**CHAPTER-III**

**MARRIAGE**

"The girl is regarded as a valuable piece of property, betrothal is a contract to transfer it, and marriage is the transfer of ownership and muklawa is the transfer of possession." C. L. Tupper, Punjab Customary Law, Calcutta, 1881

The Institution of Marriage: An Overview

The centrality of marriage in structuring gender relations is universally accepted. Marital status constitutes by far the most important element of woman’s identity in most societies.

Yet, marriage is by no means unitary institution. While certain forms of marriage are fairly well-known from a range of texts (prescriptive and otherwise) others are relatively unexplored and are often perceived as problematic. The power of the ideology becomes apparent when the sources project a few particular forms of marriage as “ideal” and “normal”. The diversity is either leveled out or at best projected as “deviant” or “rare” practices. Alternatively, such sources have created a system of gradations, a hierarchy of the types of marriage with the *Kanyadaan* at the top being regarded as the ideal form of marriage and then marriage with a “bride-price” or “Satta- Vatta” seen as inferior alternatives. It should be underlined again that whether it is the “family” or “Marriage” or any other social and economic institution, these need to be contextualised in their ecological and physical setting and accept the multiplicity of cultural practices that exist in the region without treating it as a homogenized space. In other words, different marital practices often co-existed in societies, being considered typical of distinct socio- economic strata. Moreover, as often stated, “gender is an on going fluid process”; polyandry and most other forms of marriage are as much about the relationship of man to one another as they are about women and men.

This brings us to an important aspect of ideological basis of marriage. The dominant discourse of women in Indian society has its roots in the ideology of
patriarchy; a strong social urge to control the sexuality of women. The mechanism through which her sexuality can be controlled her procreative capabilities can be channelised through the institution of marriage. It becomes still more apparent in the discussion of widow- remarriage.

Women’s nature “stri svabhav” was perceived as deceitful and driven by the uncontrolled sexual desire and thus problematic and hence had to be controlled through the insistence on women’s duty or stri dharam. It is seen as sinful for women to have their own desires and these are explicitly opposed to their dharam.¹ At the same time women are cast as the eternal temptress- the object and the very form of the sexual desire who can ensnare the wisest and most ascetic of men.² Methods of containment and of extracting obedience and virtue from wife are coded as “stri dharam” while the essentially the disruptive nature of female desire, a part of their essential wickedness is coded as stri svabhav. The stri dharam or the pativrata dharam was a rhetorical device to ensure social control over women, especially chastity, is now well accepted.³

It would not be out of place to mention the oft-quoted sayings of the Gurus about marriage. In the backdrop of general social perception about the position of women in marriage, this endeavour would not only enable us to appreciate the positivity in their messages, advocating a position of respect and dignity to women’s role as a wife and urging men to be loyal to their spouses. In fact, it would also help us in assessing whether their ideological position could actually influence, alter or even modify the dominant patriarchal ideological current. Or again there was an immense gap between the normative and operative realities.

The first important reality is that all Sikh Gurus were married men, except the eighth Sikh Guru who died very young. They also led a normal life of a householder and regarded sex desire as a normal phenomenon. The Sikh

¹ MDS: 231,234
² MDS:42
religion does not make any virtue of sexual abstinence as Nath Panthis, Jogis and Bairagis vowed celibacy. Indeed, Sikhism upheld the householder's life as an important adjunct to the spiritual life. According to Sikh teachings, true abstinence or renunciation is laid on the practice of ascetic virtues without any person having to renounce the family and the society. What is stressed again is the self restraint and self control. Guru Nanak observed in this context, "The pepper and salt if treated in ghee dissolve not in water, so do the Lord's devotees abide in the midst of maya and yet remain detached." Guru Nanak reiterated the importance of the institution of marriage when he says

"Living with in family life,
One obtains salvation"2

The Gurus not only strongly denounced asceticism but they castigated those Yogis who left their houses and lived on the generosity of the common people. The Yogis took pride in being celibate but inwardly they were in fact raving for sexual indulgence. Expressing the same sentiments Guru Nanak said:

"In his hands is the begging bowl and he cast like a mendicant's but within him is immense raving. And though, he abandons his own wife, he's attached to another's, lured by sex desire"3

Bhai Gurdas notes the discussion of Guru Nanak with the Siddhs, which highlights the importance that Guru Nanak attached to the life of household as follows:

"Khadhi Khunasi jugisard gosati karani sabhe uthi ai,
Puche jogi bhangar nathu tuhi dadhu vichi kiu kanji pai,
Phitia chata dudh da rirakia makhanu hathi na ai,
Bhekhu uteri udasi da vati kiu sandari riti charai,
Nanak ache bhangar nath teri mau kuchaji ahi,
Bhanda dhoi na jationi bhai kuchaje phulu sarai,
Hoi atitu grihasati taji phiri unahu ke ghari mangani jai,
Binu dite kachu hathi na ai"4

1 AG, p. 877
2 AG, p. 661
3 AG, p. 1030
4 Bhai Gurdas, Varan, tr. Bhai Jodh Singh, Var 1, Pauri 40, p. 70)
Meaning all the yogis getting irritated grouped together and came forward to have a debate. Yogi Bhangar Nath asked, 'Why have you put vinegar in milk. The spoiled (split) milk cannot be churned into butter. How have you put off yogic garb and attired yourself in a household way.' Said Nanak, 'O Bhangar Nath, your mother-teacher is unmannerly. She has not cleansed the inner-self of your body-pot and your clumsy thoughts have burnt your flower (of knowledge which was to become fruit). You, while distancing and repudiating household life, go again to those householders for begging. Except their offerings you do not get anything'. In Var 1, Pauri 38, Bhai Gurdas describes Guru Nanak in the attire of householders. In Pauri 48, Guru Nanak criticized Bhangar Nath and his like for their superficial knowledge and pointed out that you have to beg from the family of a householder only for your sustenance.

In Var 6, Pauri 18 also upholds the life of a householder. It emphasizes the importance of the act of balancing of all the pleasures of life. It sums up that the life of a householder can lead to path to salvation; a household rises above the level of the pleasures and sorrows.¹

"Pjhiri bab aia kartarpur bhekh udasi sagal utara; Pahiri sansari kapare manjit baithia kia avatara".²

Meaning, Baba (Nanak) returned to Kartarpur where he put aside his attire of a recluse. Now putting on a householder's dress, he sat splendidly on a cot (and executed his mission).

In the similar ideological spirit Guru Gobind Singh supposedly tried to convince the son of the Sikh family who had almost denunciated all the worldly pleasures and thus, was not willing to marry. Here, Guru Gobind Singh tried to make him appreciate the relevance of the householder through the story of the pigeon couple.³

It is remarkable that in a social milieu where a woman has been considered the "property" of her husband, the men are constantly reminded of chastity

¹ Bhai Gurdas, Vaaran, tr. Bhai Jodh Singh, Var 1, Pauri 38 and 40, p. 68 and 70. Var 6 Pauri 18, p. 179
² Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, Pauri, p. 38
³ Gur Rattan Mal, Sau Sakhi. Ed. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar , Sakhi No. 4&6, p. 8
and loyalty to their spouses as well. Nam Dev refers in the Ram Kali Raga the practice of offering women in charity at the places of pilgrimage. He says:

“If man makes gifts of horses, gifts of elephants, gifts of women with their couches and land- even then all these equal not the Lord’s name”.¹

In sharp contrast, we have Guru Amar Das emphasizing

"Bride and groom are not they who pose as one whole; 
Bride and groom are they who are two bodies with one soul”;²

Here, clearly Guru Amar Das advocates the marriage between two equal partners and the sacred institution of marriage aims at the fusion of two souls into one.

The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind called woman, “the conscience of man” without whom normal living was impossible.

The Gurus redefined celibacy in the framework of chastity- he is celibate, who is married to one wife- and taught the disciples, men and women alike, the value of conjugal fidelity. Bhai Gurdas recommends that a man who roams with the “other” women than his wife; “naku kanu fari vadiya ravey par nari”.³ Meaning that the nose and ear of an adulterous man should be chopped off.

The Gurus strongly recommended the monogamous ideal of marriage. Guru Amar Das in Sri Raga refers to it:

If we enjoy myriad of women
And rule over nine divisions of world,
We receive not God’s grace without true Guru and are cast
Into wombs again over again.”⁴
Should man lust with females a million,
And rule over the nav-khand⁵ (entire earth)

¹ AG, p 973
² AG, p 788
³ Bhai Gurdas, Vaaran, Var 36, Pauri 3, p. 337
⁴ AG, p. 26
⁵ Originally, nav-khand, the nine continents according to ancient Indian geography.
Without guidance of the holy Preceptor no joy shall find,
And again and again into transmigration be thrown.\(^1\)

There is repeated emphasis on chastity in Sikh sources. In Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin, there is an instance where Guru meets the begums of Jahangir who according to the author tries to seduce him but he explains them the importance of chastity in life. Guru Hargobind instructed them that their prime objective should be to “serve” their husbands. He further stated that in our family every woman should view except her husband every other male as father, brother or son. Similarly, every man, apart from his wife, should view all other woman as mother, sister or daughter.\(^2\) In the very similar spirit, Sri Guru Panth Parkash of Bhai Gyan Singh Ji Gyani narrates the episode of Anup Kaur. A rich prostitute (randi) of Lahore named Anup Kaur tried to seduce Guru Gobind Singh. To her inviting gestures, Guru Gobind Singh responded in a firm manner, explained her value of chastity:

“Nijnari Ke Saath Nehu Tun Nitbathjo,
Par Nari So Nehu Chhuri Paini Kar Janhu.”\(^3\)

Meaning that consider the other woman as the forbidden company, by mistake also never have any sexual contact with any other women; consider other women as a sharp knife who would bring your end.

In Hukum Namah 15, Guru Gobind Singh Ji states:

“Par Stri Ma-Bhain Dhi Bhain Kar Janani
Vilas Layi Par Stri Da Sang Nahi Karna - Par Triya Rakhi Na Hoth Anand”

“Hukum Namah 16 states” Stri Da Muhn Nahin Phit Karna!
Putri Da Dhan Vikh Janna!”\(^4\)

The thrust of both the Hukum Namahs is to consider all the women, other than your wife as your mother, sister and daughter. For the (sexual) pleasures never seek the company of the other woman.

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\(^1\) AG, p. 26
\(^2\) Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin, op cit, pp 317-318
\(^3\) Singh Bhai Gyan Ji Gyani, Sri Guru Panth Parkash, p. 204
\(^4\) Ganda Singh ed. Hukum Namah, p 93,94, Hukum Namah 15 &16
J.S. Grewal has undertaken a nuanced analysis of few of Guru Nanak’s verses in his works, particularly in his article “A Gender Perspective of Guru Nanak”. He comes to the conclusion that “Guru Nanak supposes the regulation of sex. This principle applies to both men and women. To covet the wife of another person, or an unwedded woman, is immoral in his system of values, but the whole tone and tenor of Guru Nanak’s compositions appears to be monogamous.”

Giving his views on chastity, Guru Gobind Singh said, “As I grew up, my Guru instructed me this: O son, as long as you live, keep up thy vow (of chastity). Let no thought of other women cross even thy dreams. And let the wedded spouse be the exclusive objective of the ever increasing love.” The loyalty to their spouses has been repeatedly emphasized as a trait of an ideal Sikh. Bhai Gurdas defines it in the framework of celibacy. According to Bhai Gurdas, a celibate is one who is married to one wife only and treats all other women as if they were their mothers, sisters and daughters. The Sikh ought to treat beautiful women of others as his mothers, sisters and daughters. Others’ wealth for him is as beef for Hindu and pork for a Muslim. Out of infatuation, for his son, wife or family, he should not betray and deceive any one. While listening to praises and slander of others, he should not talk ill of anybody. Neither should he count himself as great and glorious nor should he (out of his ego) snub anybody. Gur mukh of such a nature practices raj yog (highest yog) lives peacefully and goes to sacrifice his self unto the holy congregation. In his another Var, Bhai Gurdas says “Eka nari jati hoi par nari dhi bhain vakhanar” meaning having one woman as wife, he (the Sikh) is a celibate and considers any other’s wife, his daughter or a sister. “Dekhi parayeean changiya mavan, bhaina, dhiyan jaaney”. In his another Var, he says “Hau tisu gholi ghumaia par nari de neri na java”. Meaning I love him deeply, who does not go near another’s wife. In fact, the symbol Kachh (an

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2. Gopal Singh, Thus Spake The Tenth Master, Patiala, Punjabi University, 1978, p. 142
5. op cit, Var 6, Pauri 8, p. 169
6. op cit, Var12, Pauri 12, p. 305

154
important symbol among the five symbols of baptized Sikh. The other four being Kesh, Kangha, Kirpan and Karaha) signifies continence and is indicative of the Sikh’s manly control over his appetite even as he commits himself to the pro-creative world. And the same thing is applicable in case of women too. Guru Nanak’s ideological position fully recognizes the useful role played by women. She is not an evil or a seductress but the mother of mankind is the spirit that emerges from a very oft-quoted verse of Guru Nanak.

“We are conceived in women,
We are born to women,
It is to the women to which we get engaged,
And then get married. Women is our life long companion,
And pillar of our survival.
It is through women,
That we establish social relationships.
Why should we denounce her.
When even Kings and great men are born from her?"

The thrust of the message is that a married woman performs a very useful role in society through maintaining sexual discipline and establishing a morally healthy society. She is an embodiment of virtue and fortitude. The element of lifelong companionship between man and woman is emphasized and that both are incomplete without each other.

It would not be out of place to mention here that an ideal woman has been described by Guru Arjun having thirty two qualities- Batisulakhni and all these “sulakhnn” – virtues have been listed by Dr. Gopal Singh in his translation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Battisulakhni: She who is blessed with thirty two kinds of embellishments: namely: beauty, cleanliness, modesty, humility, cheerfulness, concord, observance of religion, cleverness, knowledge, service, compassion, truth, dedicated love for the husband, purity of mind, patience, frugality, beneficence, sobriety, chivalry, active habits, house decoration, respect of elders, proficiency of music, poetry, painting, domestic science and embroidery,

1 AG, p. 473
respect attention of guests and upbringing of children.\(^1\) There is also mention of sixteen embellishments of ladies by Guru Arjun, *Solah Kiya Singar Ki Anjan Payai*.\(^2\)

The same virtues were valued in woman in the perception of all communities as evinced by Abul Fazl’s elaboration of the following virtues which can be viewed as a representation of Muslim perception. These sixteen embellishments have been elaborately described by Abul Fazl in *Ain-i-Akbari* in the following way.

A Woman is adorned by sixteen things:

a. Bathing; Anointing with Oil; Braiding Hair; Decking her crown head with Jewels; Anointing with sandal woods; The wearing of dresses and these are of various kinds; Sectarian marks of caste and often decked with pearl and golden ornaments; Tinting with Lamp-Black like collyrium; Wearing ear rings; Adorning with Nose rings of pearls and gold; Wearing ornaments round the neck; Decking with garlands of flowers or pearls; Staining the hands; Wearing a belt hung with small bells; Decorating the feet with gold ornaments; Eating Pan (betel leaf) Finally, blandishment and artfulness.\(^3\)

The picture that emerges from these oft quoted verses of the Gurus’ ideas of marriage; a place of dignity and honour attributed to women; her social role as a wife and a pro-creator of mankind is acknowledged, the ideal of loyalty towards the spouse and chastity is advocated for both men and women. Husband and wife are seen as two equal partners, complimentary to each other and sharing a bond of love, affection and mutual trust. This perception of marriage, a very basic foundation stone of any civic society; a major component which defines the identity, position and status of women in the society appears to be flawless. If most of these adjuncts of the Gurus’ would have been brought into practice in the society then the entire construct of the social fabric would have been dramatically, drastically different. Then why was there such a

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\(^1\) Sri Guru Granth Sahib, translated and annotated by Gopal Singh, Delhi: Gur Das Kapoor and Sons, 1964, Vol 2, p. 362 footnote

\(^2\) AG, p. 1361

\(^3\) Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari, Vol iii, Calcutta 1948, p 343.
startling gap between normative ideas and operative, existing, realities. The value system as it operated in the then existing society appears to be sharply at variance with the code of conduct advocated by the Gurus (which was later laid down in the Adi Granth) with the consequence that the favourable impact which these ideas should have made, have been very largely thwarted.

As the study would reflect that there existed a wide gap between the normative and operative beliefs. What were the probable reasons for this wide divergence between the precept and the practice? First and the foremost, it is very difficult to influence or modify the value system of a society at any point of time. Thus, it is not even reasonable to expect any kind of dramatic change in the patriarchal mindset. In fact, it’s very often the women who are the vehicles of this over-arching patriarchal tenor of these social relations.

Moreover, the attitudes of the Gurus towards women were by no means simple. For instance, Guru Nanak can refer to the wife as a snare and yet place the house holder above the renunciation. He has no appreciation for a widow becoming sati, and yet neither the widow nor the divorced woman appears in any commendable light in his verses.

Although, the Gurus are in the favour of monogamy, however, there seems to be one or two aberrations. Sikhism presents monogamy as an ideal form of marriage. It is in line with the principle of equality of men and women which was advocated by the Sikh Gurus. How is it then that the sixth and the tenth Gurus had more than one wives. (In the later phase Banda Bahadur, Maharaja Ranjit Singh as well as many others Sikh rulers also had many wives). Why was polygamy not rejected and discouraged by the Sikh Gurus and their followers in clear, categorical manner? Is it not negation of equality of status between man and woman?

It has also been pointed out that the women have been appreciated for her pro-creative capabilities.

So kyon Mandaa Aakhiya
Jit Janmahi Rajaan!!

1 AG, p473
Moreover, in the Guru Granth Sahib, the relationship between God and the human soul is depicted in terms of the relationship between man and woman as in a feudal society. The relationship is not of equality but of inequality where husband is treated as Lord and the wife exists merely to serve him and yearns for his grace.

It's not that one is oblivious of the contribution of the Sikh Gurus in acknowledging the respect, dignity and honour of women as a wife, mother etc. and even if when we are not making an anachronistic reading of the then social milieu, yet, we have to admit that the ideological formulations of the Sikh Gurus strongly sanctifies the patriarchal social structure in which marriage, motherhood and service to husband becomes the most valuable attributes of women. Woman is respected for the above mentioned roles but she is generally placed in a secondary position to men.

The bulk of Guru Nanak's verses refer to conjugal relationships where God is the only true husband and human beings are His wives. The metaphors further relate to the good and the bad wife. The ideal wife is humble and modest before her Lord, even if she is beautiful and accomplished. Indeed, she adorns herself only to please her master. She is totally devoted to him and obeys his commands with pleasure. She pines for him in separation. She is faithful to him and she expects fidelity from him. The bad wife, by contrast, has no moral or physical trait to make herself pleasing to her husband. She adorns herself but not to please her Lord. She is heedless, slothful and not even faithful.

"Gunvanti Guna Vitharai Agunvanti Jhuri"
The woman of good qualities makes increase of her merits;
One without merit pines away.
Beauteous female! Shouldst thou seek the bride groom.
Not by ill-doing is he attainted,
Far off is the lord's abode;
To reach him hast thou neither boat nor raft.¹

¹ AG, Sri Rag, 17
"The women of merit (gunvanti) spreads merit and the one without merit (agunvanti) constantly her deprivation. She who seeks her "husband" (var) should know that he can not be met through falsehood."

"The ego-directed man (manmukh) after another's woman goes restless; The ego-directed are like a widow to a stranger surrendering her body; For lust and money, under another's sway, she places herself: Without her own spouse no fulfillment will she find". It further says;

"If I apply scents to my body and dress in silken ropes but do not appropriate Harnam, I can not attain to peace (sukh)....." The women may be beautiful and her eyes even more, and she may adorn herself with all the sixteen items of singar, she will suffer the daily insult of being rejected. How to win over the love of her husband (Shauh) Adi Granth elaborates; “Go inquire of the happily wedded wives by what devices have they attained love of their spouses:

All his doings should one gladly accept, And discard cleverness and self will. He by whose love is attained the boom, At his feet should devotion be offered, Whatever be the spouse’s will, obey let this be the women’s applying scent to herself, Thus, states the happily wedded wife, Sister! This wise is the spouse the love attained. By discarding egoism is the spouse’s attained- No other devise avails. Blessed is the day when the spouse casts his glance of grace: Then has the woman the Nine Treasures’ attained, The woman winning the spouse’s love is alone happily-wedded, And blessed with brothers. One that in such love is absorbed and by poise intoxicated, Day and night in love involved: Is truly beauteous of lovely aspect.4

1 AG, Sri Rag, 17  
2 AG, Rag Gauri, 225  
3 AG, Gauri, 225  
4 AG, Tilang, 722
It is further emphasized in the same rag:

"Go and ask the sohagans how to get to the Lord. What so ever he does should be welcome and his command should be obeyed. Only he whose love enables her receive the gift should be the object of her devotion. Do what he says and dedicate your body and mind to him- this is the "scent that attracts him. This is what the sohagans say should be done."1

On the similar lines Guru Amar Das says:

"Kamini tau singaru kari jan pahilan kantu manae"
"Women, before decking thyself,
Make thyself acceptable to the Lord,
Lest He should visit not thy couch,
Not thy make-up be gone waste,
In the women finding acceptance with her Lord,
Lies the beauty of her makeup.
Should her make-up be acceptable,
Shall she have Love (acceptability) of her Lord,
To her couch came not her lord-
All her preparation wasted.2

In Sakhi number 34 also, although Guru Gobind Singh ji, strongly appreciated the urge of a woman to serve the faith; appreciated the cultural values inculcated by her parents and in-laws and practiced by her. Yet, the conclusive message is that all her actions should be in compliance with the wishes of her bharta (husband) and for a woman, the obedience of her husband is most important.3

When we talk in terms of this kind of ambivalent attitude of the Gurus at few places, one is cautious of not getting entangled into taking their injunctions advocating a much respectable position for women literally. Otherwise, we won't be able to realize gap between the normative injunctions and the then existing operative reality.

1 AG, Tilang, 772
2 AG, P 788
3 Gur Rattan Mal, or Sau Saakhi, Ed. Gur Bachan Singh Nayyar, Saakhi Number 34; P 46
Caste and Marriage

This brings us to an important aspect of social institutions in the subcontinent, the caste system. The term "caste" refers to what is popularly called zat or jati which is an endogamous group. Each zat has a name usually associated with the traditional occupation. Most social anthropologists concerned with the Indian caste system accept Srinivas' definition of a traditional caste as "a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group having traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of the caste". The caste system has imposed its imperatives on family systems. Caste as a system of graded inequality, inequality with the most "revered" placed on top "contemptible" placed at the bottom is not merely significant at the level of establishing ritual and social hierarchy. This elaborate structure of gradation in occupations, labour and property relations is reproduced through a tightly controlled marriage system, entailing also a tight control of the sexuality of all women but particularly of upper caste women. These markers of high caste- their rituals and customs, professions and occupations or their attitudes towards women- including wives, widows, daughters manifested in many forms. The caste system is inextricably linked to gender relations. An insightful essay by Nur Yalmen (1962) on the castes of Ceylon and Malabar shows that the sexuality of women, more than that of men, is the subject of social concern. Infact, the complex relationship between the caste and gender become apparent by the effective sexual control over the women of the upper caste. The central factor for the subordination of the women is to maintain not only patrilineal succession (a pre-requisite of all patriarchal societies) but also caste purity, an important identity marker in Indian social structure. The fundamental principle of Indian social organization at large is to construct a close structure to preserve land, women and ritual purity with in it. The three are structurally linked and it is difficult, rather impossible, to maintain all three without stringently organizing the female sexuality. Indeed, neither land, nor ritual quality, that is, the purity of caste can

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1 M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays; Bombay, Asia. 1962, p. 3
be ensured without closely guarding women who formed the pivot for entire structure. Infact, the honour and respectability of men is protected and preserved through their women. The appearance of puberty thus marks a profound “dangerous” situation and is the context for major rituals which indicates the important relationship between female purity and purity of caste. As already discussed, it is in order to stringently guard the purity of castes very early on that pre-puberty marriages were recommended. The safeguarding of the caste structure is further ensured through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. Women are regarded as gateways- literally to the points of entrance into the caste system. It must be noted that caste identities have different meanings and implications for men and women – while both may share a certain commensality in external relations, vis-à-vis other castes internally, relationships of men and women within each caste are structured along the lines of difference. However, here we would focus only on the relation of caste and marriage and not on the variation in the position of women, her rights and status in relation to caste, high or low, which will be discussed in subsequent chapter.

It may also be pointed out that Sikhs had an intellectual tradition that criticized the caste system. Guru Nanak has rejected four fold division of society as it was prevalent in the varna system. The Puratan Janam Saakhis strongly suggests that in the marriage procession of Guru Nanak Dev ji, people from all the castes and class had accompanied the Barat, it further emphasizes that all the people from different castes had their food sitting at one place. This is in contrast to the description of the marriage party of Sri Ram in the Raamcharit Manas, composed by another revered Bhakti Saint, Goswami Tulsi Das. In this description, although people from different caste and class had accompanied the marriage procession of Sri Ram but they were awarded the treatment according to their status in the hierarchy of caste system. Their arrangement of stay as well serving the food was on the lines of caste system. Howsoever, even if we accept this piece of information as opposed to de-facto presentation of knowledge, yet, one can not deny the fact that the latter adherents wanted to perceive Guru Nanak as one who had not strongly denounced the caste system but, infact, had practiced the idea of casteless
society in his own life. This would have certainly had the desired effect on the perception of the adherence of the faith. Moreover it is noted in the Adi Granth that according to him, the real criterion to judge a man was his karma and conduct and not birth. It is stated by Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas that Guru Nanak had reduced the four castes into one. An oft-quoted saying in Adi Granth states it still more categorically as follows:

"Jaat Janam Naa Puchiya Sach Ghar Lohe Batiyen
Ma Jaati Ma Pati Hai Johe Karam Kamayee"  

The Adi Granth contains many hymns which question the practice of casts distinctions and differences. Guru Nanak declared his attitude in famous and often repeated couplet:

Phakar Jati Phakar Nau,
Sabhana Jia Ika Chhau.

Worthless is caste and worthless is an exulted name. For all mankind, there is but a single refuge. This is one of the most famous of his pronouncements of this particular subject, many more can be added.

Observe the divine light in the man and ask not his caste, for there is no caste in hereafter.

Sacrifice, oblation, the reading of sacred text- all are futile.

Only that which pleased Thee is acceptable in Thy sight.

Kingship, Possessions, Beauty and Riches, all are but transient clouds, and when the Sun's chariot ascends the true landscape comes into view.

In the hereafter, name and caste count for nothing.

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2 AG, p. 1330
3 AG, p. 83, Var Siri Ragu3:1
4 AG, p349, Asa3
5 AG, p1257, Malar 8 for all other examples of Guru Nanak's pronouncements see Var-Majh 10, AG, p142; Var Asa 11:3, AG p. 469; Sarang 3, AG, p. 198; Prabhati 10, AG, p. 1330
Nanak’s successors repeat the same message both by precept and the institution of distinctive customs.

When you die you do not carry your caste with you.
It is your deeds (not your caste) which will determine your fate.¹
These are the words of Guru Amar Das.

The cardinal institutions of the Sikh faith, the *langar* and the *pangat*, not only intended to get rid of the caste divisions and distinctions but bring about a compulsory commonality. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru tried to instill the same message when he said;

There are four caste and four traditional stages in the holy life.
but he who mediates on God, he who is supreme.²

Guru Arjan, the fifth guru expressed his agreement by including in the Adi Granth, the works of two earlier poets, Kabir, a low caste weaver (*Jullaha*) and Ravi Das, an out caste leather worker (*Chamar*). Both had made the same point with even greater force, for instance, one of Kabir’s hymns directly questions the authority of *Brahmin* over *Shudras*;

“There is no clan or caste while dwelling in the womb,
Everything is created from the seed of Brahman (God). Say, o Pandit! When were the Brahmans created?
Do not waste thy life by proclaiming thy Brahmanhood.

If thou art a Brahman, born of a Brahman woman, why hast thou not come through another way? How art thou a Brahman? How am I a shudra? How am I blood? How art thou milk? Whosoever reflects a Brahman (God), Saith Kabir. He is called a Brahman. "³

Thus, Guru Arjun indicated his agreement by retaining his pronouncements in Adi Granth, and also included the works attributed to Namdev, a low caste calico printer (Chimba).

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¹ AG, Asa, p. 363
² AG, p. 861
³ Gauri Kabir, p. 171.
Finally, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru brought the ideological perceptions of the Sikh Gurus into practical reality. At the time of the institution of Khalsa in the course of the ceremony of initiation it required all the candidates to drink from the common bowl, striking once again at the roots of caste purity. In Sikh tradition, the anti caste quality of Khalsa initiation is further strengthened by the belief that the first five to become “Khalsa” included a representative ranging from High Caste Khatri to a middle caste Jat to low caste barber and washer man.

In sum, the caste system was at least reconceptualised after the formation of the Khalsa, it was denied among the Sikhs. However, the idea of caste, both as a marker of social and ritual status and as an organizing principle of daily life persisted.

Now, coming to the specific question of influence of the caste system in Punjab; there are many scholars who are of the opinion that caste system in the context of Punjab is not of much relevance. As a region, that had to bear the brunt of multiple foreign invasions, it has been seen as a region where Brahminism founded difficult to survive. The Punjabis had to adjust to different ethnic people, their religion and social practices. Besides, influence of Islam and Sikhism with their egalitarian ideological formulations must have checked the growth of stringer t Brahaminical practices yet, to believe that caste system did not have any role to play in social relations is more like a fallacy. If that would have been the case, then we would not have had this kind of recurrent and powerful injunctions by almost all the Gurus. At the same time, it should be highlighted that the situation in the then Punjab clearly reflected the social fluidity where boundaries of both caste and religion were not rigid. The fusion of traditions and plurality of socio cultural customs has already been discussed in detail. We have to admit that the one aspect of the ritual purity and social relations within the framework of the caste system as it exists even today is the diversity of cultural practices that prevail among different castes. This diversity is most visible in terms of family forms and marriage practices including divorce and widow remarriage.
Admittedly, the caste and kinship played the most important role in marital alliances. The traditional classical hierarchy of all four varnas in context of marriage provides a most misleading starting point for any discussion of relation between caste and marital alliances. Instead, we shall begin with the two components of the “system” most meaningful to those with in it, namely the “zat” (Hindi Jatti) and the “got” (Hindi Gotra). The zat is the larger groupings, distinguished above else by the fact that it is endogamous. In the Punjab, the important Zats included Brahmins, Khatris, Rajputs, Jats, Aroras, Tarkhans (carpenters) and many more. Each zat is divided into several smaller groups. These are the gots, and the got (in contradistinction to the wider zats) is exogamous. This meant that the marital alliances were to be arranged outside a particular got (to whom the bride/bridegroom) belonged. But the marital alliances had to be with in an approved range of the other gots in the same zat.

In other words, in Punjab (both Hindus and Sikhs) patrilineal and patri virilocla system seems to be followed. Marriage takes place with in one’s Jat (caste/sub-caste) but outside of one’s gots (Exogamous clan). While the rule of endogamy, by and large, ensures that one does not go outside once identifiable group for marriage, the rule of exogamy takes care that one does not marry with in one’s close agnatic kin group. Lewis (1958) and Mayer (1960) among other social anthropologist have reported that a caste group at the village level in most parts of North India is essentially agnatic kin group. With in a village usually all the members of the caste belong to a single got, but in the case of some large castes, such as Jats Sikhs, they may belong to several exogamous groups. Even in the later case, it would be most unusual for members of a Jat in a same village to inter marry. This exogamy ensures that marriage takes place, not only outside the got but also outside the village. On the whole, for a male member of a Jat in a village, the most important agnatic ties are with in his village, while affinity ties are outside it. What repercussions did this custom of marrying outside the village had on women will be discussed in subsequent sections.

In the caste system in the context of Punjab, what emerges as the startling reality, a great evidence of gap between normative beliefs and operative realities, Sikh Gurus, beyond all doubts, appear to be vigorous and practical denunciators of castes. In fact, acknowledging the "fusion of traditions" between Hindus and Sikhs; Muslims also not to be treated, culturally at least, as a great distinct, social group- the influence of Gurus should have extended much more beyond the "Sikhs Per se". Yet in reality, the caste restrictions were the most important, if not the sole criterion of the marital alliances. In fact, even in the today's date, the Sikhs of Punjab are divided into a number of named endogamous castes and sub-castes.

Writing on the inconsistency between the Sikh ideology of equality and the presence of caste distinctions among the Sikhs, McLeod says "A reasonable conclusion appears to be that where as they (Sikh Gurus) were vigorously opposed to vertical distinctions of caste they were content to accept it in terms of its horizontal linkages." Although McLeod does not define these terms, it would appear that he is using the term "vertical" to refer to the hierarchical status aspect of the caste system while the term "horizontal" linkages refers to the features of the endogamy and separate cultural identities of the caste group. To put it differently, McLeod seem to be arguing that while the Sikh Gurus rejected status distinctions between castes and their relevance to the salvation, they did not object to the practice of endogamy and other cultural differences between caste groups. Although, the distinction is useful in understanding the caste system (among the Sikhs), but these two aspects are closely connected. Status differences, (that is the vertical aspect), between caste cannot be fully maintained if endogamy and other inter and intra-caste differences are obliterated. The latter provide identity to groups which are required for any rank-order system.

The second point that emerges is that on the one hand there are numerous pronouncements by almost all the Gurus denouncing caste advocating an egalitarian social structure. In contrast, the marital alliances of all the Gurus, without an exception, presented a totally contrasting picture. All the ten Gurus

were Khatris by caste, that is belonging to a mercantile caste, Khatris, as indicated by the similarity in the names, claimed their allegiance to the elevated rank of Khastriya and commanding a high status rating in the Punjabi society. All the Gurus, themselves, Khatris, married Khatri wives. Apart from their own marriages, all the Gurus arranged marriages for their children in strict accordance with traditional caste prescription. There is no instance of a Guru having contracted on behalf of his children marriages with boys or girls from lower caste. For instance, Guru Nanak, a Khatri by Jat belongs to the Bedi got, this meant that his parents were required to arrange for him a marriage outside the Bedi got, but with in the approved range of other Khatri gots. Gots into which Bedi’s may marry include that of the Chonas and it was to a Chona girl that his parents duly betrothed him. The second Guru Angad was a Khatri of a Trehan Gotra and his successor Amar Das was a Bhalla. Since the Bhalla Got may inter-marry with the Sodhi Got, it was to a young Sodhi that Amar Das married his daughter. This young man, Ram Das became the fourth Guru and thereafter the office was hereditary in the line of his male descendants. The list of the Guru’s family members’ marriages can be added on, but one thing that emerges very clearly that all the sons and daughters of the Gurus’ families were married according to the correct got prescription. This kind of picture inclines one to agree with McLeod’s opinion of their (the Gurus) apparent acceptance of the horizontal relationship, an acceptance unmistakably demonstrated by their willingness to observe customary marriage conventions. Yet, one would like to highlight that although the Gurus were not addressing the ills of the caste system per se, yet, categorically and repeatedly emphasized that the way to salvation was open to all, irrespective of caste. Even if, the clutches of the caste system was loosened only to the extent of reducing the discriminatory aspects of the vertical relationships, it was undoubtedly an achievement which need to be acknowledged. To comprehend that why the caste system did not loose its relevance in social relations, particularly marital alliances, it is necessary to make an obvious but a critical point. To understand the working of the caste system, the link between caste and kinship, the long history of tenuous ideological control of the caste system, the role of Sikh ideology and the
economic and political power of the different sections (region) of Punjab must be examined.

To sum up, the existing state of affairs, one can safely infer that the need to maintain group's status govern the rule of endogamy. As is indicated by the works of Warris Shah, Muqbal, Agra Sethi, Lakh Shah and Ahmed Yaar; the Khatris, the Rajputs, the Jats, the Qazis, the Brahmins, the Dhobis and the Ghumiars, all adhered to the rule of the caste pertaining to endogamy.\(^1\) With in the endogamous group, the status of an individual was the primary concern. For example, the size of the land holding was the basis of the social status among the well off Jats. And it figured as an important criterion at the time of marital alliances.\(^2\) Even among the artisan caste, people preferred nuptials at least with those equal in status.\(^3\) As already noted that the system of exogamy was followed with respect to one's sub-caste village or a town locality.\(^4\)

**Varied Forms of Marriages**

In Punjab, different types of marriages were prevalent. Rituals constitute a key element in the construction of religious identity, particularly, those that fall under the rubric of the rites of passage. As has been repeatedly pointed out that the cultural practices even of an extremely important social institution like marriage, were not categorized into the set of rituals and practices followed by either Hindus, Muslims or even Sikhs. In fact, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Sikhs had not emerged as a distinct Sikh identity. Prior to the Khalsa transformation, Sikhs do not seem to have possessed a distinct set of life-cycle rituals. Given the fluid nature of the Sikh identity, there was of-course no need for such rituals. The caste played a major role in marital alliances and it was more importantly, the combined social influence of caste and class which had an over-arching influence on the marital alliances and the kind of marriage practices and the allied rituals than anything else.

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\(^1\) Warris Shah, Hir, pp. 55, 206; Muqbal, Kissa Hir Ranjha, p. 19; Agra Sethi, War Haqeeqat Rai, p. 52; Ahmed Yaar, Kamrup, p333; Lakh Shah, Kissa Sasi Punan, p. 32; Soñni Fazal Shah, p145; Ahmed Yaar, Kissa Sashi Punan, pp. 19,21

\(^2\) Warris Shah, Hir, p56; Muqbal, Kissa Her Ranjha, pp. 19,21

\(^3\) Ahmed Yaar, Kissa Sassi Punan, pp. 50-72, 75, 79

\(^4\) Muqbal, Kissa Hir Ranjha, p19; Hashim Shah, Kissa Sohini Mahiwal, p. 114

169
To attempt to construct, the complex and inter-mingled marriage practices, three related points need to be highlighted at the outset. Although, Kissas like Hir Ranjha, Sohini Mahiwal and Mirza Sahiban have evoked the indigenous aspect of Punjabi countryside. An elaborate picture of some social institution and rituals is there in the Kissas of Warris Shah, Muqbal, Ahmed Yaar, Fazal Shah and Mohamad Baksh. Marriage as an institution not only figures in the works of these poets, but in fact emerges as a direct theme of folk songs furnishing meaningful and live evidence on some of the contemporary marriage customs. Yet, the evidence on marriage customs and rituals available in the literature does not provide any comprehensive and compact view in this regard as some of the rituals can differ from caste to caste and from region to region. In other words, it is important to see the marriage practices as a continuum of cultural practices with in the larger Punjabi society rather than sharp distinctions of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim dividing the society. Second, it is significant to note that the notions of “ideality” of customs of marriage were not new, but, in reality, a variety of marriage customs existed among the Punjabis as there were also forms of secondary marriages. Was there any attempt towards recognizing one form as honorable, and therefore, suitable for those cautious of maintaining or enhancing their prestige and social status. Third, we need to speculate upon, what these different forms of marriages and practices meant to have for women. A society where, generally speaking the girl child was seen as a great economic and social burden; what would it have meant for women, where some sections of populace practiced what came to be known as “selling” a daughter in marriage. Or a marriage with dowry or in some agricultural society, where a girl child was considered another working hand in the family. A society which was fetish with the vigilance needed to manage the sexuality of females whether as daughters or wives, how could it solve its dilemma of widow remarriage. What was the mechanism it evolved to control the sexuality of widows in a social scenario where there must have been a huge proportion of young widows as the child marriage was the norm. How did the society try to absolve the property rights of the widows, if they had any at all?
Hindu scriptures record eight forms of marriage but we come across mainly three major forms of marriage among the Hindus in Punjab:

- Class I Dharamnata (Pun)
- Class II Wattasatta (Marriage by exchange)
- Class III Takka (On payment of money)

To put it more clearly, the marriage form “pun” indicated “without price”; takka for a bride price; and watta by exchange involving a reciprocal betrothal. There was also a fourth form of marriage for widows known by different names such as “Chaadar Andazi” or “Chaadar Dalna” or “Karewa”. The marriage by “Chaadar Andazi” was practiced for re-marriage of widows. It will be discussed in detail in the section of widow-remarriage and its logistics.

Evidence from ancient scriptures shows that only in one out of the eight forms of marriage, a girl was given in marriage along with the gifts. The “tradition” of marriage, the idea of an honorable meritorious as also an expensive marriage of a daughter was present among the upper castes of the Punjabis. Though the marriage of Pun was the ideal, however, the other forms of marriage like Watta satta were more popular. These forms of marriages later came to be criticized vehemently by a section of the society who styled themselves as high castes. In fact, in the nineteenth century, one sees the clear attempt to project the “Pun” as an “ideal” type of marriage. The marriages of exchange seemed to be especially shameful as because they often involved taking money for the hand of the daughter or a sister. It was also stressed that the Watta marriages led to mismatched couples and an element of disgust was aroused as the spouses through such marriages were equated with the tabooed relationships in Punjabi society. This kind of social reaction is well represented by a monograph, although of a much later period, by Mohan Lal Shampotra written with an intention to cure such “social evils” as clearly reflected by the title “Kuriti Nivaran” (meaning “cure of social evils”) when he writes:

“Bhain diya jab aurat aai, aurat nahi goya veh Bhain Kahai”

“ When you get women by giving a sister, not your wife, she will be called your sister’.

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1 Mohan Lal Shampotra, Kuriti Nivaran, Lahore, 1890, p. 7
Watta Satta or marriage by exchange was popular among large sections of the society. Ibbetson commenting on its wide spread practice noted that exchange betrothals were found among all sections of the society in western Punjab; "In the west of the country among all classes in the hill and sub montane districts apparently among all but the highest classes, and among Jats almost everywhere except in the Jamuna districts, the betrothal by exchange is the commonest form."

Among the Muslims too, in certain cases, matrimonial alliances were settled on a mutual basis when a boy of one family married a girl of the other family and the latter's family married a former. This type of marriage was called "Golat" or "Golavat" and such type of marriage was found in the imperial households also. Auranzab's daughter, Zeb-Datun-Nisa and his son Mohammad Azam were given in marriage to Darah Shikoh's son Siph Shukoh and daughter Jahan Zeb Banu. For the common masses on the subject, howsoever we do not come across any recorded information.

As obvious, the custom of Watta, that is, exchange was quite prevalent in all the communities of the society as it gave a mechanism for not so well to do families to get both their daughter and son married without incurring much financial cost. However, this type of marriage added another dimension of adjustment- either as a sister or a wife- because both the families had a member of the "other" family easily available who could be humiliated. As has always been noted that it is the woman who is victimized in case of any problems in the relationships of the two families. Moreover, at times, there was the involvement of the bride price too. The repercussions of such marriages, their availability as a source "settling scores" between the two families will be discussed later.

Now, "Taaka" marriages in specific, the practice of accepting money from the boy's parents by the bride's parents were also quite a prevalent feature of the age. So much so that the young daughters were an asset and "according to

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2 Mutamid Khan, Maasir-i-Alamgiri, translation. P. 77; also see Qanungo, Dara Shukoh, vol I, pp. 18-19 and 330-331
the customary law of the Shah Pur district, a girl is looked upon as a valuable piece of property and betrothal is a contract, by which the girl’s family binds itself, often for money considerations or an exchange for an other betrothal.”

About the Customary law of Moga, Zira and Ferozepur, it is stated, “The parents on both sides have already made their enquiries and arrangements, and have settled the considerations which is accepted among those tribes and families who pretend to superior dignity. As generally paid for the girl by the boy’s side.” Among the large Jat population of Punjab, marriages involving bride wealth were common and openly acknowledged. The bride price was prevalent among higher castes too in exceptional circumstances like when the groom was older, disabled, or a widower, he could get married only through the (custom) payment of bride price. An older groom meant a bride could be procured only by paying bride price. Infact, the practice was prevalent so much so that the young daughters were married to old persons for material considerations as indicated by Warris Shah and Najabat.

About the custom in Ambala, it is stated, “The custom of selling girls is largely on the increase among all castes, especially Khatris. In fact, in the secular literature, it is reflected that the parents with inferior economic status had difficulty in finding spouses for their sons as in “puran bhagat”. In some cases, where the boys side being poor, could not pay for the bride price, he could go and live with his in laws and serve them in fields and forests grazing flocks, and after some years could claim the hand of the girl. This practice was known as “Marriage by Service”. As indicated by Ahmed Yaar, the practice for working for a bride existed among the artisan class, to earn bride, the boy could do labour for her father. In fact, in later times, the census authorities too noted this custom even among the Khatris of Lahore where the mother of the comparative poor boy would go and serve the elderly lady of the

1 Gazetteer of the Ferozepur District- 1915 (Lahore, 1916) p 56
2 Ibid ,p 65
5 Ahmed Yaar, Qissa Sassi Punnun, ed by Nihal Singh Ras, Amritsar, 1963, p. 51
household and after some time would request the girl in marriage. It was known by the name of “Chaakri”.

**Child Marriage**

Marriage was considered to be the ultimate goal for the girl. It was considered improper rather disgraceful for a girl to remain unmarried. By way of conjugal union women formed the basis of human existence.\(^1\) Marriage, says Waris Shah, constituted a large link between the domain of caste and kinship.\(^2\) Severe social criticism was faced by fathers who failed to perform the marriage of daughters at the proper time. The traditional Hindu marriage had two components, wedding ceremony, considered binding, was performed before the girl had reached puberty, although the girl bride continued to live with her parents and the second component being *garbha daan* or *mukalwa* when the bride finally moved to the bridegroom’s home. As early as the second century AD, Manu had recommended eight years of age as the ideal age of marriage of girls.\(^3\) So that the girls would already be the sexual property of their husbands at the time of their puberty. All sexual activity would then be exclusively concentrated upon the husband and there would be less possibility of woman going “astray”. Immediately on the onset of puberty, referred to locally as *shanee*,\(^4\) literally inauspicious, probably regarded so because women became dangerous\(^5\) and need to be safeguarded thereafter; the ritual consummation of marriage was performed through the *garbha daan* ceremony. After this ceremony, the bride went to her husband’s house, thus, harnessing female sexuality for the sole purpose of ensuring legitimate reproduction. In case of girl began to menstruate before she was married, her marriage could be performed only (if anyone was willing to marry her) after the prescribed ceremony of penance.\(^6\)

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3. Manusmriti, ix. p. 88
6. Kane, 1941, pp. 444-45
Similar concerns are evinced by the secular literature of the Punjab. Parents were required to make an earliest provision for their daughter's marriage. A premature liaison of a girl was a social norm, somewhat compulsion. And a grown up unmarried girl was a source of pain for parents. Sikh history is replete with innumerable examples of child marriage. For instance, Sri-Guruditta, son of Guru Hargobind’s marital alliance was fixed with a girl of seven years only (daughter of a Khatri named Rama belonging to Batala). Bibi Veeron was also married at the age of seven only. Banswalinamah reports the marriage of Lakhmi Das (son of Guru Nanak) at the age of eight only. As far as Sikh Gurus are concerned we do not come across any direct or indirect injunction criticizing the child marriage. Probably, it did not even enter as something "inappropriate" or "objectionable" in their entire discourse. That’s why the Gurus’ families history is replete with innumerable such examples and it appears to be accepted as the norm by the gurus as well. Among the Muslims too, the young girls were regarded as unmanageable and so parents remained anxious to get their daughters married as early as possible. Thus, among the Muslims too an early marriage was generally the norm so generally girls were married at the age of seven, eight and nine years of age.

This kind of psyche must have contributed to the practice of child marriage. The Khatris were more cautious of their upward mobility, thus, as a marker of high caste, wanted to manage the sexuality of their females and thus married

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2. Muqbil, Kissa Hir Ranjha, p27; Warris Shah, Hir, pp31,32,33,46,206; and Sohini Fazal Shah, pp132, 138
3. Warris Shah, Hir, p. 181
4. Gurbilas Padshashi Chhevin, p. 375
5. op cit, p. 386
them too young. From the various indications, we find that the approximate marriageable age was round about ten.¹

The rationale for the dual ceremony was strongly patriarchal in nature “stri svabhav”, as already discussed in detail, declared the women to be deceitful, evil and prone to immoral behaviour and therefore in need to severe disciplining from the closely related male at each stage in her life.

This view of female sexuality was constituted with four closely inter-related but conceptually separable dimensions, first woman’s supposedly uncontrollable sexual desire was assumed to be awakening at puberty, and had to be harnessed in advance, through marriage to a legitimate sexual activity. Second, the women’s consent in the choice of spouse was immaterial. Admittedly marriages being arranged by families, this choice was denied to both the spouses. However, the husband’s polygamous options and extra-marital sexual freedom remained firmly closed to the wife. It can be very safely deduced of what ever little and indirect evidence available that adulterous women of the middle and the upper castes must have been regarded as serious offenders. Adultery was regarded as offensive not merely because of the problem of ensuring legitimate reproduction but also because it was thought to represent “excessive” sexual energy and was considered deeply reprehensible in the case of women. Third, the women were the object of sexual gratification for her husband. Fourth, the women were an instrument of procreation. Thus, it becomes obvious that these reasons must have at least ensured the continuance of the system of child marriage.

Polygamy

Polygamy was prevalent both among the Hindus and Muslims, as often noted among especially ruling elite. It was fairly common among kings and nobles who often found it a useful instrument in strengthening their political power by

¹ Warris Shah, Hir, p. 81; Tulsa Singh, Jhagra Jattii Te Khatrian da, Ms 800, Punjab University Library, Chandigarh, p. 8; Qadir Yar; Puran ‘Bhagat’ in Qadir Yar, edited by Gurcharan Singh, (Patiala 1969), p. 26, 27; Agra Sethi, War Haqiqat Rai, p 34; Lakh Shah, Qissa Sassi Punnun, p. 32

176
contracting numerous but judicious matrimonial alliances.\textsuperscript{1} The classic example of polygamy due to marital alliances guided by political reasons is Akbar. According to Abul Fazl, Akbar had seraglio of 5000 women supervised by a separate staff of female officers.\textsuperscript{2} However, generally, common men preferred to have one wife only.\textsuperscript{3} A large harem was a privilege of aristocracy, the prerogative of chieftains and was common among the Hindus and Muslims Guru Amar Das in Sri Raga refers to it.

If we enjoy myriad of women  
And rule over nine Divisions of world,  
We receive not God’s Grace  
Without true Guru and are cast  
Into womb again over again.\textsuperscript{4}

The existence of 	extit{harems} clearly refers to the practice of polygamy in the society Guru Nanak refers to the harems as well when he says:

"Those who possess horse fast as wind and harems colorfully decked,  
Have chambers, halls and bowers and in shows of these are absorbed,  
Indulge in pleasures after hearts desire."\textsuperscript{5}

Another hymn of Guru Nanak refers to the harem:  
"Where the betel purveyors, the chamber maids? All vanished as shadows".\textsuperscript{6}

Var17 Pauri 10 of Bhai GurDas also hints at the existence of 	extit{harems} of the kings.

\textit{Rajai De Sau Rania Sejai Avai Varo Vari,  
Sabhai Hi Patarania Raje Ikdu Ik Piari}.\textsuperscript{7}

Meaning the king keeps hundreds of queens and turn by turn visits their beds. For the king, all are the principal queens and all are loved by him much and

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{1} Alberunis India,Vol I, p155; A.S.Altekar,op.cit.,p. 104
\item\textsuperscript{2} Abul Fazl, Ain-I-Akbari, trl .H. Blochmann, Delhi :1965, pp. 45-46
\item\textsuperscript{3} Badaoni,op.cit.vol II ,p212
\item\textsuperscript{4} AG, p.26.
\item\textsuperscript{5} AG, Rag Asa, M1,p.472
\item\textsuperscript{6} AG, Raga Asa, M.1,p.417
\item\textsuperscript{7} Bhai Gurdas Varan, Tr Bhai Jodh Singh, Var 17, Pauri 10, p. 418
\end{itemize}
more. Decorating the chamber and the bed, they all enjoy coition with the king.

According to the Muslim tradition Sunnis and Shias could have four wives. However, it was prevalent only among the rich Muslims, to keep three or four wives at a time. This practice in the aristocratic families in the Punjab was prevalent.

The Hindus by and large, restricted themselves to monogamy. Edward Terry states that they (Hindus) married one wife and were not afraid or jealous of her. They married at a very early age, the choice being made by the parents. They married a second time only if their wives were unable to bear a male-child or were barren or the first wife had died. Remarriage was common after the death of one’s first wife. Hindus married but one wife and never divorced her till death except for the cause of adultery. Although, a later reference but as already mentioned such social practices do not suddenly emerge.

The census of 1901 states that the religious character of the regular form of marriage was responsible among the higher castes like Khatris of the Chopra section and the Mohammedan Khojas of Bhera (in Shahpur), for a strong prejudice against a man’s taking a second wife during the lifetime of the first. However, polygamy was quite prevalent amongst the lower castes such as the Chamars, Chuhras Dagis, Nais and several other menial and artisan castes. It was also common among the lower agricultural tribes especially those of the hills kanets, Ghirths, Gujars and Jats all practicing it somewhat extensively. In all these castes the probability was that polygamy could have been practiced largely due to the practice of widow remarriage. Marrying by Chadar Pauna to maintain brother’s widow but among the Kulu Kanets at

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1 P.N. Chopra, op. cit, p. 134.
3 Foster ed. Early Travels in India, Travels of Williams Hawkins, William Finch, Thomas Coryat and Edward Terry
5 Census of 1901 p.218
6 Census 1901 pp.218-220

178
least, polygamy was a form of investment as most of the field work was done by the women. This also applied to Kanga Girths, but in a less degree.

In sum it emerges that the polygamy if not very wide spread, yet it was prevalent among the high class aristocracy both Hindus and Muslims as well as lower class. Thus, in net effect if not popular yet it was substantially present in the society at large. The very fact that Akbar had issued definite order that a man of ordinary means should not possess more than one wife unless the first proved to be barren\(^1\) indicates the prevalence of the system. The common mundane social wisdom also considered it injurious to a man’s health to keep more than one wife.

The implications of the existence of polygamy for women must have been, quite understandably, a severe sense of insecurity. As the entire social-economic status of woman depended on her husband. In case of many wives it would have directly affected by the position she held in the eyes of her husband; her entire social esteem must have been directly proportionate to the love and favours bestowed by her husband. In any case, as often noted the prime goal of a *suhagan* should be to serve her lord (husband) win his favours. In a situation where there was a constant race for such favours among a band of women called wives, it must have inevitably generated a sense of rivalry and jealousies among them. Though, we do not get any clear evidence from Punjab of such jealousies. But presumably, the manifestations of human emotions, a sense of insecurity becomes evident from the rivalries, the associated politics, a race for better clothes and ornaments to get more “favoured” position among the Mughal harems must have been existent among women who had to bear the agony of “sharing” her husband with many other woman/women.

Here, it must be noted that the sixth Sikh Guru also had three wives, however Mata Ganga Ji played pivotal role in keeping the relations of both wives, Mata Damodari and Mata Nanaki, smooth and pleasant. We get evidence of both of them visiting the elder sister of Mata Damodari along with Mata Ganga to

\(^1\) Badaoni *op.cit.* vol11, p. 357
Daroli. Kesar Singh Chibber’s Banswali Namah as well as Bhai Sheetal Singh’s RahitNamah reports that Guru Arjun’s first marriage took place in Mongra district in a Suri Khatri family with the girl named Ramdevi. And when she could not conceive for a long time, and then he was wedded to Ganga Devi. However this piece of information is not corroborated by any other source. The same cordial relationship, sense of mutual respect and trust evinced by the wives of Guru Hargobind, marked the relations of Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Deva., the wives of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Yet, one can not ignore the element of mutual rivalry and jealousies among the wives of Guru Hargobind. Although, we do not get any reference on day-to-day basis, but at the time of accession to Gurugaddi, there are very clear references to it. When Gurugaddi was bestowed upon Guru Har Rai, Mata Manwahi was annoyed that her son Suraj Mal was not considered worthy of accession and moved to her parent’s place (Pekke) along with her son. Similarly Mata Nanaki also enquired about fate of her son, Teg Bahadur. To her credit although she did not manifest her concerns as mother in the form of tantrums. Another interesting evidence comes in the form of Hukam- Namah issued is by Mata Sahib Deva, second wife of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The thrust of Hukam-Namah that Mata Sahib Deva almost scolds Bhai Duna, Bhai Sabha, Bhai Kabida and so on for showing favoritism towards Mata Sundari and not sending money (Kar Bheteyan) for langar to Mata Sahib Deva. She rhetorically questions them that “Are you closer to her?” (Tusi Mata Sundari De Vakhrey (special) aaye Hon?) and instructs them that the Guru’s households should be treated at par. One can infer that probably Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Deva maintained separate kitchens. In nine Hukam-Namahs, Mata Sundari and in seven Hukam-Namahs, Mata Sahib Deva, either instructs the Sangats, either to send the money or acknowledge the receipt of the same. One does not infer that the number or the language of the Hukam-Namahs indicate the proportionate power exercised by them, but

1 Gurbilas Padshani, Chhevin, p 353
2 Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin, ibid, p555-556: Tawarikh-i-Guru Khalsa, Gyan Singh Ji Gyani, ed K S Raju, pp. 602-603
3 Ganda Singh, Hukam Namah Number 74, p. 209
certainly it indicates a power tussle over their respective share in the resources ensuing between them.

In Var 10, Pauri 1, Bhai Gurdas too captures the emotional state of Child Dhruv and the sense of rivalry and jealousies prevalent among the co-wives. When he writes: ‘Boy Dhruv came smiling to his house (palace) and his father full of love put him into his lap. Seeing this, the step mother got angry and catching hold of his arm, pushed him out of lap of the father (the King). Tearful, with fear, he asked his mother whether she was a queen or a maid servant.’

Exogamous Marriages: Impact on Women

As noted in the context of marriage, there is a well observed tradition among the people of Punjab of marrying off their daughters into families who live sufficiently far away. This custom had significant implications for women in their routine lives. The women, through this custom were effectively restricted from keeping day-to-day contact with their natal families. As evident in the contemporary literature, among the Jats and the lower castes the sacramental aspect of marriage was only limited to an extent of retaining and securing their wives by all means. In some cases wives were not allowed to visit their parental homes (peke). Daughters were seldom married to men living in their parents villages, although, there are few exception like Bibi Bhani and Bibi Dani, daughters of Guru Amar Das not only stayed in the same village but in fact stayed with their parents family only. However, the structure of this type of patriarchal family must have made it more difficult for women to resist maltreatments, since they are suddenly transferred to a completely strange environment and are expected to please a family of strangers who, the brides are told, will gradually “accept” them if they persevere in their efforts to please. This transfer is viewed in folklore and folk songs as the beginning of a new life for women.

1 Bhai Gurdas Vaaran, Tr Bhai Jodh Singh, Var 10, Pauri1, p. 248
2 Waris Shah, Hir, p. 77
We must mention the fact that many folk songs bear witness to the anguish experienced by women in leaving their natal families on marriage. This anguish is expressive of the fact that the effective needs of a woman are not fulfilled in her conjugal family. Although, one hears many kinds of voices in the folk songs sung by women, certainly a large number of them express the anguish of the daughter who has to leave her childhood and the pathos of the father destined to his daughter. Yet, many others give poetic descriptions of the mystery of the new relationship and make poetic allusions to the bride who symbolizes ecstatic union. It is beyond doubt, that the position of a new bride in her conjugal family is indeed a difficult one.

In Sikhiya, a kind of moral teachings given to the newly wed at the time of departing daughter from her natal family, also great emphasis was laid on that “you must treat your mother-in-law as mother; devars (younger brother of the husband) as your brothers and nands (sisters of the husband) as your own sisters. Serving the needs of each member of the family is the ultimate goal of your life. This kind of displacement went to the extent that in Punjab, even the first name of the woman is still changed by her in-laws to complete the idea of “newness”. Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin informs that Mata jee of Hargobind renamed his second wife as “Nanki”. A daughter is commonly thought of in terms of paraya dhan (alien wealth), who is only a temporary guest in her natal home and who really belongs in her husbands house, where, in reality, very often she remained like an outsider to the family for most of her life. She had to constantly and continuously strive hard to carve out a niche for herself in the “new family”. The reality that the bride has to win over the love at her in-laws by her virtues and by serving them is acknowledged by Bhai Gurdas, when he says that unmarried daughter is loved by everyone in parental house and enjoys respect in the in-laws’ house because of virtues and good deeds.

"Naihar Kuar(i) Kanniia Ladili Kai Maniat, Biaha Sasurar Jae Gunan Kai Maniat." 2

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1 Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevin, op cit, p. 345  
Hereafter referred to as K.S.;
In his 119th Kavit, Bhai Gurdas asserts same sentiments when he briefly recaptures all the traits of “good wife”, worthy of being called a “Kulwadhu” sati.

“Naihar Kutab Taj(i) Biahe Sasurar Jae, Gunan Kau Kuta-badhu Biraad Kahavai.

Puran Patibrat(i) Au Gur Jan Seva Bhae, Grib Mai Gribesur(i) Sujas(u) Pragtavai.

Ant Kal(i) Jae Pria Sang(i) Sab-gamani Bue, Lok Parlok Bikhai Uch Pad Pavai.

Gurmukh(i) Marag(i) Bhai Bhae Nirbab(u) Karai, Dhann Gursikh ad(i) ant(i) Thaibravai”

Meaning Just as a girl leaves her parents house after getting married and earns a respectable name for herself and her husband’s family by virtue of her good traits;

Earns the honorable title of all in all and revered one, by devotedly serving her elders and remaining loyal and faithful to her partner;

Departs from this world as honorable companion of her husband from the world and earns name for herself here and in the world thereafter.

The general social expectation from a newly wedded daughter-in-law is echoed in the Kabit Swayye of Bhai Gurdas as well. It is to be noted here that same sentiments and emotional gestures form the thrust of the Sikhiya by the parents.

Jaise kula Badhu Budhivant(i) Sasurar Bikhai, Savdhan Chetan Rabai Achar Char Kai.

Sasur Devar Jeth Sakal Ki Seva Karai, Khan Pan Gian Jan(i) Pat(i) Parvar Kai.²

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¹ K.S., 119, p. 147
² K.S., 395, p. 423
Just as an intelligent daughter-in-law of a good family deals with everybody attentively, consciously and decently in in-laws house;

Realizing that this is her husband's family, takes care of food and all other needs of her father-in-law, brother-in-law and other members of the family diligently and respectfully;

She talks with all elders of the family respectfully, politely and abashedly.

*Laja-kul Ankas(u) Au Gur-jan Sil Dil,*

*Kula-Badhu Brat(i) kai patibrat kahavaii,* ¹

Because of the good of the family honour, displaying calm and tranquil behaviour before the elders of the house and following the right ethos expected of a married woman, a daughter-in-law of a good family is called faithful and virtuous.

From the centrality of this transfer in a woman's life springs the whole culture of adjusting to her husband's family. Even today, women are discouraged from seeking the intervention of their parental families when they are maltreated in the in-laws families. The knowledge that her parents might be available for help might deter maltreatment and thus lead to a breakdown of the marriage. Even, at present in such a case the woman could be sent back to her parents but this has always been considered such a disaster and disgrace that she was always pressed upon to keep on “adjusting”. This formula of adjustment entailed a package of “adjustment” only from the side of a woman without minimal reciprocity from any of the relations at in-laws. The parting message to a daughter at the time of her marriage is meant to be literally adhered to “Daughter today we are sending your *doli* from this house to your in-laws house. May only your *arthi* (dead body) come out of that house!”

Through the reading of the primary sources the general impression that one formulates is that the strict restrictions on women's freedom of movement and

¹ K.S., 164, p. 192
on their forming independent associations had become integral features of the patriarchal household in the then Punjab. As Bhai Gurdas put it:

"Sujan Kutanh Grih(i) Gaun Karai Patibrata, An Dev Sathan Jaise Jal Bin(u) Min Hai".¹

Meaning that "A faithful wife live amongst the close relatives of her house and goes nowhere else."

Although the above quotation underlines this kind of social behaviour of faithful wife yet one must note here that the basic goal of women life in the then perception was to serve the "lord" i.e., (husband) and be faithful to him in all circumstances. We get similar corroborative statements else where as well such as ‘Andar baithi lakh di; bahar nikli Kakh di’.

For a high caste woman to step outside the confines of the household compound for any purpose not approved by the head of the family amounted to endanger whatever tenuous status and security she was able to accrue. As noted earlier, these restrictions were almost non-existent for the women belonging to peasant, artisan and service class. The participation of women in the labour process of agricultural and artisanal production was an accepted norm. Female labour is recognized as a wage earner, as someone who contributes to the upkeep of the family by her earnings. These women earn a vital portion of the family income.

Interestingly, since these restrictions are made a mark of high social status and respectability, women themselves are made to feel that they have a stake in secluding themselves from the outside world as far as possible. Many forms of segregation – veiling the face, not going out alone, not moving freely in those sections of the house considered the terrain of men, and not speaking in front of men or elders was the normal practice among both the high caste Hindus and Muslims alike. All these customs, in sum, isolated the woman and kept her completely dependent on men for information and access to the outside world. Such exclusion from community in present day scenario ensures a woman’s isolation from and ignorance of possible sources of

¹ Bhai Gurdas, Kabit Swayye, tr Shamsher Singh Puri, K.S. 449, p. 477
support in her struggle to make a viable, less subordinate place for herself in her husband's family and village. While, for men, marriage means extended alliance derived from alliance between male members of the immediate and extended kin group. In contrast, for women it means losing whatever little foothold they had in the natal family. The pressures to loosen ties with the parental house have the effect of denying these women crucial emotional and other support in their day-to-day lives and make them much more vulnerable.

**Widow* Remarriage or Patriarchal Guardianship**

"Widowhood was read in Brahmanical traditions derived from the smrities pre-destined, Karmic product of transgression in past lives, which justified the customary treatment of the widow and helped to create hierarchy of dependence within the family. Widowhood was both a punishable crime and atonement through personal austerity, piety or domestic drudgery".

Caste system, guiding the social relations and ritual purity among the Hindus, pronounced marriage as the sacrament and the "twice born" zealously guarded it. This, in practice, translated into that women in these castes could be married only once in a life time, neither abandonment nor the death of the husband dissolved the marriage and widows were subjected to enforced widow hood and were expected to observe ascetic practices. A widow was debarred from the use of cosmetics to beautify herself.

*Na Sugandh Lagayi, Na Daahi Banai.*
*Naa Phoolan Haar Su Payi Galanoo.*

The general expectation that a widow should be leading a life of an acetic becomes apparent from Udassi Bodh of Sant Rein also. Widows, thus, entered a state of social death. Compulsory Widowhood was perceived as a marker of elevated status by the high caste. Denzil Ibbetson, although for a much later period, made a sharp social observation, serving as Officiating Director of Public Instruction in Punjab in the Colonial period "it is

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1 Udassi Bodh. F 113 B Sant Rein, Udassi Bodh. Also see in Dr. Balvinder Jeet, "Social Evils During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh A Contemporary Prespective " Punjab History Conference, 37th session Mar18-20 2005.
Ibn Battuta clearly states that the widows who did not burn herself "dresses in coarse garments and lives with her own people in misery, despised for her lack of fidelity".

The only clear reference we get of widow remarriage taking place in the Sikh Gurus' families is that of Tara Bai, widow of Sahibzada Ajit Singh, at the initiative of Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh, father of Ajit Singh viewing the mourning of Mata Sundri and Tara Bai, adopted a young Sikh from the people present at the sangat at that point of time and got him married to Tara Bai with the consent of Mata Sundri. The silence on the question of widow remarriage in all the contemporary sources is probably an indication of non-existence or rarity at large. The response to widow-remarriage must have been corollary to the general social attitude of female fidelity and chastity. Alberuni states that becoming sati was considered preferable because the widow otherwise is "ill-treated as long as lives". The question then is that then how do we come across its significant prevalence in the nineteenth century Haryana which formed a significant component of then Punjab. The general social attitude towards widow remarriage is further corroborated by Ganesh Das that no respectable Khatri could ever marry a widow or even a divorced woman, and still remain respectable. But is it not perplexing that if it was so inexistent then why these reactionary statements?

In the later period, lower down the caste system, women could be forced to re-marry and were thus required to observe enforced co-habitation, especially during the years when they were capable of reproduction. The agrarian needs also sanctified the widow remarriage, thus, it was a feature which the agriculturist castes shared with the lower castes.

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1 Papers relating to infant marriage and enforced widowhood in India. Home- Public 35, October 1886 (OIOC)
2 Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa, p. 191
4 Alberuni's India p. 155
5 Ganesh Das, Char Bagh-i-Punjab p. 292. see also V. Upadhyay, 'Socio-Religious Conditions of North India, p. 152
For a better reconceptualization of the system of Karewa Prem Chawdhry's "Customs in a Peasant Economy: Women in Colonial Haryana" is invaluable. Here it is said that Jats led the practice of Karewa and other agriculturist castes (except the Rajputs) followed suit. Interestingly among the Brahmins, the reports indicate that Karewa was being followed (Karnal gazetter). Even in a far-flung district Muzaffargarh, the Brahmins had declared their adherence to the Jat custom. Rattingen¹, states that the settlement officer of this district pointed out that there was scarcely a Brahmin there who had even the slightest knowledge of Hindu law books. The Brahmins of this province, who were not a priestly class but were mostly landowners, consequently followed the dominant social custom of this region in preference to the Sanskrit model. Among other Hindu castes the "low grade Khatris" also followed this practice but others like the Banias and the Kayasthas did not do so and among the Muslims nor did the Sayyids.²

The question of widow remarriage is closely linked to the general perception of "Istri Swabhav" and the need to control the sexuality of women. The other aspect which is closely interlinked is the property rights of the widow. If property rights of the widow are acknowledged, then to avoid the circumstantial need to divide the agricultural land, a form of widow remarriage is evolved. Or, in other words, in the name of widow remarriage and female guardianship, patriarchy exercised its power yet in another form. This was by the custom of "Karewa", or "Chadaar dalna" or "Chadar andazi". It was primarily exercised among the Jats who married their deceased brother's widow to uphold the name of the family. In "Karewa", the ceremony was not accompanied by any religious ritual. "Karewa", a white sheet coloured at the corners, was thrown over the man over the widow's head signifying his acceptance of her as his wife. There could be certain variations.³ In some regions, for instance, it could be placing churies (glass bangles), a popular

¹ Rattingen, A Digest of Civil Law, 13th edn. Revised by Om Prakash Aggarwal, 1st ed., Lahore, 1880, p. XVII
² Census of India, Punjab and Delhi, 1911, Vol. 17 pt 1 p. 219; Karnal District Gazetteer, 1976, p. 85
symbol of being a “suhagin”, on the widow’s wrist in full assembly and sometimes even a gold nath (nose ring) in the nose and a red sheet over her head with a rupee tied in one of the corners. This could be followed by the distribution of Gur (Jaggery) or sweets. This ceremony was not accompanied by any religious ceremonies and rituals. It fitted well with the religious instruction that no women could be customarily married twice, that is, could go through the custom of biah (religious wedding). The marriage through “Karewa” had a social acceptance and the children of such marriages were regarded as legal heirs. After “Karewa” the widow merely resumed her jewels and coloured cloths which she had abandoned after her husband’s death. So much so, that sometimes, mere co-habitation was considered sufficient to legitimize the relationship and it conferred all the rights of the valid marriage. However, the patriarchal social psychology reiterated itself for instance co-habitation was socially accepted as a remarriage, if it took place, in the man’s house, in contrast; any visits to the women were considered adulterous.

The practice of widow re-marriage among the Jats, followed by other agricultural castes, should be understood as closely linked up with the idea that the landed property should remain with in the family and women’s productive and reproductive potential was not allowed to go waste, especially when there were adverse female/male sex ratio. In other words, the prevalence of “Karewa” among the land owning classes became popular when the land became a “prized” possession. It emanated out of the need for retaining landed property with in the family. The main reason for making the marriage arrangements inside the family was to transfer the control of the deceased husband’s land from the widow to his brother or to a patrilineal family member, because if a widow remarried, she lost all her rights to property even if she married her deceased husband’s brother. Remarriage, therefore, deprived her even of the limited right to the land, which she came to possess after her husband’s death. This practice successfully managed to pass on the property rights to her husband’s male line.

With in the framework of the “Karewa” too, the widow’s right as to whom she could marry was not only severely restricted, it could only be settled by her late husband’s family. And although the widow could not be compelled to remarry, she was not free to marry without their consent. So complete was the
control over woman and on the question of her re-marriage that it was freely admitted that the widow was often practically forced and made to yield to their wishes. The basic intention behind the system of widow re-marriage, in fact, poses a big question mark as to what an extent this system was beneficial for the widows and whether it was really in the spirit of a social reform. Although, much later, a British barrister at Law, F Cunningham, who compiled draft Gazetteer of Rohtak District between 1870-74 made an apt social observation when he wrote, :“Karewa” under these conditions may be called re-marriage with reference to reasons affecting the women; but such unions often take place for causes which have regard to men only.’

When we try to construct a picture from the available sources of the Muslim widows, it emerges to be pretty better than their Hindu sisters. Unlike Hindus, a Muslim widow was allowed to attend and enjoy the festivities of the betrothal, Nikaah and birth ceremonies. The only ban on her, after her husband’s death, was to observe strictly the period of “Iddat” which was of four months and ten days. During this period, she had to give up all physical decorations and makeup and not attire herself in new, gaudy and silk garments. She was forbidden to wear any type of ornaments made of flowers or metals. The use of perfume, antimony (surma) and “missi” were also not allowed. During the period of “Iddat”, she could not use scented oil for her hair and was forbidden to comb it smoothly. She had to be secluded in the house and was not permitted to move about except under unavoidable circumstances, that too, during the day and covering herself with the veil.

In case of pregnancy, she had to follow the Islamic rules of Iddat only up to the birth of the child. Generally, the Muslim widow strictly observed these rules. In her “Iddat” she was regarded more respectfully and the people had more sympathetic attitude.

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1 Cited in Rohtak District Gazetteer, 1883-84, Calcutta, N.D., p51
2 Al Mishkat, Maulana Abu Mohammad Ibrahim Madfuzah, Urdu translation, Vol III, 188, p. 53. For a detailed discussion see Muslim Women in Medieval India, Zinat Kesar, Janaki Prakashan, Delhi: 1992, p.300-301
3 ibid, Mishkat, Vol III, 189, p 53
4 Behishti-Zewar, Urdu bazaar Delhi. Also English translation Mohammad Masroor Khan, Delhi: 1979, vol. IV, p34
5 The Holy Quran, Surrah, IXV 4, 11, 234
After the completion of period of “iddat” a widow was free to re-marry if she so desired. Mostly all foreign travelers of the period (1526-1707AD) recorded the system of re-marriage prevalent among the Muslims, and it was not looked down upon till the reign of Aurangzeb. However, the attitude of the Muslim society too underwent a change in the acceptability of the widow remarriage and started viewing it as an undesirable social practice. (During the reign of Mohammad Shah (1719-1748 AD), widow re-marriage was considered undesirable especially among higher and respectable families).¹ In fact, this changing social attitude was in contradiction to the Islamic faith which considered widow re-marriage as desirable as fresh marriage. It is worth to note in this context that all the wives of Prophet Mohammad, except the youngest Aishah, were previously wedded. Due to religious sanctions and thus the wider social acceptability, widow re-marriage was widely practiced by the rich and the poor alike.

Among the Muslims too, we find a form of widow re-marriage equivalent to “Karewa” or “Chadar Dalena”. The widow was married to the younger brother of the deceased and the Muslim traced the origins of this practice to a Turkish custom. Manucci also refers to this custom thus, “Since the law thus directed that the wives of the dead elder brother belonged to living younger brother.”²

It must also be highlighted here that in the Muslim society the women also had some say whether she wanted to go in for a re-marriage or prefer to live in solitude with the memories of the deceased husband. Commendably, such widows did not have to bear social ostracism or even criticism; they were in fact highly respected not only in the family but in the society too. However, analyzing the then social milieu this seems to be the behavioral norm among the very high status families- like royal families. Otherwise, the reality for a common Muslim widow would not have been much different from her Hindu sisters where the social pressure and the acceptability would have been the main guiding force of her widowed life and she must have bowed down to the

² Manucci Niccolao Venetian (1653-1708AD) Storia Do Mogor in four volumes, translated into English by William Irvine, Indian Text Series, Published for the Govt. of India, London: 1907-08, also reprinted, Calcutta 1965 Vol I, trans, p. 361
wishes of her family (read her deceased husband's family). Within the family too the opinions of the male members would have been most formidable.

However, the larger picture that emerges from the Muslim society is that the position of the Muslim widow was better than her Hindu counterparts, at least in theory. A Muslim widow could enjoy property rights and had a share in the property of her late husband, however, small.¹ After the observation of "idaat", the Muslim widow was not forbidden to put on jewels and fine dresses and shoes. A Muslim widow was not deprived of social privileges and her appearance on festive occasions was not considered inauspicious as among the Hindus. A Hindu widow was constantly reminded of her misfortune when she was not allowed to participate in birth, marriage or any other auspicious ceremony. She was made stranger in her own family as she could not be present even when a child was born to her own son or during the "namkarana" (naming of the child). Although, it must have been an emotional soother for Muslim women that she was not debarred from social festivities, yet, in general, they were either busy in fulfilling the needs of the family or led a life of solitude and prayer.² Widows in Muslim society generally dressed themselves in white garments.³

¹ If she had a child or son's child, her right over this property was 1/8th, One eighth but if she was childless then 1/4th, One Fourth of the property according to Islamic rule, as interpreted from "The Holy Quran, Chapter IV, Surah 4, Verse 12.
² H.G Keene, History of Hindustan, p182. Also Ms. Meer Hassan Ali, Observations, p. 46
³ Mischeep's Man English Book, trans in Urdu by Illiyas Maulana, Sayyeed Mohammad, 1904, p 46.