CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

History of sexuality, as every other history, reflects partial truths and silences others. Within this domain, dominant voices, cultural injunctions and prevalent traditions overshadows the unacknowledged experiences of women. In deeply engaging with any phenomenon, we uncover those truths, that otherwise are likely to be hidden from common knowledge and, hence, not given acknowledgement or relevant space. Within the larger realm of social-psychological and political reality, does the ‘story’ of sexuality, too, not speak of a similar marginalization? Is sexuality only conceived of as a moment of heterosexual genitalized experience? If not, then how did we banish from our consciousness its wider realms? Standing at the threshold of next century, do we not need to recover our consciousness around this aspect of our lives, so intimate and intense and one that each of us remains deeply affected by?

This study attempts to break the silence around women’s sense of self. It tries to bring into focus those realities living in the midst of which tribal women experience their lives. Often enclosed by multiple stresses and economic difficulties, they have but little space for the expression of their selfhood. Negotiating difficult situations, Kinnauri tribal women, constantly struggle to maintain a sense of inner balance. Frequently, in so adjusting, they pay a heavy inner cost of devaluation. Despite difficulties in their cultural space, they do demonstrate a sense of unity with nature and their ecology. Preferring woman to woman bonding, over all other forms of relationships; the uneducated Kinnauri women still speak to us of an experiential truth, which has not yet been totally ‘invaded’ by the
dictates of modern patriarchy. Marking a shift in their lives, is a movement along with education, towards a preference for the heterosexual mode of relatedness. Thus situated, education comes to reflect a critical moment, in the order of their lives, symbolizing change and transition.

While looking at the problems and relevance of education of indigenous women, this work explores its possible implications. At the deepest level, it leaves us with the question: does education, not come to represent an inner self-estrangement of the ‘feminine’ cultural self? Capturing their lives, as dynamically lived, the present study situates itself in the transactional moment. Its location is neither in their ‘matrifocal’ past nor in their ‘patriarchal’ future. Indeed, it is paradoxically grounded in a moment of cultural flux.

The theoretical understanding which guide this work primarily, centre around a wider conceptualization of sexuality. It locates its historical reduction with the advent of patriarchy, which coincided with the origin of the idea of private property. Along with the domestication of animals, came into being the concept of hoarding and its institutionalized reflections were now to invade our sensibilities, through the newly formed familial structures. Sexuality, henceforth, represented male interests, male pleasures and became a major tool for propagating male dominance. As its institutionalization developed, we reduced it to its contemporary narrow paradigm; sanctioned through marital bonding, the ethos of monogamy (especially for women) sanctified it only as a genitalized heterosexual union.
Retaining a feminist perspective, the present study examines the subsequent consequences of patriarchy. It understands several psychological disturbances, such as depression, anorexia nervosa and obesity, largely due to women’s unsuccessful attempts to adjust their self/body image to conform to the approved male standards. In so viewing the relationship between the outer and the inner, a possibility remains open that permits us to see how social systems, once internalized, come to constitute the contours of our identities and inner selves.

Further, seen to a relational theoretical framework, in the present endeavour, women’s selves are understood as confirmed and authenticated via a connectedness and togetherness that comes to them within the folds of relational networks. This work document the loss of woman to woman bonding that inevitably comes as patriarchal forms encroach upon the matrifocal remnants in tribal cultures.

The choice of the subject reflects an attempt to bring into the purview of contemporary history, just those voices, which are likely to be lost under the influence of the dominant power. Do tribal women’s lives have something to add to our experiential dimensions, something we have lost during the course of our history? In knowing them can we move a little closer to knowing ourselves more holistically? Can their patterns of relatedness help us to discover as women, a greater sense of bonding with each other? Retaining, in their internal constructs, a wider consciousness of sexuality (even if it is not lived out in moments of actualization), do they not help us to value forms such as sisterhood and woman love a little more and free them from the bondage of psychopathology? What is the meaning of education in their lives? How effective is the educational
system? How does it affect the perception of tribal woman’s sexuality; her notion of herself, her body and her personality?

This study is an exploration of several of these questions operating in the lives of Kinnauri tribal women, as seen through their projections, be it in their drawings (DAP, DAC), stories (TAT) or preferences in sexual iconography.

THE TRIBAL WOMEN OF INDIA

The Tribal woman, Elwin (1958) believes is exactly the same as any other woman, with the same passions, loves and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults, and the same duties. In practice, however, the tribal woman enjoys comparatively more freedom and is devoid of many constraints imposed on women in non-tribal societies (Hodson, 1975 and Mann, 1996). Tribes in transition, however, stand somewhere in between, but even here the traditional norms are somewhat liberal to womanhood. The least influenced by formal legislation is the tribal woman. She continues to live in her customary style, with the same position and behavior. On the one hand, though she leads a hard life, the tribal woman enjoys far more freedom than her caste counterpart. She can roam about freely, visit markets or friends, cut jokes with them without reservation and is usually free to select her mate. Some part of her freedom gets restrained in post marital stage, although she has the liberty to divorce and remarry. Within the tribal set up, a divorced woman is not much stigmatized. The bride price is said to be a mark of respect and value for her. She has a firm hand in most of the family
matters. Her social participation is not as aggressively restrained as in the case of caste woman. On the other hand, however, in most patriarchal tribal communities, she cannot customarily speaking become a religious or a political head. She is deprived even of family headships and property inheritance (Mann, op. cit.).

Education of Tribal Women: Issues and Concerns

In thinking of the education of tribal women, the issues concerning us, raises the question what should be the kind and content of education that they are to receive? Further in thinking of their education, several other questions come to mind. Even if a tribal woman is educated, what does she do? How does it affect her life; her self, her identity and her relational networks? Does it bring out a change in her ethnic and cultural selfhood? Does it widen the purview of her choices? Does it significantly affect a change in her cultural and personal identity? Does being educated make her less burdened and more freer, or on the contrary do her life stresses increase as she becomes more internally aware of her inner self and the consequent needs which awareness bring with itself? How does a tribal women, after receiving education retain linkages and connections with her own past.

In viewing education as a symbol of transition, this work will attempt to answer these and several other questions. This will be done after having engaged with the tribal woman’s reality, as dynamically being affected by the impact of education in her life.
KINNAUR: A DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

Kinnaur is considerably secluded and rugged area nearly 200 kms away from Shimla, in the western region of Himachal Pradesh. It is located in the deep north western Himalayan range. The altitude of the district is between 2,000 metres, and 4,500 metres.

Culture

According to Chib (1984), the Kinnauri are the largest single Schedule Tribe throughout Himachal Pradesh. The total population of Kinnaur (1991-Census) is 70,931: - 38,148 males and 32,783 females.

Hinduism and Buddhism are the religions followed by these people. Buddhism allows women to become zomos (nuns) and stay in Gompa (monastery/nunnery) in order to get salvation. The Kinnauri Buddhist women have a prominent role to play in their faith. They can command an equal religious status with the male monks in the role of zomos, but cannot ordain others or head nunneries. In contrast, women following the dominant Hindu culture, rarely assume the role of a 'pujarin' in order to serve their deity, though women participate in organizing rituals and keep fasts to a great extent.

Within the Kinnauri culture (Mann, op. cit.), frequently fairs and festivals are celebrated. They are connected to their social and economic life and are the only means to reduce the drudgery of the hard toilsome people of this isolated district.
Economy

The Kinnauri economy is based mainly on agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and to some extent trade. Apart from this, the Kinnaurs are proud of their age old traditions of spinning, weaving, drugget-making, dye-making, woodwork, metallic work and carpentry.

Family System

Society in Kinnaur is patrilineal with patrilocal residence. Both succession and inheritance of property occur in the male line.

Role of Women

The women have a prominent role in most of the economic ventures followed by Kinnaurese. Apart from ploughing, which is a taboo for Kinnauri women as for most of their other Indian counterparts; right from clearing of fields to storing grain, they share all the hard and tedious toil with their men folk. Their activities involve, amongst others, breaking stones, preparing small irrigation canals called ‘khuls,’ sowing seeds, clearing weeds and alertly attending to the distribution of water through the ‘khuls,’ even during the night. Helping in horticulture by looking after the fruit trees as well as plucking and packing the fruits, they also take care of the livestock. The household work, care of the children; old and infirm people, rest entirely on the Kinnauri women’s shoulders. They often risk their life by fetching water, fuel and fodder from long distances on treacherous paths.

Yet the question remains, does all her contribution and participation in the economic life of her family and community bring her credit or even
acknowledgement. Most of it is taken for granted, as part of her duties as a female member of her household. How does she negotiate this space of ‘economic dependence,’ in spite of her long hours of hard labour? What does it do to her self-image?

POLYANDRY

The earliest evidence of polyandry was found among the Sumerians of Mesopotamia in 2,900 B.C. During the classical times in Athens, particularly at Sparta, ‘several brothers often had one wife whom they shared in common.’ (Prince Peter, 1963: 59). Polyandry was also found to exist among the White Huns of Central Asia during fourth century A.D. In pre-Islamic times, polyandry prevailed in Arabia (Prince Peter, op. cit.: 55-61).

According to Raha (1991), in India it is found to exist in the North and North West India (among Bodh or Bhat of Ladakh, Thakkar and Meg of Kashmir, Lahaul and Spiti valleys in Himachal Pradesh, besides the trans-Giri areas of Sirmaur, Jaunsar and Bawar in U.P.), South India (Todas of Nilgiris and Nayars of Kerala), North East India (Lepcha and Bhotia of Sikkim, Gallongs and Ramos of Arunachal Pradesh).

In India, polyandry had varied reasons for its origin and development. But at the beginning, as Prince Peter has rightly suggested, it developed in certain human societies which found themselves in a midst of a very difficult and overwhelming natural environment; imposed upon them strenuous and diverse economic and social organization. This led the people to develop great solidarity, feelings of interdependence and of love.
Finally, fraternal polyandry became the rule in these societies (op. cit.: 568). Gradually other reasons also helped developing polyandry. But the hypothesis that polyandry is a latent male homosexual and male-incestuous form of marital institution, correlated with excessive economic and social pressure on the nuclear family of peoples living in difficult natural or social environment (Prince Peter, op. cit.: 569) cannot be tenable.

In Kinnaur fraternal polyandry was a social norm in the past and still is in practice (Raha and Mahato, 1985: 172-173; Raha, 1987: 93; Raha and Coomar, 1987: 79-80; and Raha and Coomar, 1988: 151-152). Here in most of the cases (92.05%) the brothers have a single common wife, while in only 6.82% cases they have married two wives in common. Rarely they indulge in marrying more than two wives. (Raha and Coomar, op. cit.: 151). Though among them, the eldest son goes to the house of the bride to marry her, but actually the rest of the brother become her husband through a ritual called the ‘*turban-tying*’ ceremony. Under this ceremony the bridegrooms sit in a row and the bride before them. The maternal uncle (*Bhishtu*) of the bride-grooms, then with a piece of cloth makes a *pagri* (turban) on the head of all the brothers, indicating that the girl is married to all the brothers (Raha and Mahato, op. cit.; 252-253; Raha and Coomar, op. cit.: 151). With the improvement of their economy a new system of polyandry called ‘*Joridar*’, which restricts the number of husbands from many to two, has been started. That means only two brothers can marry a common wife (Chandra, 1987: 141,151). In Kinnaur, the eldest brother is recognized as the social father of all children, born in a polyandrous union.
All the brothers have equal responsibility for the upbringing and the maintenance of the children (Raha and Coomar, op. cit.: 158).

**BUDDHIST NUNS FOLLOWING THE MAHAYANA TRADITION OF BUDDHISM**

**Historical Background**

*Buddhism* reached Tibet in the seventh century during the reign of King Songsten Gampo. The first monasteries for monks were founded in the eighth century under the rule of King Trisong Deutsen. The nunneries were founded later, beginning in the eleventh century. The first nunnery is supposed to have been established in Phenpo, to the north of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Thereafter, *Buddhism* spread widely in the neighbouring Asian countries. In India, there are approximately 839 nuns following the Tibetan tradition. There are about 250 in Ladakh, 100 in Zanskar, 103 in Lahaul and Spiti and 106 in Kinnaur. There are 138 in Dharamshala area, including Trilokpur, 62 in Rewalsar and Pangnang in the Kulu area, 135 in Darjeeling, and 45 in Mundgod (Dechen, 1989).

Traditionally, Tibetan monks have had ample opportunity for education but opportunities for nuns to receive religious education have remained very limited. The principal emphasis in the nuns' training is the memorization of prayers. Nuns in majority know how to read the scriptures but are unable to write. This indicates that the main concentration of their *Dharma* practice is chanting and meditation (Dechen, op. cit.).
Organized systems of religious instructions are lacking for the nuns. Whatever learning occurs is largely private, further this individual responsibility is handicapped by dearth of facilities and qualified female instructors. Unless structured systems of religious education are implemented soon, Buddhist nuns in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and some other countries will remain disadvantaged for several generations. Though they may well progress spiritually despite learning handicaps, they will not be able to take their rightful places in the religious hierarchy as teachers, administrators, role models and perpetuators of the Dharma. Lacking a solid educational foundation themselves, they will have no footing from which to make a lasting contribution in the spread of Buddhist culture just at the very time when women’s participation could have such a far-reaching and profound impact. Many nuns are quite content to chant prayers without really understanding their meaning. Preconceptions have grown up that women are less qualified for spiritual mastery and should rest content with basic devotional exercise (Tsomo, 1989).

Tibetan Buddhist culture also originated principally from India, through a separate development. Though the Bhikshu Sangha was established in Tibet in the middle of the eight century under royal patronage, yet a corresponding Bhiksuni lineage was never transmitted due to the difficulties and danger of travel. The nuns of Tibet and other Himalayan region following the tradition receive sramanerika ordination from Bhikshus. They dress in maroon robes, with a yellow outer robe worn for ceremonies (Tsomo, op. cit.).
Zomos: Kinnauri Buddhist Nuns

The Kinnauri zomo implying a ‘reverend woman,’ is a respectful term for a nun following the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist tradition, ordained only to the Rab-jum-ma order. The novice or Upasika who can be as young as 13-14 years, must keep five precepts given by her Guru; which include abstinence from killing any creature, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and intoxicants. An Upasika’s status is at par with a Buddhist lay woman who too must follow these precepts. An Upasika can either stay in her paternal home or her family. She is provided with land/house for sustenance, where there is no nunnery. This makes her economically independent and she can spend more time in studying Buddhist scriptures (in Bhoti language). In Kinnaur, there are no infra structural facilities available which provide religious training in an organized manner, although there are some schools for Lamas (monks). The highest order (Bhiksuni) too is not established. An Upasika is also at liberty to marry. She has a shaven head and usually wears a maroon kurta pyjama. In the Rab-jum-ma order a zomo must adhere to celibacy. Most of her time is spent in acquiring religious wisdom. A Rab-jum-ma has to keep other percepts (besides those five percepts). She wears an ankle length maroon dress known as ‘Cheever’. A Kinnauri Buddhist woman can be directly ordained to the Rab-jum-ma order. Sometimes an Upasika will remain at this level for a lifetime, in case she has to self sustain herself and does not have the family support system, who can take up her complete responsibility. Thus an Upasika may feel constrained since she cannot exercise her choice and be ordained to the Rab-jum-ma order.
The zomos are called upon by the village folk to chant/recite the religious scriptures for the well being of their families. A period of retreat known as 'Chamas,' must be performed by them, which can last from a few days, weeks, months to years. During this period there is no contact with the outside world; the time is spent in contemplative meditation, chanting of prayers and religious exercises. A woman caretaker looks after the daily needs of the zomos during 'Chamas'.

The zomos actively participate in festivals held quite often. For instance on a full moon night 'Chepa-Chonga,' special prayers are held in the Gompas. On the tenth day after Amavasya (dark night, when there is no moon) a festival called 'Chechu' is celebrated. Torma and Tsogs (mainly made out of cheese, barley, jaggery, dry, fruits etc.) are prepared as offerings. The Lamas (monks) to drive away the evil spirits and to promote a healthy atmosphere in the village perform a festival called 'Tona'. All through the festivals, the zomos serve meals to the Lamas. Few women from the village are given the responsibility of helping the zomos in preparing meals, collecting wood from the forest and other chores like washing utensils and cleaning up the rooms of the Gompas.

Hence, zomos form an integral part of the Kinnauri culture. They are accorded respect and a high social status. No stigma is attached to the institution of Zomohood. There is a folk song giving reason for women opting for religious and spiritual pursuits in life. It says that the first three years are the toughest for a zomo, and the years that follow after are comfortable. In the institution of marriage, the first three years are highly pleasurable, and rest steeped in struggle and unhappiness. Zomos strongly believe in the Karma theory and transmigration of soul. Thus, the
institution of Zomohood provides women with an alternative avenue to spend their lives in a more constructive and fulfilling manner.

Some viewpoints put forth by writers need to be questioned. According to Bhaumik (1991), the most adverse effect of the polyandrous arrangement is that a number of the female population is left unmarried. They often take refuge in the monastic convents, becoming nuns. Another argument put forth by (Mann, op. cit.), who sees a possible connection between polyandry and Buddhism as a means of solving a great social problem of tackling young surplus women in Kinnauri tribal society.

According to these writers, it implies that all the unmarried, single women are a burden or a ‘social problem’ on their families. Whereas, in actuality, the single, even married daughter or unwed mothers are not stigmatized but have many options. They may stay on in their father’s households, earning their keep by working in the fields/homes/grazing their livestock on high altitude meadows. In reality several women opt for Zomohood, as it enables them to pursue their spiritual yearnings. A number of issues concerning the lives of zomos, single and polyandrous women were studied during the course of this work.

PRESENT STUDY

In this in-depth study, the Kinnauri women of Himachal Pradesh tribal belt were studied through participant observer method, along with projective tests. The use of these tests was in accordance with their cultural heritage of art, drawing and narrative story telling. They were tapped by the help of Draw a Person (woman) test and the TAT respectively. As an
exploratory method, an iconography kit comprising of photographs of Indian erotic sculptures and *Kamasutra* miniatures, were used to comprehend female sexuality. Various dimensions of sexuality were explored, including Auto-Eroticism (self directed sexuality, where the subject of inquiry is one's own body), *Sakhi-Bhav* (implying friend/sister/lover’s emotions) and Heterosexuality (i.e. man-woman relationships). In the course of this study, this innovative tool was standardized. The subjects were, in addition, asked to Draw a couple (DAC). This task was undertaken to obtain the projective images that depicted the concept of a *Jodi* (couple).

With the help of these tools, the effect of education, marital status, and within the marital status, the effect of education on sexuality, self/body image and personality were studied.

**RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

The area of sexuality, self/body image and personality, as related to education has rarely been explored amongst the tribal culture, especially in the inaccessible Greater Himalayas. Further, few psychological studies have looked closely and in-depth into the lives and psyche of Kinnauri polyandrous women, particularly *zomos* and their perceptions and experiences of their psycho-sexual-social needs and stress. This becomes a critical focus because sexuality, self/body image and personality are crucial for women’s well being. Thus this study has important implications for women’s mental health.
WHY KINNAUR?

Kinnauri tribal life presents us with different possibilities for exploration:

1. Perhaps, the tribal people still have links with the ancient *pre-Aryan*, *pre-Vedic* societies or cultures. In comparison with urban societies, they would reflect different attitudes towards women, marriage and sexuality.

2. Kinnaur is one of the few surviving societies with polyandrous marital arrangements, bordering on extinction.

3. Rarely encountered elsewhere, Kinnaur presents its women with an option to join the *Buddhist* system of Zomohood.

4. This society provides an opportunity to study a group closely in affinity and harmony with nature.