CHAPTER V

THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Irrespective of the nature and form of society, women have always been its integral and inseparable part. That reality notwithstanding, they hardly get what is due to them. The very word 'woman' connotes a long history of dependence and subordination. For centuries, women who constitute half of the humanity have been suppressed, oppressed and treated as subordinates, not as equals of men in various fields of activity, and politics is one among them.

The work on social history cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in society. The socio-cultural practices in society, to a large extent, determine the life of women. Historically, women were supposed to carry forward the traditions, norms and values of the society. The process of socialization that they undergo in their families does not prepare them for non-traditional roles.¹

In this light, what does the mainstream Indian culture expect a woman to be? Without going into the corridors of Indian history, which may be a good source to turn to, insofar as the realities are concerned, we will not be in a position to have a general view about women's position in Indian society. In ancient India, reverence was given to women as mother's image, a symbol of life, strength and purity with immense
capacity for patience, sacrifice and suffering. Woman was depicted as 'Shakti' and it was an accepted belief that where woman is respected, there is divine presence.²

For the Rig-Vedic Aryan, women were not ornamental addendum but co-partners in life, in its pleasures and hazards, in its joys and sorrows.³ They enjoyed a position of equality and were respected both in and by family and society as well. They were imparted education like men and enjoyed considerable freedom in their personal matters. The community as a whole showed concern and respect for them and they played a significant role in the familial, social and political life.⁴

Indian culture also accorded a high place to women who did not come into their own till the early 20th century. He writes, "It may be noted too that in law and theory at least women in ancient India, contrary to the sentiment of other ancient peoples, were not denied civil rights, but, he qualifies, being a student of history "although in practice this equality was rendered nugatory for all but a few by their social subordination to the male and their domestic preoccupation, but adds in the selfsame sentence that "instances have yet survived in the existing records of women figuring, not only as queens and administrators and even in the battlefield, a common enough incident in Indian history, but not as elected representative on civic bodies."⁵
Even though in the Rig-Vedic period, ostensibly, women were equal to men and had access to education, administration, politics, etc., but in actual fact, because of domestic preoccupation a very small percentage of them could take advantage of this freedom and equality. This fact is sharply underlined by Aurobindo in his opus, The Foundations of Indian Culture.

In the later Vedic period (C. 1000-600 BC) the position of women deteriorated to some extent because of the undesirability of a daughter. Marriage became compulsory and eschatological notions as well as notions of ceremonial purity crept in. Women were generally considered impure and were debarred from the highly clean and spiritual function. A son was more desired, as he had to perform the funeral ceremonies of his parents, in the absence of which the dead souls, it was feared, would go to hell.

In the later-Vedic period, there was a gradual decline in female education. The system of sending out girls to famous teachers or centres of education was discouraged and they received their education from their close relatives. Further, Vedic education was also canonized during this period. However, women of royal, rich and cultured families would receive education like their male counterparts. Women did not take part in political activities as actively in the later Vedic
period as in the Rig-Vedic period. They did not form a part of the Sabha.

The position of women continued to plummet in the 'epic period', the general principle prescribed being that Man was the master of Woman. The husband was 'viewed' not only as a friend, but also an ideal 'preceptor' and the 'very god' of the wife. Occasionally, ancient beliefs that women should be respected and honoured were repeated in the epic period. They were considered pivots, not only of domestic life, but of society as a whole. The education of women was well looked after and they were assigned important duties at home. But we can see that such an 'exalted position' was replete with an ulterior motive as they were socially useful to maintain 'racial purity' and continuity of the family. Women became a condemned section of the Hindu society during the post-vedic period. They were considered dependent upon men throughout their lives. As no resurgence of Indian culture and society occurred, these traditions continued to be strengthened. The position of women continued to be downgraded gradually due to certain internal changes in the societal arrangements.

Compulsory marriage, introduction of the dasi system, specialization of Vedic education and denial of religious and, therefore, intellectual education to women, contributed much to their degradation.
Buddhism and Jainism upheld the women’s position to some extent by providing an alternative position of dignity to those who wished to dissociate themselves from the normal role of women in the family and society to join the Sangha. Though Buddhism admitted women as nuns to participate in higher spiritual life, they were given inferior positions to that of men in the monastic administration.

Like other great religions, Jainism also maintained that in the monastic life, a nun was inferior to a monk as Jainism generally believed in the supremacy of indirect salvation.

Even in the Sangha women were not equal. They had to prostrate completely to the monks. Such inequality reflected ridiculously on their poor status.

The lower status of women continued in the Mauryan and Gupta period. However, during the Mauryan Era, there were women who constituted the force for the personal security and safety of the King, meaning there was faith in the competence and faithfulness of women. During the Gupta epoch too, women were not disqualified from the exercise of public rights.

After the 7th Century A.D., the position of women declined steadily. The medieval period strengthened three atrocious practices, i.e., female infanticide, child marriage and the sati system. The competition to find a bridegroom, the denial of education to women, the rigid idea of chastity as an imperative for the prospective bride, fear of women joining
nunneries, and, to a large extent, protection of the women from the inroads of Muslim invaders were some of the main reasons which strengthened the custom of child marriage. With the arrival of Islam and the terrorism of martial Turks, Hindu society became rigid in its indigenous socio-religious structure. Some Turks entered into marriage alliance with the Hindu girls after forcibly converting them to Islam. This led Hindus to further curtail the freedom of their womenfolk. The purdah system, a Muslim custom of covering the face with a veil was adopted by middle class Hindu women to protect themselves via camouflage from the foreign invaders. The denial of education and advocacy of early marriage resulted in putting women under the protection of their husbands at an early age. Purdah, polygamy, the widespread practice of Sati and the like, were some of the indications of the rapidly deteriorating status of women.

The birth of a female child was not welcome, she being considered a burden by both parents and generally. This resulted in the practice of female infanticide. Social seclusion of women turned out (unjustly) to be a matter of pride for the men, especially among the middle and upper class families.

When British imperial power established its rule over the Simla Hill States, women were occupying a highly subjugated position in the social structure. Dube (1963) argued that the dark and dismal years of the eighteenth century were believed
to have left the deepest mark on the status of women. The advent of the British in Simla Hill States brought them in contact with the modern west. This brought about a considerable change in political, economic, social and cultural outlook of society.

The 19th century reform movement and the Indian social renaissance initiated the process of improving the status of women. The struggle for their upliftment took place mainly in making laws for social reforms, women's education, and political rights. Efforts were concentrated on the first two in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The emergence of a muted Indian Renaissance in the nineteenth century opened the eyes of the Indian intelligentsia to the disgraceful social conditions of their own people, especially that of women. They realised the shameful position of Indian woman, which was nothing but a tale of suffering and humiliation from birth to death.

The religious and social organisations like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Rama Krishna Mission advocated the cause of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who is also called the father of the Indian Renaissance, opposed the inhuman custom of sati and rallied strong public opinion against it. By this time the Indian Renaissance had gathered steam. He urged the British government to legally abolish the cruel practice of sati. On 4th
December, 1829, sati was declared "a crime of culpable homicide punishable with fine, imprisonment or both."

Conditions in the Simla Hill States when the Britishers came, were somewhat different than other States. To assess their status, in various factors like marriage, dowry related, and bride price, birth, child marriage, widow remarriage, divorce, have to be examined. In Bashahr no case of dowry was unearthed, at least not as solid proof. Parents gave to their daughters material and money of their own free choice.

The society of Bashahr State was divided in two groups, tribal and non-tribal. Tribal women enjoyed great freedom in the Kinnaur region. Marriages were settled at an early age. The marriage customs of a society mirror a society's standard and progress. Four types of marriages existed in the Kinnaur region of Bushahr State. The first was called Janekang or Janetang, in which the boy and girl, father and mother and relatives celebrated a common marriage function. The second type was Damchalshish or Benaghachis love marriage. The third type was forcible capture, in which a group of boys forcibly captured a girl for marriage, for a friend or a relative. The fourth type of marriage was called Har, which means enticing away someone's wife.

The socio-societal status of a woman was variously estimated and diametrically opposite views were current,
regarding her place in different stages of civilization. On the one hand, she was conceived as little better than a slave or beast of burden, condemned to perform the hardest drudgery, bought as chattel, and treated as such. On the other, those who had anything to do with tribes reckoning descent from the mother were likely to view woman as an undisputed mistress of the family, if not of the communal life too. Both concepts were, as far as the vast majority of the people were concerned, far removed from the actual state of affairs. There was so much variability in the relationship of woman to society that any general statements must be taken with caution. Her utility and resourcefulness in domesticity, her refreshing company and the affectionate care of children had always proved to be a great asset to her partner in life and had, to a considerable extent, determined her status at different stages of civilization.¹²

In the hill society of the region as a whole, Kinnaur aside, woman appeared to be subservient to man. She was regarded as chattel and bought and sold to the highest bidder. Besides, she could be inherited by her husband's kin. If the husband willed it, he could repudiate his marital obligations and divorce her on the flimsiest of pretexts and receive compensation for her in the shape of reet. The status of a woman was to a considerable extent due to her economic utility to her husband who had to depend on her. We must, therefore, study the use of women in the hills to get at the root of her societal status, in society. In order to illustrate her
vegetable. The morning meal consisted of Sattu or in winter at times of boiled gaugti (Arum colo-casea). That did not take her very long to prepare except on festive occasions when she had to cook the whole day to entertain guests. She was now free to go out and proceed to bring in fuel and grass.

In the evening she had to milk the cattle again. The cows and buffaloes were generally milked three times a day—morning, noon and evening. After preparing the meal for the night, she kept hot water ready for the bath. The men, tired after the day's toil, came at nightfall and to relieve their fatigue she provided them with a hot bath. Those who did not take a bath simply washed their faces while she washed their feet. She kept the milk for coagulation before retiring to bed and this finished her daily routine. A grueling one, to say the least. One can see from the above, that the woman was busy from dawn to dusk. The fact of the matter is that she still does, even today.

It was not only as a worker at home that the services of the women were demanded, but also in the fields. She was important in the fields as at home. Near the obera the refuse of the cattle was collected at a place called gabras. She carried this on her head or at times on her back to the fields where it was utilized as manure. Women in the cis-Giri were not expected to do this sort of work which was considered unchivalrous on the part of men. But difference prevailed in
the trans-Giri tract or Sirmour and in the other Simla Hill States. After the manure had been collected and the field had been ploughed by men she broke the lumps of earth that were left behind by the plough. The stones in the field were thrown out by her to prepare the soil for the growth of the crop. Women were useful in the cultivation of rice. When the fields were flooded, they were ready for transplantation with a basket called poora or poori. It was a very tedious, back-breaking, and labourious process and needed careful and constant attention till the whole field was finished.

Apart from the usual management of the household, a woman had to do other work from morning till evening. It is worth noting that woman performed almost all tedious tasks because they needed not only strength but careful attention. It may be not out of place to mention here, though in passing, that what Buddhists call 'mindfulness' comes naturally to them as they are involved with minutia in living, whether in the kitchen or, for that matter, human relationships.

Women were a source of help not only in the household and the fields, but also in the industrial undertaking of their partners. They took an active share in the manufacture of mats and baskets. In Bashahr and other States, where sheep-breeding was done on a large scale, they helped not only in supplying fodder to the sheep and in looking after them but did a considerable part of this spinning and weaving as well.
Because they worked side by side with men, this encouraged equalitarian culture.

Thus, it was that the woman worked. There was no restriction on her except one. She was nowhere allowed to plough the land. But under extraordinary circumstances she was obliged to do so, it being taken as an insult to men. This brief description shows how, in the region, she was man's equal in every respect. By her economic utility, she was equal to men in every respect. The scarcity of her sex in number enhanced the demand for her and her position in society was assured.

The role of woman in Simla Hill States was important because she could work side by side with man in agriculture as at home. Women were constantly at work in the field (agriculture) such as weeding, reaping, threshing, pounding or carrying headloads of fodder, water, rock clay, firewood, grain, manure and flour, etc. Women were mostly away from their homes, when they were at work regularly with care and tenacity, collecting grass, leaves or firewood or tending animals in the forests and even at night and also during winter and rains. She busily and unrelentingly performed most agricultural and livestock duties working worked like a machine, ensuring that the food was cooked and even carried to the men working in the fields. In Bashahr Hill State, woman
worked very hard both at home and in the fields but never protested, doing all cheerfully and freely.

Reet or Rit (obnoxious social customs) were prevalent since time immemorial among tribes in the lowest rung in social stratification such as Kolis, Chanals, Chamars, Kanets, etc.

Reet was a form of marriage without any ritual or ceremonies and was contracted by paying money. Girls, young women and even married women were allowed to go by their parents, guardian or husbands for sums ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 2000/-. After the payment to the husband, the marriage or association was considered to be annulled. Concubinage to a second man became marriage under this custom. A woman could trade hands many times and a man could keep as many women as he could. Women were considered merchandise.

Because of Reet domestic ties became weak and marriage had no significant position in socio-societal stability. 'Reet' also resulted in the laxity of sexual relations and total disregard for the laws of chastity. Sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis or gonorrhea were common in these segments of society. The girls were often exploited and used for immoral purposes, which in turn swelled the ranks of prostitutes.

Alarmed by the evils of Reet, organizations of the hills like Rajput Sthania Sabha and the Himalaya Vidiya Prabundhani Sabha Simla began vigorous propaganda for its
abolition in the beginning of the 20th century. The Himalaya Vidiya Parabandhani Sabha in 1907 wrote to Colonel Doughlas, the then Superintendent of Simla Hill States, to take strict measures to stop the custom of 'Reet'. Douglas took up the matter with the hill chiefs who agreed unanimously to eradicate the Reet custom but nothing effective was done. Then, in 1910, Kettlewell, successor of Douglas, emphasised to the hills rulers the necessity of doing away with this immoral custom. Kettlewell wrote about it to Mir, Munshi of Patiala State in July 1910, who further wrote to the Political Agent, Phulkian States and Bahawalpur, inquiring whether the custom of 'Reet' was accepted by British courts. On July 26, 1910, during the discussion among the Political Agent, Phulkian States and Bahawalpur and the Superintendent and Hill States on the 'Reet' system, the last informed that the British courts regarded Reet custom as valid. Thereafter, the Patiala Darbar issued an order declaring the Reet custom illegal.

To discourage the custom of 'Reet' marriage (5% in 1855 to 15% in 1920). In 1924, Thakur Surat Singh, General Secretary of the Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha intensified against Reet and suggested that to counter it, it was necessary that rulers of hill tracts themselves took interest in abolishing the most crying practice of society.

The Thakur Surat Sing started complaining against reet by issuing pamphlets and tried his best to create public opinion
against reet. At the initiative of the Hindu Sabha, a Hindu conference was held in Simla on June 28-29, 1924. The reception Committee of 120 members was formed, some office bearers being Rana Jagjit Chand, Chief of Kuthar State as Chairman, Dr. Kedar Nath General Sect. Thakur Surat Singh, Propaganda Secretary, Lala Puran Chand, Vakil Reception Secretary. The conference was held in a spacious shed at Ganj. This augmented the State exchequer but still was not a deterrent.

The decoration of the shed was done by Pt. Raghaba Nand Gautam and volunteers of the Himalaya Vidya Prabandhni Sabha. The Singh Sabha, the Seva Samiti, the Akhara Committee etc. helped the organizer of the conference.^^

Rana Durga Chand, the elected president, was given a public reception on his arrival on June 27, 1924. The procession started from Winterfield cart road with a band of volunteer hill musicians on horses, leading students of the Sanatam Dharam School and followed by the volunteer of Himalaya Prabandhni Sabha and Singh Sabha. Shops along the route were decorated and the bazaar was thronged with interested spectators. The session opened in the day following Bhajan by Master Mohan Singh, Musical Prodigy of Punjab.^^

The main aim of such fanfare and associations and involvement of prominent personalities of Simla, various
organizations, the hill chiefs, high Govt. officials and people of the hill state was to create a lot of propaganda or agitation among the masses against the social evil of 'Reet' and secondarily to remind the Kenats that they were also Rajput, and they should adopt the custom and manners of the Rajput as Kanets comprised the majority of the population of the hill States.

High British officials and many hill chiefs, although invited, did not attend the conference.25

Thakur Surat Singh by enclosing the copy of above resolution appealed to the Supdt. Hill State to prevail upon hill chiefs to take up legislative measure for the eradication of Reet custom.26 The Sabha held meetings at several places to create awareness about the evils of Reet in the society and passed resolution that no woman shall remarry during a husband's life time.27

Surat Singh also assured the British Govt. that the Sabha was loyal to the British and had nothing to do with politics. He remarked that since the Govt. had already abolished Sārī, Barda Faroshi, female infanticide, human offerings to God and slavery they should also take necessary measures to abolish the evil custom of 'Reet'.28 With respect to such, he also requested E.G.F. Abraham Supdt. Hill State to substitute Hindu Marriage for Rit by legislative process.29
The opinion of the then Chief Secretary to the Punjab Governor, J.M. Dunnett, to the resolution was that the Governor in Council considered Reet as purely the internal matter of Indian States and that it could suitably be dealt with in conference with other hill chiefs than at a conference convened by the Sabha.30

The Punjab Governor advised his local representative at Simla not to take initiative for calling such a conference and not to act as the Sabha's Chairman, so that the official approach might not be misconstrued. The Punjab Government, however, opined that the practice of 'Reet' was purely a matter of internal administration of the hill chiefs who, however, could take practical steps in its elimination.31

Thakur Surat Singh in 1925 brought out the seventeen page pamphlet on the evils of Reet custom titled "The Himalayan Tragedy of Marriage" which was distributed to the high Govt. Officials, journals and newspapers in and outside Punjab.32 The pamphlet attracted considerable attention of the people of Punjab and in other parts of India with respect to the degradation of women and society as a whole. It was published in various paper like the Tribune, Lahore, The Servant of India, Poona, Hindustan and the Advocacy of India, Bombay, the Hindustan Times, The Statesman (Calcutta) and Indian Daily Mail, Bombay.
Emphasis was also laid on the lackadaisical and irresponsible approach of the Govt. of India and the Punjab Govt. in strictly curbing the menace of Reet.

The matter was publicised to such an extent that the Colonel Wedgewoel, on June 30, 1925, raised the question in the House of Commons (London) on the practice of 'Reet' in Simla Hill State under which girls were traded for immoral purposes within and outside the State, and if the custom existed, the political department should frame rules to eradicate it.\(^{33}\)

On reference from White Hall, the Govt. of India wrote to the Punjab Government about the problem. The letter asked the Supdt., Hill State, to consult the Hill chiefs to eradicate or reform the custom.

The Govt. of India asked the agent to the Governor General, Punjab State, to operate with the Government of Punjab to discourage the practice of Reet in respect to those hill States which were under his political charge. These States were Patiala (hill territory), Mandi, Suket, Sirmour (Nahan), Bilaspur and Kalsia hill territory.

The Punjab Govt. was not very keenly enthusiastic about holding any conference of Simla Hill State Chiefs. It was certain to enquire what action had been taken to suppress the evil of Reet by the British Government in territories under its direct administration.
Regarding the two solutions suggested, one was to declare Reet marriage an offence and the second to withhold such recognition in civil courts. J.M. Dunnett commented that the first method was full of difficulties. The prevailing criminal law did not interfere in matrimonial matters except on the complaint of the husband and, in this case, it was assumed that the husband would not report and under Section 498 of the Indian Penal Code, the woman herself not being a culprit. In Reet, as practiced in Sirmour and Kullu, including the right of divorce and remarriage by women. Therein, woman too would have to be made an offender and Dunnett observed that he was doubtful if any law of this kind could be administered; he further remarked that if legal recognition to these marriages was refused and children treated as illegitimate, that would create further complications.

Meanwhile, the Government of India wrote a number of times to the Punjab Government inquiring about the action taken on the subject. The local Government made inquiries from J.C. Coldstream, Superintendent Hill States. The latter took up the matter with Bhagat Chand, Raja of Jubbal, who told Coldstream that he was not prepared to take the initiative in calling the conference. The Raja was of the view that as a Rajput, he was not justified in taking part in a movement for imposing changes in a custom of other castes, unless the initiative came from the people themselves. Raja Padam Singh of Bashahr, however, framed regulations for abolition of
Reet custom in December 1924, which were to be enforced in the State from March 14, 1925. The first part of regulations contained five provisions about the forms of marriages to be performed and the second part dealt with the punishments for breaking the rules. The regulations were finally approved by the Raja in April 1926 after the approval by publicmen, Zaildars, Lambardars and State officials in a joint meeting.

The Raja of Keonthal, with the initiative of Superintendent, Hill States, brought forward the question of Reet and explained its evils to the chiefs and representatives of the twenty-one Simla Hill States. The Superintendent stated that the Govt. deplored the existence of the practice and would like the hill chiefs to take necessary steps to end it. The laws enacted and enforced by Raja of Bashahr were read to the audience.

The Raja of Jubbal supported the abolition of the practice. In the opinion of Rana of Baghat, it was not possible to abolish Reet unless the public was educated about its evils.

After great discussion, it was unanimously agreed that Reet should be abolished. A sub-committee consisting of the chiefs of Bashahr, Jubbal, Baghat, Bughal, Kumharsain, Bhajji and Theog under the Chairmanship of the Raja of Keonthal was appointed to prepare a draft bill. Rai Bahadur Sher Singh, the 5th Wazir of Keonthal State, was to work as Secretary of the sub-committee.
The Punjab Govt. was happy that at last the hill States were determined to tackle the question of Reet in an earnest manner, independent of the State Agencies.

In Baghat, Bushahr and Jubbal the custom of Reet was prohibited on paper at least. The States of Nalagarh, Mahlog and Kuthar had agreed to adopt the rules framed by the subcommittee of the chiefs. Baghal and Bhajji had also agreed to reduce the draft rule but they were under minority management and therefore the Governor in Council was averse to the introduction of the rules. The draft rule was postponed until their rulers attained majority and assumed full ruling power. In the case of those States who agreed to introduce the draft regulation, the local Government desired the hill States to advise the rulers to enforce the rules with consideration and not too harshly at once, because the people would take some time to reconcile to these regulations.

In a nutshell, theoretically, in eight of the Simla Hill States out of twenty-eight, the Reet custom was illegal or the States were prepared to make it illegal.

Though greatly opposed publicly by various social organizations, efforts were also made by the same and some hill chiefs to abolish the custom of Reet, rules being framed as well and theoretically enforced by some States. Yet nothing concrete could be achieved in its abolition as it was a immemorial custom. The custom was prevalent among the
Kanets and Kolis and - formed the backbone of their economics. No hill chief wanted to antagonise the two classes. Furthermore, the Kolis built and mended the houses of the rulers, carried their baggage and dak, cultivated their land and rendered innumerable other services under the begar system.

Thus, the rulers could not afford to annoy such a vital section of their subjects, they being dependent upon them for political expediency.

Moreover, the reformist trend of the British Government had relaxed and changed after the 1857 independence struggle prior to which the British Government had abolished female infanticide. The paramount power did not want to see turmoil and rebellion in the hill States as Simla was their summer Capitol. So they did not want to get directly involved in the abolition of Reet in the hill States and whenever the issue was raised by the social organizations, they evaded the same by transferring the responsibility either to hill chiefs or to the rulers.

That the Reet custom has been an extremely complex problem is borne out by the fact that about forty-five years after attaining independence, it is still practiced among some backward tribes. The present writer, in a conference held at Simla in September-October 1990, presented a paper on the custom of Reet. The paper evoked interesting discussion in which persons from different walks of life participated. One of
the participants, an I.A.S. Officer, who was Deputy Commissioner of the Nahan district for a couple of years remarked that the custom was even still prevalent among the poor tribes of the remote Pachad area of the district. Maybe there still are such pockets in other districts too. Nonetheless, concerted efforts made by the Union Government of India and the State Government of Himachal Pradesh in declaring child marriage (below the ages of eighteen and twenty-one in the case of girls and boys respectively) illegal, in introducing education, both at the primary and higher levels and making it accessible even in the remote tribal areas, and their many economic measures with a view to eradicate poverty, have started bearing fruit. One remarks with a sense of relief that the centuries-old custom, which was eating into the vitals of society, is at long last on its way out.39

Even though Reet was legally abolished in 1925 by the British after a long, hard, sustained and protracted campaign, which found echoes in the British Parliament, unfortunately, so deeply embedded is Reet in the Simla Hill society culture, so embedded in the psyche of the lower strata in particular that is to say among the Kolis, Dumnas, Chamars, Kanets, etc., it continues to flourish subversively.

With respect to Reet it is important to mention now, that the British are gone and India is free since 1947, the fact that the hold of Reet still survives is a matter of shame.
Barda Faroshi

Barda Faroshi is the practice of dealing with slaves or captives. Slave dealers carried on regular trafficking of girls and boys in Punjab, especially in the hill tracts of Kangra, Hoshiarpur and Ambala districts. In Simla district and Hill States, the practice existed even before the arrival of British.

In July, 1824, C. P. Kennedy, Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Hill States remarked that women of hills were always in great demand for the zananas or harems of the plains and as slaves were priced highly.*

In August 1924 the Deputy Commissioner, Kangra district reported that 'barda faroshi' existed mainly in the subdivision of Hamirpur, Dehra and to some extent in Nurpur. Thereunder, this kidnapping, buying and selling of girls for export was engaged in nefariously by 'barda faroshes' based in the plains and the girls were taken to distant places such as the united Provinces and the canal colonies in West Punjab. The Deputy Commissioner suggested that by the amendment of Indian Penal Code or Penal legislation this social evil could be eradicated.**

Polygamy

Throughout the Simla Hill States, including Kangra and Sirmour, polygamy was widely practised. In fact, it was
prevalent in all the Himalayan tracts. But the spread of education and a consequent change in outlook had placed this custom at a discount in Hindu society. Such, however, was not exactly the position in the hills for no stigma was attached to a man who had more than one wife. It was not, however, everyone who could afford a wife in the hills where the mere possession of more than one wife signified prosperity and distinction, though possession of many wives where the number of males was considerably higher than that of females would seem improbable.

Polygamy was usually practiced where there were more females than males. The most important reason behind the adoption and continuance of polygamy was the fact that women functioned as partners in agriculture. In the past it was not possible in the hills to carry out the household and field work without the assistance of someone else. For that purpose, tenants had to be engaged and paid quite decent wages. Instead of getting tenants, it was inexpensive and more useful to get another wife who could, in addition, work after marital needs. If the first wife was childless or had only female issue, she insisted on her husband's marrying another woman, preferably her own sister. When the wife was living a comfortable life, according to the local standard, and was happy with her husband, she might ask him to marry her sister so that the latter too might be as happy as herself, where she found that she could also carry on the household and field work singly;
she might ask her husband to marry someone else too. All this
goes to show that polygamy was not by any means a sign of
feminine inferiority or felt as a degradation by the women
concerned. Nor was the husband in most cases prompted to
take a second wife because of an excessive libido but by his
first wife's eagerness to shift part of her household duties on
other shoulders. The opportunities of satisfying one's sexual
desires were so ample that in legal marriage with a second
wife, the sexual motive did not play an insignificant role. Such
marriages also became a badge of distinction and a sure sign of
prosperity in the family, for a man with more than one wife
was not only in a better position to manage his household and
fields but also had ample time to relax and entertain guest
properly. It may seem inevitable that two or more wives could
be always quarreling and fighting and making one's life
miserable. But an examination reveals that this apprehension
was not justified by the actual state of affairs. Since it was only
the rich who could afford the luxury of many wives, the
husband had generally at least two rooms in his house. Only
the wife whom he would like to be with for the night would
sleep in his room though in cases where the wives were not
jealous, they might sleep in the same room. Quite often the
husband had a dochhi where he kept his cattle and he kept one
wife at his house and the other at the dochhi. She lived in the
house and at the dochhi and performed her duties. Since the
women married without any coercion or pressure whatsoever,
they generally got along well with each other. We came across cases in the hills where children treated their mothers and their stepmother, who was not their mother's sister, on the same terms and had no reason to dislike her but were rather more attached to her than to their mother. This was of course by no means common, but it must be admitted that on the whole the relations of the co-wives were not as bad as they were generally made out to be. In case irreconcilable differences grew, the injured wife might leave her husband and marry someone after her heart.

Polyandry

Polyandry of the fraternal type was extensively practiced in Bashahr, Jubbal, Keonthal, and the Trans-Giri tract of Sirmour. It was not peculiar to any particular caste or tribe.

Fraternal polyandry was practised in some Himalayan areas and, where it was in vogue, it was not confined to any caste or tribe, but extended to even the highest castes, ruling families alone being exceptions. Generally, only brothers shared a common wife, but first cousins and at times even strangers shared a wife in common in certain tracts.

We find polyandry prevailing in the greater part of Kinnaur and in some places in Bushahr other than Kinnaur. In Bushahr it was found existent in both the forms mentioned
above, higher and lower. In the higher form, the joint husbands were brothers and in the lower they were not so. Usually the former only was found in Bushahr but there were scattered instances of the latter too. In the latter type even strangers of even different castes became dharama bhais and shared a wife, but in such cases the offspring were not admitted into the brotherhood of the father.

The fraternal tie was thus the basis of the practice, allowing them to share a joint wife for as members of one caste, tribe or family, they as possible heirs, represent the fraternal group. As a matter of general practice, however, a joint wife was shared by uterine brothers upto the number of six. If, however, there were more than six brothers, they got two wives.

The ceremony of a polyandrous marriage was simple. Formerly it was the practice to capture the bride. She would be waylaid, a struggle might take place. Her captors would bring her home. If she managed to slip out of their hands, she would boast of it all her life and would be very proud of her achievement. The brother would in that case negotiate for her marriage with her husband. They would send a deputation to settle her price. The marriage ceremony was completed by her washing the feet of all the bridegrooms and the bridegrooms tying round their caps pieces of Muslin cloth called puju. The formality of capture is not, however, generally observed now
and the brothers of their friends negotiate with the parents of the bride and bring her home after paying the bride price.

Conventional methods existed in this region for ascertaining the social paternity of a child. It was usual to recognize all the husbands as the fathers of each child. The eldest brother was called teg babach (elder father) and the others gato babach (younger father).

At times, one of the several brothers, married yet another solely for himself. If the new wife agreed to be shared by all brothers, no difficulty arose. If, however, she refused to be the common wife of all the brothers, the joint property had to be partitioned. She and her husband had to separate and set up a new hearth and home and work as well (due to the partition).

The hill tracts such as Jubbal and Keonthal practised polyandry too on much the same lines as in Bushahr. All these tracts were situated in the interior of the Himalayas and were removed from the plains by mountains and rivers. Bushahr and Jubbal lie in the remote recesses of the Himalayas. The Kinnauris had been practising polyandry as a system of marriage, but later changed it to education and development of individuality as a result thereof. The custom of polyandry had been prevalent in border areas of the State. This system may have began to control the joint family as agricultural land was not sufficient to be divided among all the brothers.
However, lower, economically deprived classes continued with the polyandrous system."

**Divorce**

The present research shows that the ruling Chief of the Hill State or the upper class Rajputs and their Wazirs had many Khawas wives. A Khawas was known generally as more than a keep and she was especially treated with respect in the palace, when she became mother. Divorce was the name applied to the value of clothes and ornaments given to the bride by her husband at the time of marriage. If a wife wished to leave her husband, the marriage could be annulled by both accepting of 'Reet' of just a rupee.

Thus polyandry and polygamy existed as variations within the traditional monogamy structure. The incidence of polyandry was much larger than that of polygamy, for the simple reason that polyandry was the way of life in Kinnaur and other parts of Bushahr and also a spillover in Jubbal and Keonthal territories. But Polygamy in comparison was incidental, affordable by a select and chosen few, though here and there, some zamindars also went in for it due to not having a male issue and for an extra hand in agriculture and sometimes for prestige as well.
The chapter 'Status of Women' has given a fairly comprehensive view of the position of women in the Simla Hill States at the British time and how they fared both at home and outside in the place of work, essentially in the agricultural domain. It is seen that although no clear pictures emerges in terms of the institutional marriages as different kinds of arrangements prevail polyandry, polygamy and serial monogamy—all due to 'Reet'. However, these different arrangements were necessitated by economics. Despite the diversity and variation in the marriage arrangements, patriarchy appears to have been strongly entrenched, because the power still belonged to men and women had to play second fiddle.
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