed., *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and State*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).Back.

Note 8: Lucy Carroll, "Law, Custom and Statutory Social Reform: The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856," in Krisnamurthi, ed., *Women in Colonial India*, 1—26.Back.

Note 9: Asok Sen, *Iswarachandra Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones* (Calcutta: Riddhi, 1975), 148. Back.

Note 10: Ibid., 56. Back.

Note 11: Ibid., 155—156.Back.

Note 12: C. R. Bhandari, *Oswal Jati ka Itihas* (Chanpura,1934), 277—283, cited in Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 52.Back.

Note 13: Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 4.Back.

Note 14: Balchand Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 590—91. Back.

Note 15: Ibid., 594.Back.

Note 16: Ibid., 596.Back.

Note 17: *Pinjrapole* is a nineteenth-century neologism. *Pinjra* means "caged" and *pole* means "courtyard."Back.

Note 18: *Calcutta ka Sanstayan: Akh Jhalak [A Glance at Calcutta's Institutions*] (Calcutta: Nawalgarh Hitashi, 1974), 23—25.Back.

Note 19: *Calcutta Pinjrapole institutional papers*. Copy under 6912, search no. 6906, Book 1, Vol. 53, pp. 254—256, no. 2105 for 1921.Back.

Note 20: RNNB. *Mohammadi* (Calcutta), 11 February 1921.Back.

Note 21: *Report of the Marwari Association: 1899—1903* (Calcutta: Wilkins Press, 1903), 1—10.Back.

Note 22: *Report of the Marwari Association: 1899-1903*, 100.Back.

Note 23: Govt of Bengal, Judicial Dept. Judicial Branch. File No. 1-A-18. Proceedings 24-33, Aug 1922. *Bill further to amend the Indian Penal Code (Age of Consent*). No. 29. Dated Calcutta 26 June 1922. From Rai Sir Hariram Goenka Bahadur To The Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department. Back.

Note 24: Govt. of Bengal. Judicial/Judicial June 1928. Progs 110-33A. *The Hindu Child Marriage Bill by Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarda*. No. 125. From Babu Ramdhan Dass Jhajoria, Hon Sec to M Assoc. To: Secretary to the GOB, Judicial Dept.Back.

Note 25: *Bharat Chamber of Commerce. Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Calcutta: Alliance Press, 1950), 6. In 1950, after independence, it was renamed the Bharat Chamber of Commerce. Nowadays it appears to be defunct; I did not find any materials relating to the organization before 1947, when a concerted attempt was made to boost the organization through a new series of publications(*Journal of the Marwari Association,* 1947*)*.Back.

Note 26: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 617—619.Back.

Note 27: Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 72.Back.

Note 28: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 649.Back.

Note 29: *Shri Ramdev Chokhany*, 84—89.Back.

Note 30: "Note on the Activities of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya," NAI. Home Poll. 187/1926: 9.Back.

Note 31: Karen Ray, "Marwari Politicization to Counter Village Victimization: The Anti-Indenture Struggle," *Shodhak*, 17: 8 (1988). . Back.

Note 32: Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour*

Abroad, 1830—1920 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).Back.

Note 33: Karen Ray, "Marwari Politicization," 89.Back.

Note 34: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigration). December 1915. Proceeding 52. Letter from the Hon'ble Mr. James Donald, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Financial Department, to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry. Back.

Note 35: Besides the Marwari Sahayak Samiti and the Marwari Association, another society involved in the struggle against indentureship was the "Indentured Cooly Protection Society or Anti-Indentured Emigration League," which had its main office at 160 Harrison Road in the heart of Burabazar. This organization distributed leaflets in the rural areas where workers were being recruited and organized lectures stating the evils of emigration.Back.

Note 36: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigration). April 1916. Proceedings 30-33B. From the Honorary Secretary, Marwari Association, Calcutta, to The Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry, Delhi. February 7, 1916. Back.

Note 37: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigration). August 1919. Proceedings 1-3. Letter from the Honorary Secretary, Marwari Association, Calcutta to The Private Secretary to His Excellency the Viceroy, Simla. Dated July 31st, 1919.Back.

Note 38: It is interesting to consider that Marwaris participate in the discussion of "free will" when it comes to the question of plantation labor, but not in questions of domestic life, or at least not to the same extent.Back.

Note 39: The coolie recruiters were known by the Bengali word *arkati*. The same word was used for recruiters of all types: recruiters of workers for tea garden estates and for the army. Originally the word *arkati* referred to the man employed on a boat whose job it was to constantly determine the depth of the rivers and inlets, so that the boat would never become marooned in any one spot. *Kati* referred to the stick that was used in measuring, and *ar* referred to the effect of refraction of the stick under the surface of the water, so that *arkati* literally meant "bent stick." This "bent stick" pointed the way that the boat should travel, or in the case of labor recruitment, pointed the way that the workers should migrate. I am grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty for this information.Back.

Note 40: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigration). August 1919. Proceedings 1-3.Back.

Note 41: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigation). April 1916. Proceedings 30-33B.Back.

Note 42: Karen Ray, "Marwari Politicization," 88.Back.

Note 43: NAI. Commerce & Industry (Emigration). April 1916. Proceedings

30-33B.Back.

Note 44: Karen Ray, "Marwari Politicization," 95.Back.

Note 45: Medha Malik Kudaisya, "The Public Career of G.D. Birla 1911—1947" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1992).Back.

Note 46: Goswamy, "Collaboration and Conflict,"Back.

Note 47: Stanley Kochanek, *Business and Politics in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).Back.

Note 48: G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: A Personal Memoir* (Bombay: Vakils, Feffer and Simons, 1968); Ramesh Bhardwaj, ed., *Sitaram Seksaria Jamanshatabdi Granth*, (New Delhi: Gandhi Hindustan Sahitya Sabha, 1993); Ramesh Bhardwaj, ed., *Sitaram Seksaria Wadmay*, (New Delhi: Gandhi Hindustan Sahitya Sabha, 1993); Nandkisore Jalan, ed., *Ishwardas Jalan Abhinandan Granth*, (Calcutta: Abhinandan Samiti, 1977).Back.

Note 49: *Himmatsinka Abhinandan Granth*, 55—71.Back.

Note 50: Kudaisya, *The Public Career*.Back.

Note 51: Kudaisya, *The Public Career*, 39.Back.

Note 52: Radhakrishna Nevtiya and Jugalkishore Jaithliya, eds. *Shri PrabhuDayal Himmatsinka Abhinandan Granth*, (Calcutta: Shri PrabhuDayal Himmatsinka Abhinandan Samiti, 1984), 64—71.Back.

Note 53: Pushpa Joshi, *Gandhi on Women* (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1988), 63. Speech reprinted from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 28 January 1921; and CWMG Vol XIX, 274-275. (Author: what is CWMG?)Back.

Note 54: See, for instance, G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*.Back.

Note 55: Pannadevi Poddar, "Mere Pita" [My Father], *Sitaram Seksariya Janmashtabdi Granth*, (New Delhi: Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha, 1993), 11—21.Back.

Note 56:   This type of ideal life-narrative, of earning money for the first decades of adult life and then devoting oneself to charity and social causes in middle and old age, has been much valorized among trading communities for several centuries. In the "Half-Tale" autobiography discussed in earlier chapters, a similar life narrative is presented and valorized for Banarasi. In cases such as Sitaram Seksariya's, however, the fact that he was able to purchase extremely expensive parcels of land and an elaborate mansion once owned by Scottish industrialists suggests that he was not as much of a renouncer as his biographers claim. Even if he was not actively involved in the day-to-day operations of family business and industry, he would at least have held part ownership in such ventures. This explanation is not meant to diminish

Seksariya's achievements, but instead to point out how one member of a business family could become a Gandhite nationalist and at the same time benefit from colonial capitalism. Gandhi, of course, certainly benefited from the enormous financial contributions that Birla and other super-rich Marwaris made to the Congress Party.Back.

Note 57: *Sitaram Seksariya Abhinandan Granth*, preface.Back.

Note 58: *Sitaram Seksariya Abhinandan Granth*, 21—39.Back.

Note 59: *The Voice of Shri Shikshayatan College* (Calcutta: Shri Shikshayatan College, 1978).Back.

Note 60: Janaki Devi Bajaj, *Meri Jivan Yatra* [My Life Journey] (1956; reprint, New Delhi: Martand Upadhaya, 1965), 3—49.Back.

Note 61: Ibid., 55—57, 67—69.Back.

Note 62: Ibid., 106—128.Back.

Note 63: Papers of the *Goseva Sangh 1942—50*. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Back.

Note 64: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 713; Ashok Goenka, "Smt. Indumati Goenka: A Brief Life Sketch," in *Kedar Nath Goenka Centenary Volume*, ed. Vinod Tagra (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, n. d. (1992?)), 243—247.Back.

Note 65: *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 28 June 1930, 242—3.Back.

Note 66: Bhimsen Kedia, *Bharat main Marwari Samaj* (Calcutta: National Publications, 1947), 277.Back.

Note 67: B. R. Nanda, *In Gandhi's Footsteps: The Life and Times of Jamnalal Bajaj* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 19—21.Back.

Note 68: *PrabhuDayal Himmatsingka Abinandan Granth*, 35, 57—61Back.

Note 69: Shri Gangaprasad Bhotika, "Marwari Samajkay Andolan aur Basantlal" [Basatlal and Movements of Marwari community], *Basantlal Murarka Smrtigranth*, 82- 83.Back.

Note 70: Nanda, *In Gandhi's Footsteps*, 145—147, 201.Back.

Note 71: Bajaj, *Meri Jivan Yatra*, 58—59.Back.

Note 72: Letter from Gandhi to Janaki Devi Bajaj, in Bajaj, *Meri Jivan Yatra*, 60.Back.

Note 73: *Samaj Vikas* 45 (Aug—Sept. 1996), 9—11.Back.

Note 74: Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (New York: Praeger, 1972). Singer wrote that there was a physical separation of two spheres of tradition and modernity in which people would have different "norms of behavior and belief" (320).Back.

Note 75: Shri Gangaprasad Bhotika, "Basantlal," 82—84.Back.

Note 76: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 639-643.Back.

Note 77: 996 Interview with Ashok Seksariya. Back.

Note 78: Among the institutions founded in Burabazar were the Maheshwari Sabha (established in 1914), a library (1915), a Maheswari Vidyalaya (1916), a Seva Samiti (1921), a gymnasium (1922), a music room (1927), a social club (1935), a girls' *balika vidyalaya* school (1940), an adult *vidyalaya* (1945), and a Women's Mahila Samiti (1963).Back.

Note 79: *Calcutta ka Stanstan: Ack Jhalak* [A Glance at Calcutta's Institutions], 39—41.Back.

Note 80: Basant Kumar Birla, *A Rare Legacy: Memoirs of B. K. Birla* (Bombay: Image, 1994), 291—294.Back.

Note 81: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 686.Back.

Note 82: Vasantlal Tulasyana, *Maravari-Agrawala-Mahasabha ka kacca cittha* [Critique of the Administration of Marwari Agrawal Mahasabha], (Bombay(?): n.d., n.p. [1929?]).Back.

Note 83: Kedia, *Bharat may marwari samaj*, 2—3. Back.

Note 84: Ibid., 140—152.Back.

Note 85: Ibid., 140—152.Back.

Note 86: Ibid., 256—257, 298—304, 231—232.Back.

Note 87: Karine Schomer writes that *Chand* [The Moon] began publication in 1922 as a women's magazine, combining entertainment, a little sensationalism, and a moderately nationalist stance that could pass government censorship. Schomer comments that the Marwari number was an example of sensationalism and "contained a considerable amount of muckraking that was more titillating than socially useful." Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181—182, 182 n 82.Back.

Note 88: Personal communication with Rishi Jaimini Kaushik Barua.Back.

Note 89: "Kuch Janne yogy bate," *Chand* (1929), 115—116.Back.

Note 90: The annual report of the Jodhpur court for 1923—24 was quoted in decrying these rulers, who "being themselves mostly uneducated could

unfortunately display little enthusiasm over the education of the *ryots*. Indeed some of them had a lurking suspicion that the education will make the *ryots* think more of their rights than their obligations." Ibid., 117.Back.

Note 91: Ibid., 115.Back.

Note 92: Ibid., 120.Back.

Note 93: "Marwari Streeon," *Chand,*169—172.Back.

Note 94: "Marwardion ke Gunavaguna," *Chand,* 59.Back.

Note 95: "Osar," *Chand* (1929?), 65—70.Back.

Note 96: Ibid., 58—59.Back.

Note 97: Ibid., 59.Back.

Note 98: Ibid., 60.Back.

Note 99: "Marwari Steeon" *Chand* (1929), 177—178.Back.

Note 100: "Calcutta ka Samajik Jiwan," *Chand* (1929), 155—156.Back.

Note 101: Ibid., 157—158.Back.

Note 102: "Manoranjan," *Chand* (1929), 173—4.Back.

Note 103: "Kalkatta ka Sudharak
Marwari Samaj," *Chand* (1929),188—192.Back.

Note 104: Kedia's *Bharat Mein Marwari Samaj*, discussed in the previous section, was no doubt in part a response to the charges raised in *Chand*.Back.

Note 105: I am indebted to Francesca Orsini for providing me with the information that I present in this paragraph.
Ramnaresh Tripathi's booklet, *Marware ke manohar git*: (Hindi Mandir, Prayag, Jul-Aug 1930), 51, (Subtitle "*Chand* ke Marwari ank ka uttar") is in SOAS Library, ref. S. XII. Hindi 49041. Back.

Note 106: Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon, *Memorandum and Rules and Regulations*, n.p., 1961.Back.

Note 107: Peter Heehs, *India's Freedom Struggle* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 123.Back.

Note 108: Shri Bhanwarmal Singhi, *Sammelan ka Sanskipt Itihas* (Calcutta: Akhil Bharatwarhiya Marwari Sammelan, 1986), 30.Back.

Note 109: Some members were not happy with this decision and broke off to form a Marwari workers federation that promoted social reform in Orissa until

rejoining the AIMF in 1946.<u>Back.</u>

Note 110: AIMF History, 25—30.<u>Back.</u>

Note 111: Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon, June-Dec. 1943 (Calcutta: Bajranglal Lath, 1946), 7—11.<u>Back.</u>

Note 112: J. T. Molesworth, *Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary* (1857; corrected fourth reprint, Bombay: Bombay Educational Society Press, 1991): 648.<u>Back.</u>

Note 113: B. M. Singhi, *Marwari Samaj: Chunauti aur Chinti* (1965; reprint Calcutta: Shushila Singhi, 1985), 107-120.<u>Back.</u>

Note 114: In 1991, septuagenarian Orissa chief minister Biju Patnaik created waves of protest, Burabazar shop closings, and a one-day boycott of the Calcutta Stock Exchange in response to his "dangerous and irresponsible" threat to Marwaris that they would have to leave Orissa with the jug and blanket with which they came to conduct business. Patnaik pointed to the way that Marwaris were targeted in the recent riots in Bhadrak as evidence of them "playing the politics of religion," by worshipping Ram while adulterating commodities like rice and sugar. By issuing this statement just before an election, Patnaik probably hoped to win the votes of non-Marwari people back to the Janata Dal party from those who might have cast their ballots with the Marwari-identified BJP. The public reactions in Calcutta expressed shock and disgust at the communally-directed remark. Dr. Kusum Khemani, secretary of the Bharatiya Bhaisha Parishad, said Patnaik's statement was completely unfounded, asking how anyone could "say anything against a community which is so involved in charitable work?" Khemani pointed to the examples of eleven hospitals plus numerous schools and colleges, open to all, that were run by the community. "Widespread protest over Biju remark on Marwaris," *Telegraph*, (Calcutta) 13 May 1991; "BJP decries Biju Patnaik's utterances," *Times of India* (Delhi), 15 May 1991; "CSE brokers boycott trading," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 15 May 1991; "Biju's remark halts CSE trading," *Statesman* (Calcutta), 15 May 1991; "Burrabazar Bandh," *Statesman*, 15 May 1991; "Anti-Marwari Remarks: Biju backed by state party chief" *Times of India* (Delhi), 16 May 1991; "Biju flayed for comment on Marwaris," *BPO* 17 May 1991; "Advani ridicules Biju's threat to Marwaris," *Telegraph*, May 17, 1991; "Storm in a Teacup," *The Sun Times*, 17 May 1991; "CM's threat to Marwaris part of a clever design," *The Sun Times*, 17 May 1991; "BJP-Cong-Marwari nexus new Janata Dal plank," *Telegraph*, 17 May 1991; Payal Singh, "Going Berserk? Biju Patnaik's unsavoury ultimatum to Marwaris has stirred a hornet's nest," *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 18 May 1991.<u>Back.</u>

Note 115: Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon, second session, 1948.<u>Back.</u>

Note 116: AIMF Papers, 1974—76. All India Marwari Federation. <u>Back.</u>

Note 117: Sushila Singhi, "Akhil Bharatiya Marwari Mahila Sammelon, Udghatan Satra" [text of Inaugural Session Address by Shrimati Sushila Singhi

under the auspices of the All India Marwari Sammelon] (Patna: 23 December 1983).Back.

Note 118:   One example of this kind of text is Kathleen Olga Vaughan, *The Purdah System and its effect on motherhood: osteomalacia caused by absence of light in India* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1928).Back.

Note 119: Sushila Singhi, "Akhil Bharatiya Marwari Mahila Sammelon, Udghatan Satra."Back.

Note 120: Report of AIMF, 1974—76:Back.

Note 121: AIMF Papers 1974-76, 19—23. All India Marwari Federation.Back.

Note 122: *Shree Ramdev Chokhany*, 152—154.Back.

Note 123: I have noted earlier in this chapter the work of Sitaram Seksariya and his contributions to the Marwari Balika Vidyalaya and some of the other schools in the Burabazar, which created spaces for Marwari girls to receive basic primary education. Marwari reformers also established a large number of girls' schools in Rajasthan, including the Rajasthan Balika Vidyalaya in Vanasthali village, which began offering instruction in home science, art and culture, music, and sewing in 1919. Kedia, *Bharat Mein Marwari Samaj,* 241; Rshi Jaimini Kaushik 'Barua,' *Surajmal Jalan* 286-299.Back.

Note 124: Shrimati Gyan Kumari Heda [inaugural lecture], Akhil Bharatvarshya Marwari Sammelon Silver Jubilee Conference, (Calcutta: December 12-25, 1961), 4.Back.

Note 125: Private papers of Saraswati Niketan. Calcutta. Back.

Note 126: *A Story of Devotion and Service: Hindustan Charity Trust*, [undated brochure].Back.

Note 127: *Modern High School for Girls: 40th Anniversary 1952—1992*. (Calcutta: nd).Back.

Note 128: School Magazine of Modern High School for Girls: 1992—1995.Back.

Note 129: Papers of the Mahila Parishad, Calcutta.Back.

Note 130: *Calcutta Ka Stansayn, Ack Jhalak*, 151.Back.

Note 131: The inability, or refusal to speak English should not necessarily be confused with class. This woman's family's industry in cement and chemicals does approximately $50 million of business each year.Back.

Note 132: Jyotirmai Club, *Members List*, (n.d.) Back.

Note 133: As I noted in the introduction, the fact that men are away at work all day creates a space for women's agency: to meet friends, to shop, and even

to talk to anthropologists while the men are away. Despite the appearance of an overwhelming patriarchy in these families, wealthy Marwari women did not articulate to me that they felt oppressed. Many say they are generally very content not to have to work. One Bengali woman from a business family, now married into a Marwari family, told me that she enjoyed her life as a "Marwari by marriage," spending her days being driven around by a chauffeur and shopping. When I spoke to her about the Marwari and Bengali relationship, she retorted that most Bengali women were probably jealous.Back.

Note 134: "A Word about Jyotirmai Club: A Ray of Light for a Better Life," (undated brochure, 1990?).Back.

Note 135: Ibid.Back.

Note 136: Another dowry death reported in the press was that of Gita Jaiswal, age 22. See the articles about Jaiswal in the Bengali newspaper *Sattayug* (Calcutta) on 16 September 1981; "Marwaris Call War on Dowry" in the *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 25 September 1996; *Aajkal* 9 June 1981. Back.

Note 137: Animesh C. Ray Choudhury, "Bride Price–rooted in the Soil?" *Business Standard*, 22 February 1981.Back.

Note 138: I am grateful to S. Singhi for generously sharing with me her copies of these unarchived articles, used in her own journalism work.Back.

Note 139: Even the husband's father was said to have been henpecked and beaten by his wife. In response to a photo of the mother-in-law drinking milk, one reader commented that he was reminded of the expression, "Don't feed milk to a snake." If one continues to feed the snake, presumably it will bite and kill you one day.Back.

Note 140: In the case of the news coverage of Neelam Jain's death, public discussions of her death actually bear a striking similarity to debates over women's agency in the case of *sati*.Back.

Note 141: *Indian Express* (Calcutta), 20 September 1980.Back.

Note 142: *Statesman* (Calcutta), 10 October 1980.Back.

Note 143: *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 17 February 1984.Back.

Note 144: *Manushi*,nos. 7—8, 1981.Back.

Note 145: Home Public. August 1888. Proceedings 23—30.Back.

Note 146: Shyamal Sarkar, "Marwari Brides Pay Price for Wealth," *Statesman* (Calcutta), 14 February 1997.Back.

Note 147: "Marwaris Call War on Dowry," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 25 September 1996.Back.

Note 148: *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 19 September 1986.Back.

Note 149:   Ranjit Kumar Guru, "A Meet in Rourkela to Marry Minds and Hearts," *Asian Age*, 30 December 1995.Back.

Note 150: When I visited women from the Samiti in their homes, talk would often turn a discussion of their own children. One woman brought me home and noticed my eye traveling to a stack of fresh pillows and linens wrapped in plastic on the top of the wardrobe. "Those are for my daughter's dowry," she said, "we have already started saving. For middle-class families like ours, any decent boy's family would ask for at least 20 *lakhs* ($50,000)." Her daughter was eight years old.Back.

Note 151: To my surprise, none of the participants ever expressed surprise at seeing me work in the booth. I was wearing a Mahila Samiti badge pinned onto my sari. They probably all assumed that I had married into a Marwari family, and no one questioned me about my identity.Back.

Note 152: This catalogue was produced as one issue of *Samaj Vikas*, 1996.Back.

Note 153: "Mass Wedding: 9 Knots Tied," *Asian Age*, 8 December 1996.Back.

Note 154: I might add that if you do the math here, the fees from both the introduction ceremony and the wedding add up to the whopping sum of approximately Rs. 97,500, which is about the equivalent of US $3,200. Was this actually a money-generating event?Back.

Note 155: "Mass Wedding: 9 Knots Tied."Back.

Note 156: The giving of dowry gifts in this manner is reminiscent of other historical contexts, such as Christian missionaries providing dowries for the girls who studied in their schools.Back.

Note 157: Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a Native Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95 (3) 1993. p 671-686.Back.

Note 158: Saraogi, one of the interesting Calcutta Marwari women writers I got to know, is a brilliant writer in Hindi literature. Unfortunately, I could not incorporate material from her recent historical novel about one Marwari family's migration from Rajasthan to Calcutta, a Hindi novel with the title, *Kolkatta, via Bypass*. There are a couple of other well-known Marwari writers. Prabha Khaitan has written a large number of Hindi novels about Marwari family life (see bibliography) and several books on philosophy, including a Hindi translation of de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. In contrast with Saraogi, Khaitan's novels are meant to shock; her topics and themes include runaways, love affairs with married men, sibling incest, alcoholism, and other family scandals. Saraogi commented on the perceived ambiguity of her role as a writer combined with her responsibilities of being a mother in a joint family: "People say Ch-Ch, it is good you are busy in something therefore you don't get bored." ("Aatmalochan key

abhav may lambe samay tak rachnakar chal nahi pata." [A writer cannot exist for a long time without self criticism. An Interview with Alka Saraogi] *Jansatta Sabrang* [Sunday magazine supplement], 24 September 1995, 16—17.)Back.

Note 159: The translations from the Hindi originals are my own, done in consultation with the author.Back.

Note 160: I am not arguing that Saraogi's work has had a prescriptive effect on the lives of Marwari, North Indian and Bengali women. I am primarily interested in the way the relationship of Marwari women to the past is revealed in the stories as the main characters' sentiments toward older family members. Thus, I put aside questions of readership and the overall social impact that Saraogi's stories might have on a larger reading public.Back.

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