THE WOMEN'S WORLD:
CONSENT AND RESISTANCE
Chapter - 3

The Women's World: Consent and Resistance

The women's world created in the novel Zindaginama will be discussed in the backdrop of the purdah ideology which limits the anthropological universe of the women. It is through the sieve of the norms, values, cultural patterns and taboos of the purdah framework that women are born, grow up, attain maturity, marry, experience motherhood, acquire power, position, prestige and finally come to the end of their journey. The focus on purdah, construction of gendered identity and power relations would help us understand the anthropological and existential predicaments of the women who come to life in the novel. This will also highlight the constant struggle between the anthropological and existential situation of the women. It is this spirit which does not accept the dictates of the rigid institutionalised anthropological positions which enables the women to subvert purdah, express their desires and passions, and seek a place for themselves in the patriarchal world.

3.1 Purdah-Socio-Cultural and Religious Dimensions

To begin with, 'purdah is a complex of norms having three main dimensions (a) those rules which govern the behaviour of married women towards male affines and neighbours, (b) those norms which define the separation of the sexes, (c) those norms which govern women's mobility and visibility outside the home' (Sharma 1980:214). Thus purdah signifies, 'specific traits of veiling and spatial separation and more widely to values about the proper behaviour of women, to the restrictions on their movements outside the household and to requirements for their respectful demeanour within the house' (Mandelbaum 1986:1999). Indeed the term purdah is used, 'throughout the subcontinent to refer to various modes of excluding a woman from the sight of others, whether by confining her within an enclosed space (bounded by a 'curtain' or other physical shield) or by manipulating her clothing' (Vatuk 1982:57). However, 'in a
broader sense the purdah system is related to status, division of labour, interpersonal dependence, social distance and maintenance of moral standards as specified by society' (Papanek 1982:7). In her study of North India Urusula Sharma has linked the observation of purdah, 'to the production process and its control which has both a caste and class dimension' (c.f. Chowdhry 1994:288). Pastner sees the ritual of purdah in terms of the 'ideology of sexual role allocation and the status of women which are directly correlated with the most important features of social organisation including kinship and stratification' (Pastner 1990:257).

Another important link provided by Yalman relates to the 'connections between sexuality, pollution, the purity of caste blood and forms of control over women including seclusion' (c.f. Papanek 1982:21). From a more general comparative, if not evolutionary, perspective some scholars (Goody 1976, Boserup 1970) trace the institution of purdah in terms of, 'economic surplus, the establishment of a privileged non-productive class, which leads to seclusion, concealment, chaperonage, segregation and arranged marriages' (Ram 1992:46). Thus purdah is a special variant of the more general restraints with which women's lives are hedged in everywhere. In the region under study, the practice of purdah is an important part of its cultural configuration. Studies of Eglar (1960), Slocum Akhbar Sahi (1960), Papapenk, (1982), Hershman (1981) Pettigrew (1978), and Chowdhry (1994) show the existence of purdah and its local variations including modern attempts to soften its rigour. While the observation of purdah is 'a symbol of prestige and fashion in Punjab villages' (Papanek 1982:13), in Indian Punjab and Haryana, it is increasingly seen as a sign of backwardness. In her historical study of Haryana, P. Chowdhry regretfully notes how:

non observation of purdah meant a presumption of immorality on the part of a woman and according to the rural male opinion she could, therefore, be turned out of the house... even now a woman who does not observe purdah is called nangi (nude) or besharam (shameless) and even badmash (loose character). The allegation made is 'chati dikhati phirti hai' exposing her bosom (Chowdhry 1994:283).

In terms of the period of the novel, it is important to look into the differences between
Hindu and Muslim purdah practices. As explained clearly by Doranne Jacobson:

for Muslims purdah stresses the unity of the kindred vis-a-vis the outside, since it is observed only before males who are outside the trusted circle of kinsmen. Among Hindus by contrast purdah is related to the respect relations among affines particularly between a woman's natal and conjugal kin and within the joint family (c.f. Papanek 1982:19).

More explicitly between both these purdah practices there is, 'one which deals with the relationship of women with outsiders (Muslim System) and the other which controls women inside the family, and kindred (the Hindu System)' (Vatuk 1992:56). All these factors are in turn being related to 'certain differences between Hindu and Muslim social structure, kinship, and family organisation, value systems etc.' of which the main feature differentiating Hindu and Muslim purdah is the Muslim preference for parallel and cross cousin marriage (Vatuk 1982:56).

In contrast, north Indian Hindus and Sikhs prohibit close kin marriage of all kinds in addition to marriage in one's own descent group and mother's father's descent group (Hershman 1981:175). This means, for the Muslim bride, as her senior male affines are her uncles and cousins under whose care she has grown up, she need not observe purdah from them, but, for her Hindu counterpart, these affines are unrelated strangers from whom she, a junior, has to maintain a hierarchical social distance including sexual avoidance. In the circumstances, the two types of purdah differ significantly in their orientation. The Muslim purdah serves to screen out inappropriate social and sexual contact with the male outsiders, while the Hindu purdah helps to reinforce a respectful social and sexual distance between a married woman and her senior male affines.

Sylvia Vatuk, however, tries to seek a convergence between Hindus and Muslims in terms of a number of central concerns which both the communities share. These relate to (a) protection of women (particularly in the realm of sexual matters), (b) maintenance of harmony through relationships within the family and kindred, (c) concern with women's sexual
vulnerability and consequent need to protect it, (d) nature of female sexuality (Vatuk, 1992:57).

Thus purdah emerges as an important way of controlling women and confining them to domestic sphere among both Hindus and Muslims. A number of authors point to the extended metaphor of purdah which relates to the codes of modesty governing a wide range of women's behaviour both domestic and public. Here veiling is reinforced by 'a set of general rules of modesty' and a 'metaphoric' of closure and expectations (Ram 1992:49). The rules of modesty according to Vatuk include:

first dress standards covered head to toe in the presence of males, explicit standards of feminine behaviour avoidance of eye contact with males, avoidance of loud speech and laughter, bowing of head and the complete silence a woman observes in the presence of a man (Vatuk 1992:70).

Pettigrew similarly observes:

as the, Pathans say "purdah is in the heart" and it therefore, does not solely mean separating oneself from men by veiling oneself and by avoidance. These are only two realizations of a concept which requires a situation of distance and separation between men and women (except mother and son) in all spheres of life. According to local circumstances this may be more or less evident (Pettigrew 1978:50-51).

She further asserts that 'gradual disappearance of veiling is however,not an indication that purdah has vanished from the mind and the feeling. The expressions of it are now more subtle and discreet. For example when a woman is talking to a man she is very careful not to be too polite, not to joke and laugh unless there is a considerable age gap. She generally averts her gaze from the face of the man or lowers her eyes. These are the modern indications of purdah'.

The whole process of purdah practice and its enforcement rests on two main edifices 'separate worlds' and 'symbolic shelter' (Papanek 1982: 27,34). The separate worlds relate most closely to the division of labour in terms of actual work allocated to different categories of
people. Although the worlds are segregated, the separation is accompanied by a high degree of mutual dependency between men and women (Papanek 1982:192). The other interlinked concept of 'symbolic shelter' implies that 'something and someone needs to be protected in a given space and time from forces originating elsewhere'. The whole process leads to, 'complementary and asymmetrical relations between the sexes which develop from the basic conception of a strongly felt tension between the private world of the immediate kin unit, which includes the women and the outside world' (Papanek 1982:8). The most important devices of seclusion being (a) the physical segregation of living space, (b) covering of the female face and body, (c) enclosing public spaces for women so as to make them private. Thus, 'social control' (Papanek 1982:14) devices are used as Mandelbaum also stresses to control and restrict the spatial access of women in terms of 'distance, duration and purpose' (Mandelbaum 1986:2001). The achievement of 'symbolic shelter' and women's proper conduct raises the 'status of their protector's' and enhances 'male pride and sense of power as a result of control over the behaviour of others' (Papanek 1982:36).

3.1.1 Honour and Shame

The emphasis of purdah remains on 'shame mechanism of social control' (Papanek 1982:11) with a high moral responsibility on the women not to let a slur on the family izzat. Similarly in the context of the Panjgir of Balauchistan, Pastner discusses that:

Honour (izzat) and shame or modesty as conceived by men relate to the behaviour of women which is seen to reflect on the latter's male kinsmen - husbands, fathers and brothers in particular. The stress on the physical modesty of women reflects the highly sexual connotations of these values. Two of the major methods of preventing the breach of modesty lie in the limitations on the physical mobility of women beyond the home and establishment of sexual invisibility through such items of clothing as the burqah and the shawl' (Pastner, 1990:250).

For Mandelbaum izzat essentially is a 'symbolic summary' of men's past achievements and 'a main element in present power. Power properly deployed enhances izzat... which is to be
continually reinforced in action, defended against, challenged rewon and advanced in competition' (Mandelbaum 1986:2001). As 'public positions are the province of men... the primary referents of izzat are men. While a man's izzat is assessed... on several scores, the conduct of a family woman is always a cardinal consideration' (Mandelbaum 1986:2002) while the acquisition of wealth, land influence and powerful contacts are valuable resources for maintaining and enhancing izzat, the family izzat is reduced to dust if the honour of a family woman, particularly sexual honour is lost (Pettigrew 1978:51, Izmirlian Jr 1979:97, 196).

Numerous studies of Pakistan and North India agree that the concern for izzat is a key value of the region which continues to persist despite major economic and social changes, and that it is the women who have to bear the main burden of maintaining and upholding it through their faithful adherance to the prevailing code of female modesty and propriety (Eglar 1960, Slocum Akbar Sahi 1960, Gill 1977, Pettigrew 1978, Izmirlian Jr 1979, Sharma 1980, Hershman 1981, Papanek 1982 and Pastner 1990). One of the latest of these is Chowdhry (1994) wherein she underlines how the father of an errant daughter is afraid to enter into a public argument for fear of being silenced with a taunt about the daughter's sexual impropriety 'Tu ke bole sai, Teri beti ne aisa kiya' (what can you say, your daughter did this) (Chowdhry 1994:296). Not that there has been no change at all in the attitudes and values relating to izzat, but the emphasis of the studies have been more on highlighting the continued valorization of izzat rather than identifying nuances of change. Be as it may, in the Punjab of the novel, it was the passionate preoccupation with izzat which lent colour and vitality to social life.

Another most important dimension of purdah or code of modesty relevant to izzat, relates to the woman's initiation and absorption in the social group of her husband where too the rules of 'deference and avoidance' (Mandelbaum, 1986:1999) are strictly followed particularly so in joint families having both sexes of various ages and non-kin outsiders connected by marriage as is the case among the north Indian Hindus. These rules are meant largely (a) to show respect within the family, (b) to preserve family solidarity both reasons implying the potential of the women for, 'directly causing disruption of the unity of the group -or disruption of its delicately
balanced ties with other groups—through her interaction with it' (Vatuk 1982:60). Wives, thus, become both 'guarantors and disrupters of family patrilincagc' (Mandclbcum 1986:2002). This destructive potential is however kept in check through rules which are based on the:

explicit recognition of internal hierarchical distinctions based on such principles as sex, age, generation, genealogical seniority and kind of incorporation within the group. The recognition of an order of precedence and differential allocation of authority commonly applies to interaction among those of the same sex as well as those of opposite sex (Vatuk 1982:61).

The experience of the newly wed Preeto in Gill's book Phulkari from Bhatinda brings out some other relevant considerations:

The illusion and reality of married life in a joint family at Basarke did not take long to manifest itself in all its intricate network. Preeto, however, was not a novice to this system... The only difference was that at Basarke she was not the all privileged daughter but the daughter-in-law who had to bear the brunt of everything which went wrong in the house. Preeto had all the strength which mattered in this system. She was young, beautiful, competent in household affairs. She came from a good family and her dowry was admired by all... (Gill 1977:14).

3.1.2 The girl child: An ephemeral joy but lasting liability

Since men's mansion of honour is built on the uncertain foundation of women's sexual frailty, men feel vulnerable in relation to their women, wives, daughters, sisters. While they love and protect them, they also resent the burden of responsibility they have to carry. Their attitude to women therefore, is marked by certain ambivalence, if not negativity, which is particularly evident at the birth of a girl child. As Hershman observes in relation to Punjab:

the birth of a son is greeted quite differently from the birth of a daughter: a son is a child who will remain in his parents village, continue the family line and take care of his mother and father in their old age, while a daughter after her marriage departs to her husband's village and leaves her natal family. The birth of a son is an occasion of great joy and celebration, while the birth of a daughter goes virtually unmarked (Hershman 1981:156).
He mentions the past custom in Punjab of keeping only the first girl child and killing the subsequent female children at birth. Kakkar too discusses the 'greatest drawback of Indian tradition, its relative rejection of girls' which is expressed in its, exaggerated emphasis on sons, in the joyous din at the birth of male children, the silent rejection of female infants stands out so clearly and has had grave consequences for Indian women and society... Infanticide by sheer violence has probably always been exceptional all over the world. Rejection or at best, ambivalence towards girls has always worked (and continues to do so) in a more subtle and insidious manner. It is reflected in statistics that show a higher rate of female infant mortality and underlines the crushed spirit of countless women for which no statistics but only folk songs are available (Kakkar 1979:31,32).

In the context of the peasant culture of Haryana, Chowdhry discusses the economic emphasis and preference for a son, specially in terms of contribution to family labour. This preference finds expression in a number of proverbs.

*Meehin our beTTYA te koon dhAPPAYA sai* (who can have enough of rain or sons) or *jis ke Nahin put, voh kya jane maya* (one who has no sons knows no prosperity) (Chowdhry 1994:47-48).

However, as the reality of the birth of a girl is accepted 'she is treated with as much care and attention as a boy' (Hershman 1981:156). Chowdhry too endorses that, 'a girl is not made to feel unwanted all the time. The usefulness of girls is acknowledged. Yet what is also stressed is the temporary nature of their stay in the parent's home, and being less valuable in economic terms. Investment in a girl, clearly overrides her contribution' (Chowdhry 1994:49).

Sudhir Kakkar mentions various factors which act as a buffer, in the realisation of a girl's feeling of devaluation and neglect by society. These include a passionate bond between the mother and her infant daughter. 'Thus in infancy, the most radical period of emotional development, Indian girls are assured of their worth by those who really matter, by their mothers' (1979:39). Secondly she develops relationships with others, 'within the extended family' which
'tend to dilute any resentment she may harbour against her brothers' (1979:39), lastly and most importantly 'in traditional India, every female is born into a well defined community of women within her particular family' (1979:39). All these factors stabilise the life of a girl as she awakens to the reality of her anthropological position.

It is however, towards the 'advanced stage of early childhood that the cultural expectations of boys and girls begin to diverge radically' (Kakkar 1979:37). Under her mother's care she gradually takes on 'new grown up' responsibilities including taking care of herself and young children. This marks her initiation into culturally appropriate feminine roles. She also 'learns that the 'virtues' of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in various household tasks... Thus, in addition to the 'virtues' of self effacement and self sacrifice, the socialization for the feminine role in India also crystallizes a woman's connection with others, her 'embeddedness' in a multitude of familial relationships' (Kakkar 1979:37-38).

In a more concrete anthropological format. Paul Hershman discusses the way the upbringing of a boy and girl diverges widely in a Jat family of a village in Jalandhar district of Punjab:

Little by little a girl begins to participate in housework. At first she sweeps the floor, and later learns to make cowdung cakes which are the main source of fuel. She begins to bake roti (unleavened bread) and cook sabzi. Meanwhile, as he grows older the Jat farmer begins to spend more and more time at his fathers khuh (well)... Slowly the girl is taught those tasks which will make her a successful housewife, and the boy leaves his mother's world for that of his father and man's work' (Hershman, 1981: 157).

Hershman sees a number of differences in the cultural upbringing of a boy and girl in terms of their 'ritual status in their fathers patrilineage' (Hershman 1981:157-159). These include (a) the lack of authority of the father's descent group over the girl compared to that exercised over the brother and his wife, (b) exclusion from certain rituals of her father's lineage, (c) as a
virgin daughter she is bestowed honour and respect shown to one who is ritually pure, and she is allowed to move about freely in her natal village, in contrast to the avoidance behaviour expected of a married woman in her husband's village.

Prakash Tandon, whose childhood memories relate to the very sub-region of Punjab in which the novel is centered too describes the process of a Punjabi girl's personality development,

Deeply attached to their mothers, the girls have been taught from a very young age that parting is inevitable. The mothers have referred to it in anger, admonition and gentleness. Each time the girl made a mistake, burnt the food or dropped a stitch, the mother would say, "what are they going to say - is this how I taught you". From mother and father it is always "they". They, who will come to take you away one day. They to whom you belong. They to whom we must turn you over, well endowed and well trained. And now with the betrothal, "they" have asked for her and she has been promised. From now on she is "Theirs" (Tandon 1961:54).

The young girl as she crosses the threshold of childhood and enters puberty is protectively guarded by her mother and other female relatives till her marriage. Indeed the very realisation of this transition initiates the process of her wedding. A relative or a neighbour (Tandon 1961:53) will notice her budding youthfulness and advice the mother to initiate steps to get her married. As the marriage plans are chalked out:

she is carefully watched and chaperoned on all occasions because her parents fear any possible gossip which might damage the good name of their daughter and endanger any further marriage negotiations. It is considered important by the Punjabis that a woman should be a virgin at marriage. In the past, it was generally the case that the marriage ceremony (biah) was performed prior to the menarche, and at the onset of puberty a woman went to her husband's household and the marriage was consummated (Hershman 1981:159).

3.1.3 Transition to a new life

Thus, marriage becomes the major turning point in a girl's life. Marriage changes her situation drastically at many levels - anthropologically, physically, emotionally, sexually and
in existential terms. More than ever before she will have to shoulder the major burden of upholding social and cultural values. Gill highlights this contrast in relation to the legendary Heer:

One may conceptually perceive the two main aspects of Heer phenomenon: Heer before marriage, the daughter of a chieftain, the sister of brave brothers, the spoiled child of a feudal household, an active and assertive Heer who takes all risks who challenges all and Heer after marriage, a bride within feudal constraints, a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law who must submit to other's authority, a submissive and weak woman who can only weep or pray, lament or think of good old days and be more and more depressed and helpless (Gill 1989:158).

While Hershman sees this new phase of her life in terms of a transition from a virgin daughter to a sexually active wife (1981:158), Tandon (1961:143) emphasises her emotional turmoil as a newly wedded wife, in particular her sadness at leaving her natal home and hope and uncertainty about the future.

3.1.3.1 Sexuality and motherhood

As the young bride becomes a part of her new surroundings she has to reckon with two important facts of kinship - 'procreation and copulation' (Das 1994:200), woven into the fabric of her cultural, social and moral orbit. Although it is she who has children, yet, in local cultural terms, her procreative role is seen as both passive and secondary. According to Das: 'The basis of the Punjabi theory of procreation is that women provides the field and man provides the seed. As in the classical Hindu theory quality of offspring is determined by quality of seed. Nevertheless the field should be able to bear the seed, if the seed is very powerful it will burn the field' (Das 1994:200). The man's role in procreation, 'ends with the depositing of the seed and this act is seen as garbhadana the gift of conception given by a man to the woman' (Das 1994:200). Muslim Punjabis also seem to share this view, 'the woman's role in the propagation of the generations is a passive one for she only nourishes the seed and carries the child until it is ready to be born. The child takes its qualities almost exclusively from the man. If you sow
barley you cannot expect to harvest wheat regardless of where you sow it' (Alavi 1972:5). Implying the 'symbolism of the seed and earth' as Dube (1986:30) points out 'helps to emphasize the strength of the patrilineal descent principle and the fact that the child derives its group identity from the father'. However, Hershman characterises the biological inheritance of the Punjabi's as 'bilateral' with, 'the bones of the child formed by the semen and the blood formed by mother's blood'. The importance of semen becomes clear with the Punjabi saying 'one hundred drops of fat make one drop of blood, one hundred drops of blood make one drop of semen' (c.f. Hershman 1981:130). By this is implied 'that sexual intercourse is debilitating for the male and that in creating a child a man is drained of much generative energy' (Hershman 1981:130). The discussion on procreation leads to the interpretation of Punjabi attitude towards sexuality and women, who are, 'on one hand desired and esteemed, on the other...rejected and feared'(Izmirlian 1979:99).

The 'bonds of sexuality are not explicitly recognised at the level of social kinship, the social nomos does not deny their importance but only relegates them to a backstage which is hidden from public view' (Das 1994:203). The potential of sex to impart shame and bestow power to the women is kept in check by devices such as separation of husband and wife in public, ignoring and lack of interest shown by the couple towards each other, absence of privacy and often the only interaction being quick infrequent conjugal meetings. These help to sustain the 'myth that his wife is a stranger for a man, while his own mother and sister are his own blood' (Das 1994:208). This same predicament is eloquently described in Phulkari from Bhatinda, once in a while he entered the house but he talked mostly to his mother or sister. There was practically no married life for the young married couple. Even their conjugal meetings were quite infrequent. In any case Preeto was always within the hearing distance of her mother-in-law or young sister-in-law who carefully watched every step of the Choti nuh' (Gill 1977:14).

Analyzing psychologically, Sudhir Kakkar links these attitudes to the 'image of the wife as the needed mother and feared whore' (Kakkar 1990:19) in our culture, making it apparent
that, 'with such a collective fantasy of the wife, the fate of sexuality within marriage is likely to come under an evil constellation of stars. Physical love will tend to be a shame ridden affair, a sharp stabbing of lust, with little love and even less passion' (Kakkar 1990:19). However, the 'act of coitus leads to strong natural bonds which are difficult to dissolve' (Das 1994:203) and keep resurfacing and asserting themselves in different ways. Among the couple, 'a role can be constructed between the two which can be at variance with the public image of themselves that they each individually wish to project' (Barth 1981:87). At least, for the woman throughout her married life 'the intense wish to create a two person universe with the husband where each finally "recognizes" the other, is never far from her consciousness. It stands as a beacon of hope, amidst the toil, drudgery, fights, disappointments and occasional joys of her stormy existence within the extended family' (Kakkar 1990:22). In fact this is the, 'real sasural, the husband's home to which a girl looks forward after marriage and which a married woman keeps on visiting and revisiting in the hidden vaults of her imagination' (Kakkar 1990:23).

The wife truly comes to her own as a woman and establishes her position in the husband's lineage and community with the birth of a child particularly a son, 'who is a key to a woman acquiring status and position and without one a woman is socially barren' (Hershman 1981:190). A son is a woman's most precious object in life and embodies her whole future. Infact 'the cultural idealization and emphasis on motherhood as the predominant constituent of feminine identity' (Kakkar 1979:34) is fully realised with the birth of a child/son. It is this factor which for a mother culturally, 'accounts for her unique sense of maternal obligation and her readiness for practically unlimited emotional investment in her children' (Kakkar 1979:34).

Therefore, the mother-child bond assumes special significance in Punjabi culture. The initial transmission of qualities takes place during breast feeding, 'milk is acknowledged as the substance by which a mother nourishes her child and gives him strength' (Hershman 1981:132). This bond between mother and child is considered, 'pre-social in that it comes spontaneously and flows from natural unlearned behaviour' (Das 1994:208). As the child particularly a boy grows up, and faces the world, the debt of his mother's milk can never be returned in his life.
The suckling of the child along with the act of sacrifice of carrying the child in the womb for nine months, 'makes a unique relationship, between mother and child' (Das 1994:208). A Punjabi mother 'suckles her sons as long as there is milk in her breasts or until the next child is born. Sometimes boys will be suckled to quite advanced ages such as six or seven years old and they may be given the nipple until even much later whether or not the mother has milk' (Hershman 1981:189).

The closeness of mother-son bond and the relative weakness of the husband-wife bond, especially the replaceability of the wife and the irreplaceability of the mother are the features of Punjabi family life to which Pettigrew (1978:52), Hershman (1981:189), Das (1994:208) among others draw attention. One consequence of this is that a woman gains strength against her husband and his mother as her son's grow up and she in turn attempts to keep an emotional hold on them against their wives. This promotes a woman centred structural division within the joint family with a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law as chief protagonists wooing support from their respective son(s). One consequence of this is that a mother-in-law attempts to discipline quite harshly her newly married daughter-in-law and make sure that her son does not get too attached to his wife. Thus, in marrying women become willing instruments to subserve patriarchal joint family and male dominance and become complicit, as Gerda Lerner puts it, 'in their own marginalization and exploitation' (c.f. Chowdhry 1994:17-18).

3.1.4 Orientation to patriarchal order: Complicity and subversion

However, this complicity is neither single minded, nor without dissent and has even overtones of subversion and rebellion. As Chowdhry points out in the context of rural Haryana:

the voice of a woman is not merely a monologic voice, it clearly emerges with dialogic possibilities. Women are heard speaking in two voices: one of them is frequently apparently supportive of the patriarchal order, though not necessarily so... The dialogical possibilities existing in the voices of rural women of Haryana... do not show them as passive but in fact reveal nuances of an an opposite stance.
Women emerge not only as reinforcing the boundaries of social order but also disturbing them. The other voice which emerges is an independent voice subversive of the patriarchal order and its specific content. It mocks and ridicules authority, and their various relationships by inverting the ordinary rules of social protest not only at annual festival times but also on other social occasions. Older women may use this voice both as a protest and as control. They may also willingly allow certain voices to be heard that would otherwise be threatening. (Chowdhry 1994:18-19).

It is this, 'traditional feminine subculture' (Kakkar 1978:40) which comes alive with its support structure, politics, buffer mechanism, interests, ordinary coexistence and forms of protest. Thus, delving deeply and unravelling the lives actually lived and experienced by women.

Our analysis of the women's world in Zindaginama will specifically attempt to bring out these features which being not so visible on the surface often escape attention. It will also seek to understand the way how such factors as caste, class, economic conditions and cultural taboos condition the movement of women outside the home, particularly, for participation in agriculture, animal husbandry and other activities.

As is well known, a number of higher castes in Punjab, such as Bania, Khatri, Rajput and Brahmins among the Hindus and Pathan, Biloch, Sayyid, Sheikh and Ranghar (Rajput) among the Muslims strictly maintain the dichotomy of home and outside and reluctant to let their women to work outside the home. Jats, Gujjar, Ahir, Mali and some other agricultural castes expect their women to assist their men folk in certain limited agricultural task specific to women. The artisans and menial castes such as Julahas, Mirasis, Nais, Chamars, Bhangi etc have few inhibitions regarding their women working outside the home and, depending on the family circumstances, their women participate actively in weeding, picking cotton, gleaning the grains from the fields, looking after cattle etc. They also perform certain jajmani related functions specific to their own caste. The women of a number of these castes are represented in the women's world of Zindaginama, and the text provides a vivid portrayal of their lives, their constraints and freedoms as they play their different roles in this world. It could be the life of the Khatri women- Shahni,
Choti Shalni, the peasant Jat women, Laa Bibi, Hakma, Rasooli and others, the Arain girls Fateh and Rabyan; the service castes - Beebo Mirasan, Umda Nain, Basra dai etc. all are presented in their manifold relatedness.

In the process the text unfolds as a collage of different voices, the main pivots of women's lives - marriage, engagements, social celebrations, festivals, love, romance, man-woman relations, passion, desire, illicit sexual relations, managing men, motherhood, in-laws, widowhood, interhousehold gift exchange, domestic cooperation, female bonding, loyalty, silences, oppression, attempts to achieve influence and power in the family and finally a search for a sense of self will all be seen through the prism of the myth of the Sun and the Moon. For it is this constant struggle between the anthropological and existential worlds which carries the women forward and is the essence of their existence.

3.2 Trinjan

It is Trinjan night spinning which introduces us to the world of the women of the village. It a world which is centred around the Haveli and Shalni. Responding to her invitation most of the women, are spending the night at the haveli basement to spin before Lohri. As they begin to spin, they escape from the mundane existence of their anthropological roles to a world of love, passion, desire, joy, romance and fantasy. Quissas of love assume a personalised relevance and longings for the warm and protective love of ones parents and brothers, all are articulated by the women who gather for Trinjan. In the dark quiet of the night, a certain transgression of class and caste differences take place and the barriers break. The women are all reliving an illusion for the night. For some this night is a night of initiation as well. The young girls are initiated into the facts of life, they become aware about men, desire, passion, and romance. The newly weds are sharing their secrets narrating their new experiences and comparing it with tales of romance. The veteran married ones are trying to break the monotony of their existence by escaping into a world of romance and illusion which they could never experience. The contrast with reality makes them go on a flight of fancy.
As the spinning wheel moves harmoniously, the night brings out all that the women have held back within them. It could be Beebo Mirasan complaining about the lack of romance among the men of the haveli, the young girls curious about their bodies and the slow flameing desire rising within them, or women like Shahni and Chachi seeking a relief in romance etc. With the women getting together for the night, the bond of their femininity, the hidden expression of their sexuality and the impending reality of the coming morning, creates umbilical ties between them.

The Trinjan night spinning session also introduces us to the role of Nawab and Mohammaddin two important retainers of the haveli. Both of them are closely linked with Shahni and Chachi and consequently with the other women. They also interact in the informal world of women sharing their jokes about marriage, secrets etc. A far contrast to the world of the men which is formal and operates on a different plane. As retainers they too participate in the agony and ecstasy of the women's world (P.28-35).

... as Chachi Mehri and Shahni went upstairs, Kartaro stood waiting, waving a marigold flower. 'Kartaro have you sent out the invitation for Trinjan'. 'Chachi. I have still to cover Uttarivand'. 'Damn you! If you are hungry, have a quick bite and finish your task'. 'If Shahni gives me 'makhanas' in milk, I will get back all my strength'. Chachi rebuked her, 'from where have you picked up this marigold flower?' 'From the Kutia, from the Kutia', 'whom did you go to invite over there?' Kartaro laughed carelessly as if she was shining utensils with her hands, 'Chachi I had gone to the Kutia to pay my respects. Bhaiji had done the 'Parkash' of Guru Granth Sahib and read out the 'Vak' (thought). A marigold flower fell into my lap. Chachi. I am sure something good is going to happen to me'. 'May you perish, just put a leash on your tongue'. Kartaro teased Chachi, 'why are you unnecessarily scolding me? Girls of my age have families of their own'. 'Shutup, you have not even reached the mark of twenty-twenty two. Be patient your groom would be here some day'. 'Chachi, it has been ages since I have crossed that barrier'.

168
Nawab and Mohammaddin brought the pitchers of milk upstairs. 'Shahni today the buffaloes gave more milk. Sister Kartaro you seem to be in great form and already licking up a bowl of milk. Made a conquest or something?' 'Vira, if I am an eyesore, that's fine, but do not cast an evil eye on my bowl of milk'. Shahni said affectionately, 'come on Kartaro, its going to be evening. Go with Dilbagh and call all those who are still to be informed'. 'Who is going to break one's head with Dilbagh, he is deaf from both the ears'. Chachi scolded her, 'so what if he is deaf, you are not going to the courts to file an application'. 'Chachi, if you send Mohammaddin along I will be back in a jiffy'. 'Is Nawab your enemy?' 'Chachi, today is my lucky day, Nawab's stars are bad. His engagement is broken every winter'. Chachi laughed, 'if Nawab's Nikaah is solemnised before your pheras, then you will find no place to hide your face'. Hearing about his nikaah pleased Nawab immensely, 'Chachi, hope your mouth is full of ghee shakkar'. 'Maa bibi, why not arrange a match for him from Daulatgarh. The jewellery and clothes will be provided by Shahni, while Shahji shall take care of the rest of the expenses. If one has dimes in the pocket, the doli is back at your doorstep, even before sunset'. Maa bibi looked at Nawab and laughed, 'well what about the regular visits at Jammiwalla Julaha? Any hope of a proposal?' Nawab was suddenly embarrassed. 'Maa bibi, Saajida is a slippery one'. Chachi scolded him, 'have some shame, having spent all your life pulling the reins of horses, and not being able to harness even one girl'. Nawab touched Chachi's feet, 'it is only with your wisdom and blessings that I will be able to overcome this hurdle'.

As Husna Nain came in, she brought along the spinning wheel of Khoja's Reshma. Shahni said, 'Husna first call out to Beebo Mirasan, she should, come and liven up the place'. On the floor of the basement long rows of spinning wheels, and the little peerhis (stools) and maunds of cotton were placed. Gradually the evening brightened up, the newly wed girls laden with jewellery, the young girls enjoying the bloom of youth and the little buds on the threshold of youth. Chachi Mehri's constant instructions tired out Kartaro and Maa bibi - 'get the basket of coins, the pinnis of gur, you seem to have forgotten the Seelam, marundas and dish of Sheemi'. The girls began to tease Maa Bibi, 'Maa Bibi why not adorn your beautiful face in a basket and bring it'. 'Hai, why have you come alone, where is the drum (Dholak)?' 'Girls! today you are going to be here all night, enjoy yourself but don't forget to spin'. The girls giggled away looking at each other. As Reshrna sat on her stool spinning, she exclaimed, 'Shahni is spinning not cotton but silken thread, why would she not spin it? After all the one who wears silk will spin silk as well'. 'Why Reshma even you have got into Rabyan's habit of rhyming and composing?' Shahni looked around, 'how come Rabyan and Fateh have not reached as yet. Niamat just send Nawab to fetch them, remind them to bring their spinning wheels along'.
As Niamat got up, both the girls walked in. 'May you live long, where are your spinning wheels?' 'Here they are Shahniji.' 'No spinning without cotton, No Trinjan without the spinning wheel'. Chachi Mehri felt happy, 'Sadke, Rabyan you compose so well', 'Yes, Maa bibi, put about six rolls of cotton in every winnowing basket'. Chiron's Bimbo laughed, 'come on girls, touch your spinning wheels'. Ghu...Ghu...Ghu... the sound of spinning wheels synchronised harmoniously and slowly the thread started coming out. 'Look at Shahnii's thread, as fine as a strand of hair'. Chachi snubbed them, 'you concentrate on the spinning wheels'. 'Why Chachi are we going to cast an evil eye?' Gradually, piles of cotton became visible and the burden of the winnowing baskets became lighter. Kammo said, 'why is sister Beebo so quite? Shahniji, tell Beebo to recite something'. The young voices chirped, 'Heer Beebo, Heer'. Chachi Mehri said, 'recite it to the girls, but softly, the echo of your voice shakes the house. By God's grace, the men are asleep upstairs'. Beebo grumbled, 'Now listen to Chachi's conditions. One must express words of lamentation by curbing one's voice, what to talk of a joyous rendering of Warris Shah's Heer. Forgive me for what I am going to say, Ranja from Takht Hazara blossomed the love of Heer Syal, bringing her ecstasy and pain, while Warris Shah's rendering of Heer inspired so many lovers. It is only our wretched men who do not respond to the rhythm of Heer. After listening to Heer, one's spirit comes to life'. Okay, now come on, stop acting pricy'.

Getting on to her palanquin,

Heer cried out in pain, take me along, take me along
keep me with you Babul,
Heer pleads with you...
Forgive me for my omissions.
I could spend only a few days of my life with you.

Shahnii's eyes were moist with tears Maa bibi sighed, while the chirping girls gaped at Beebo. Chachi Mehri said longingly, 'God's grace. If He smiles at you benignly then love reaches its peak'. The Arora girl Mehndi started laughing, 'listen to Chachi, what does God have to do in the quissas of love'. 'Shut up, don't talk like a fool. Lovers can never blossom, till they have God as their guardian. Even the earthen pots needed to cross the Chenab will crack'. Beebo again started,

...first God fell in love
His beloved was Nabi Rasool mian...
love is the preserve of the Pirs and Faqirs...'
Beebo looked around and saw the girls sitting quietly, 'little maidens why have you already started worrying? If you fall in love at the right time, by the grace of Allah, that love will reach its peak'. Suddenly stopping her spinning, Harbanso started gaping at Beebo, 'my child lost somewhere, you have not even started sprouting as yet'. Harbanso hid her face in her hands and blushed. Rassoli chided her 'Beebo, you can't carry on with this teasing all the time'. Seeing Chachi Mehri frown, Beebo changed the topic, 'come on leave it, let's sing something else'. Now it was Suhaag:

Bibi why are you
playing with the Moon,
I am standing for my Babul
to find me a groom...'

'No one is getting married or engaged and Beebo is off to singing Suhaag'. Shahni got up and brought a bowlful of milk for Beebo, 'now wet your throat, let the girls sing. Listen Fatima, sing the Ghori of Nabi Rasool!:

'Look at my Vir’s Sehra,
It has been beaded by a gardner,
under the benign shelter of Nabi,
it is all his grace Ya Ali...'

After a few lines, Fatima stopped. 'It is a promise girls, when my brother returns from the front, I will sing it with gusto'. Chachi Mehri spoke, 'may God protect your brother, he will surely come back with a medal strapped on his chest. 'Even my brother Chachi,' Zafar's sister Akbari said happily, 'I have heard that Zafar has reached China'. 'No Chachi his regiment is at Landikotal'. 'Sadke, he will come back with great glory'. 'Come on someone sing Sohni-Mahiwal'. In a black kurta and slightly dirty odhni her face like a picture frame. Fatch kept one hand on the spinning wheel and the other on her chin:

Why cry out for your lover?
This Mahiwal is ready to give up his life for you,
Rab-Rasool has truly blessed me,
and I will stake my honour for you, my love...
Everyone was lost in the world of the Sheikhs, the young Sayyidzadi falling in love with a Rangrez. 'Rabyan why not sing something, your rhyming is famous everywhere' Shahni was captivated by Rabyan's beauty. What a pure beauty born in the Arain household. Rabyan looked fixedly at Shahni as if she was a statue, then composed a rhyme.

The colourful spinning wheels under the glow of the lamps,
the fair skinned lasses are like specs of light,
in the peak of the winter months,
Shahni sits early in the morning spinning her yarn'.

'You are surely blessed by God, say something more child.'

Shah is the master of the garden,
watering it everyday,
Shahni is the mistress of the house,
treating everyone as she may.

Hearing this Shahni felt elated and took off her heavily carved necklace handing it over to Rabyan, 'take it girl, Shahni is giving it with love, keep it carefully for the day you leave for your sasural'. 'My goodness, it is so intricately carved'. 'Rabyan your prince would have already started off on his horse. Shahni with her luck has made an auspicious beginning for you'. Suddenly, Chachi Mehri looked around, 'come on, lumps of jaggery, baskets of eatables arc waiting for you to nibble. If you don't spin, then how do you eat? If only the tongues work and not the hands, your mothers are surely going to grumble. After all they only sent you to spin'.

3.3 Romance

Romance is the throbbing pulse of the novel. One of the main themes of the novel centres around the triangle of Shah, Shahni and Rabyan the young Arain girl (Discussed in detail in Section 2.1.3.2). However, the romances chosen here highlight different dimensions, they do not depict the infatuations and longings of young virgins, but the desires, passions, and predicaments of women who are abandoned by the society as young widows. Responding to
their anthropological position defined for them, they react, protest and fight it by bowing to the commands of their own mind and body. The urge is to change their destiny and make a new place for themselves in someone else's heart, ensuring thereby their relevance as women. Aware as they are of their own needs and desires, these women encounter men who are mature, who too are seeking a release from the parameters of kinship obligations. The men stand up for the women they choose, and are willing to settle down with them breaking the binding constraints of widowhood. At times such a free play of love and passion also breaks down the barriers of caste, class and religion.

The young widow in Punjab did not have many socially approved choices before her. The practice of widow remarriage chiefly followed by the agricultural Jats was the system of Karewa, Karao or chaddar andazi, signifying the acceptance of a woman by her devar by throwing a white sheet (Choudhry 1994, Hershman 1981, Pettigrew 1978). This custom was generally prevalent among the agricultural castes except the Rajputs. The Bania and the Kayastha did not do so, nor did the Sayyids among the Muslims. The Sayyids were the highest caste among Muslims and just like the high caste Hindus, did not follow this practice. The low castes known as acchut (untouchables) were among its chief followers (Chowdhry 1994: 77). This custom carried with it the 'underlying logic of retaining the widow within the family for a variety of reasons ranging from control of property, labour, her sexuality and reproductive capacity and control of her options regarding marriage partners' (Chowdhry 1994:86).

Apart from the option of such a marriage, the widow carried very little possibility of finding a partner of her own choice. Torn between her desire, youth and passion and cultural taboos, the predicament of a widow was a troublesome eyesore for the society. Tandon discusses the situation of the Khatri widows:

Young widows were, in fact, a great problem, for while people would not accept remarriage at any cost, they did not know what to do with them. Whether a widow stayed with her own or her husband's parents or brothers she was a burden. Her misfortune was considered to be her fault; at least it was her fate. While
her parents and brothers had sympathy, other relations showed none... She was forbidden to dress and eat well, to share the family's festivities and joys, and often she was just an unpaid servant in the house, without the freedom to leave. (Tandon 1961:109).

3.3.1 The love and life of Chachi Mehri

Chachi Mehri represents a very interesting character in the novel. She is almost an institution in the haveli, a woman who wields power, authority and keeps a moral hold on those around her. Yet unlike Shahni whose position in the family is because of her anthropological status, Chachi Mehri has built up her image by breaking traditional stereotyped values expected of a woman and chalked out the course of her life dictated by love and desire. Chachi Mehri represents the only character in the novel who lucidly expresses the desires of her mind and body and when necessary breaks conventions to realise them. It is this unconventional position which gives her authority and moral strength, enabling her to strongly deal with the men and women around her. Chachi Mehri is everywhere, right from accompanying Shahni on a pilgrimage to Baba Farid's, helping out Maa bibi, getting rid of Laxmi Brahmani's illegitimate child, fixing up Kartaro's wedding, dealing with the Thanedar and noticing Mehr Ali's absence from the Baisakhi revelry. It is she who holds on to the pulse of romance in the village and despite the pragmatic streak remains throughout a quintessential romantic. Daughter of the Bagga Sardars of Madina and married to the Kukka Sardars of Buzurgwal she became a widow early in life. Her infatuation with the handsome Khatri Shah Ganpat made her cross the threshold of tradition, morality, and norms to follow the only course dictated by love. As she reminiscences to Maa bibi (P.48-49):

'Chachi have heard that our Shah, was very strikingly handsome'. 'Yes child! fair complexion of the Shah's, sharp features and he dressed up like a lord'. Bebe used to tell me the famous quissa of Mehri and Ganpat'. Chachi laughed as if the evening of her life had turned into a bright morning. 'Maa bibi, time is the king of all. It was ages ago when our love reached its peak. My Shah made me appear in the crowded courtroom. The whole crowd of my in-laws descended on the Gujrat courts. Wherever, I looked, all I could fathom was a sea of people'. 'Chachi you went in all that crowd without a veil?' 'Why not? if
whole world knew about our love then who cared about the veil. I had to appear in the court. Their lawyer said accusingly, "Mehri tell me without fear, what tactics did the Khatri Shah use to kidnap you from your husband's home? What were his tricks to misguide you and to lead you astray, so that you forgot everything about family respect". "Then, what did you say Chachi?" "Maa bibi, I looked up towards the crowded courtroom. I could focus only on two persons one was my Shah and other was the judge, the rest were a mass of turbans. I spoke fearlessly, "Sahib it's been three years since I am a widow. The court will understand that my age is not one for playing with dolls and toys, nor am I just sixteen. I am a mature woman and can understand what is right for me. I have crossed the sardars threshold on my own to be here".

"However, the lawyer hired by my in-laws still persisted, he again asked, "is it true that Shah Ganpat allured and bribed you? He forcibly brought you across the river with the help of badmashes?" 'Maa bibi, I straightened my neck and gazed intently at my Shah. I don't know what was there in his look, that I felt a slow lingering excitement building up in my body. My in-laws family were really enraged and egged their lawyers to continue arguing. "You have the whole tribe of your dead husband's family to support you, property, jewellery, utensils you name anything. Being the bahu of such a flourishing household and still not satisfied with life". The Shah's lawyer again argued back, but I did not understand anything. I was only comprehending the face of my Shah. The judge asked me, "Mehri do you want to say something?" I said, "Sarkar, these questions and answers are of no use to me. Both my mind and body belong to the Shah. Now the strings of my life are in his hands". The judge delivered the judgement in our favour. People started congratulating the Shah, I bowed before the judge. "This is indeed justice Sahib Bahadur. These decisions have already been made by God. You are giving His judgement on earth". I was surrounded by the Shah's family. His father came towards me, and called the men to arrange for the horses'.

Chachi Mehri looks back at her life in the Shah household with no regrets, (P.50).

'Chachi did you ever regret your decision?' 'Never, I have experienced all the joys of life in the Shah's household. What a strong and handsome man. During the day he was the ruler and at night it was my turn. These moments of bliss are only meant for the lucky ones. It was not the celebration of youth but a matter of stars which bound us together at the mela of Nahnowal'. 'Tell me Chachi, how did he manage to win you over?' 'This is again one's fortune, the first glance created ripples in my body. Even the families became alert. It was such a moment that both of us were bound in the chains of fate'.

175
In the evening of her life, there is a growing emptiness in Chachi’s heart. Her inability to bear a child for the Shah for the continuity of the family tree, distresses her, specially after his death, giving her a feeling of lack of fulfilment about the relationship. Gradually over the years Mehri’s memories are flooded with concern for the family of her in-laws and a sense of guilt for having left her young devar Sahib Singh who was so attached to her. (P.47-48):

One night as Chachi Mehri lay down on the cot, she started singing painfully:

Sons are not available on loan,
Nor are they sold in a shop.
If they were available on demand
I would order them by weight.

Maa bibi picked up the lamp from the crevice and went towards the cot. She felt shaken, 'hai, Chachi, the person who lost herself completely in the Shah household, why is she thinking of unfulfilled desires?' Chachi lay covered with a loi, her head facing the wall. Maa bibi quietly sat down pressing Chachi’s legs while she again began to sing:

Who is the mother? Who is the father?
All relationships are nominal, false
ignorant man! why dost thou babble as in a dream?

... All from one clay are made: in all one light shines.
One breath pervades all: what point any weeping over another?
Man wails over loss of what he calls his... (S.G.G.S, Talib (tr) 1990:188, Vol. IV).

'Chachi why are you so sad, singing in pain about parting?' In the glow of the lamp like the flame, Chachi’s expressive face began to flicker taking her back to the past and memories of shared love making with Shah Ganpat. 'It is just love and attachment for the dead Maa bibi. The souls of the dead don't leave us. They continue the same journey whether alive or dead.' 'Chachi don't be superstitious.' 'A little while ago, I was standing on the terrace and looked down. Suddenly I felt as if I was back in the past. The old days flashed before me. What did I see? My dear Shah was standing on the deori as my own son. Wearing the familiar dress and with his characteristic curly hair. His face was just like that of my son.'
'Chachi I don't understand this puzzle'. 'Maa bibi one's own mind creates so many illusions. The son who could not be born from my womb, was standing in reality before me. In that one moment I was reunited both with the father and son. Then, what, I again started looking out for my Shah and whom do I see Macchi Sultan...'

Later Maa bibi again touches the raw chord of Chachi Mehri's heart, (P.50).

Maa bibi was distracted 'it would have been so good if Shah had left a child for you'. Chachi Mehri wiped her tears, 'the Shah's life is a testimony to it. He did so much for me. But child when his turn to depart came, he would blankly stare at the doorway I'll get up every now and then thinking that my Shah was able to see Yamdoot approaching. I would cry and plead with him, "my dear at least speak something, how will I ever live without you"? Maa bibi, after seeing me in such a state; he came back to his senses. Looking at me as if he was about to deliver a judgement in a court case said, "Mehri you made my life wonderful and worth living. But never thought of the future. The moment I close my eyes, this family too would come to an end". I broke down on hearing this, but what could I do? Shah had moved to another world, while I was left behind to count my days'. Chachi again wiped her tears, 'Maa bibi I have experienced all this that is why I know what it means not to have a child. Let us seek Baba Farid's blessings and a child shall play in this house, even now I feel the presence of a new born baby'.

Another sense of guilt gnaws Chachi Mehri. Her last meeting in the court with her youngest devar Sahib Singh remains vividly etched in her memory (P.49). Sahib was more like a son to Mehri and parting with him always troubled her.

In the meantime, I could see my younger brother-in-law running towards me from the crowd, he touched my feet and spoke in a choked voice, "honour and prestige is a matter of the elders, without you bharjai, the house will not be the same. For me you will always remain the queen of the house". 'I am telling you the truth, the moment he touched me, I started to tremble. When Shah saw me in this predicament he patted little Sahib Singh affectionately and tried to shake him aside, "leave us son, we are getting late". I could not see all this and pulled him towards me and kissed him on the forehead, "Sahib Singh you are still a child, so you don't understand anything. These decisions have been made in ones previous birth, and are not in one's control". Again Sahib Singh caught hold of the edge of my chunni, "don't leave me alone, bharjai, how would I even touch a morsel of food without you giving me the churi". The next moment, I saw my jhet Malkiat Singh twisting Sahib Singh's arm and pushing him aside, "you fool why don't you
die before appealing to a woman of loose character who has stepped out of the house'. Sahib Singh fell on the ground and did not get up till our horses left.

After ages, Mehri's concern for her in-laws family becomes almost an obsession. She wanted to see for herself how they were living (P.51).

'Maa bibi, I hope there is happiness in the Singh household? I don't know why I feel worried. That little Sahib Singh never let me be out of sight. A handsome face and cat like brown eyes. Hope Waheguru protects them. How hard have I become, never tried to find out about them. I wish I could see them when we are all alive. After death their will be no one to argue, show anger or taunt at me'.

However, the call of her in-laws place cannot be resisted by Mehri anymore. For her inner peace she has to visit them once again (P.51-54):

As the day drew to a close the white horse of the Shah's, Badshah stopped at Jota Singh's Tabela in Buzergwal Chirag gave a helping hand. Chachi Mehri took out her feet from the stirrups and jumped down, she was wearing a white suit and neatly covered with a pashmina chaddar. 'Chirag puttar, go inside and inform that Luddiki has come from the Shah's household'. Making Chachi sit down Chirag went inside the deori and yelled out, 'guests have come from the Shah's visiting you'. Someone peeped from the terrace, 'whom do you want to meet? 'Salaam! I have brought Chachi Mehri with me', Chachi corrected him, 'say that Luddiki has come' Malkiat Singh's wife Kudrat Kaur glanced around and then asked, 'from the house of the Peroshahs?' 'No Sardar Sahib's sister-in-law has come to meet him', 'who is it child? Who has come?' Chachi Mehri got up opening her arms to meet Kudrat Kaur. Immediately Kudrat recognised her and slapped her forehead. 'Damn you, Fitte Muh, Luddiki you here! alone, what have you come here for with your white choora. There is no one left in this house to receive you warmly'. Chachi Mehri drew closer, Kudrat, I would not have come, for years I didn't isn't it? Yesterday while reciting Sukhmani Sahib, I felt as if Waheguru was directing me to come here. As if Sahib Singh was waiting for me. I had to forget the past to come and see him. Kudrat Kaur again looked around and her eyes were moist, 'Luddiki, Sahib Singh is not at all well' Chachi entered the house and reached the Chabara, 'in which baithak does my Sahib Singh reside?' 'Over here in the mirrored one'.

Sahib Singh was lying down with his eyes shut in the dim light of the lamp. His wife Santo and newly wed daughter Basanti sat near him. Chachi bent down and placed her hand on Sahib Singh's forehead, 'Oh!
bless you!' Sahib Singh, look who is here? Sahib Singh opened his eyes, 'who is it? I can hear a familiar voice'. 'You didn't hear me, I am Luddiki your Bharjai'. With tears welling up in her eyes, Chachi kissed Sahib Singh on the forehead, quickly felt his pulse and checked the temperature, 'what is the ailment and who is treating him? 'An old stomach ailment, a hakim from Alamgarh is treating him'. 'Why didn't you take Sahib to the hospital?' Kudrat was crying, 'what can I do all alone? All the other brothers are busy with the court case at Lahore, the youngest Nikka is in Kabul. The only one in the house is Sahib Singh. I felt rather uneasy, so sent the horse to bring over Basanti, she has only come today. Child Basanti meet your tai'. Wearing a red choora, Basanti hugged her tai, Mehri blessed her and gave her Shagun. 'May God bless you and give you happiness'. Santo fell into the arms of her Jethani and broke down. 'Who is it Santo? Whose blessings are you taking? Even if you collect a maund of blessings, I will not recover'. Chachi Mehri said authoritatively, 'sister Kudrat go get a few patashas and fresh water from the well. I will set Sahib Singh alright'. Chachi mixed the patashas in water and made Sahib Singh drink the sweetened water. As if the helpless body suddenly came to life. Sahib Singh managed to raise his head from the pillow and caught Chachi's hands, 'I was just waiting for this moment, otherwise I would have been gone a long time ago'. 'Come on Sahib Singh, say something auspicious, God will show His mercy and soon you will be your old self'. In the glow of the lamp, Sahib Singh was gazing at Chachi's face. Then he called out to his wife, 'Santo! ask Bharjai, will I ever be able to walk again?' Chachi gave him a hard look and spoke in a clear voice, 'now listen carefully, if you don't feel better, I shall settle in with my cot in this baithak. Sant Kaur just get some desi ghee and phirangi liquor'. Chachi expertly massaged Sahib Singh in such a way that his limbs gradually came to life. She spread the sheet over him. 'If you are in a mood to sleep, I can massage your hair as well'. 'No that is enough for today'. 'Sant Kaur, go take rest, I'll sit by his side'. Kudrat Kaur brought some food for Mehri. After washing her hands, as she took a bite her eyes were suddenly flooded with tears. 'Oh dear sister Kudrat at this moment, the years gone by appear to be a part of folklore or a quissa. I am no longer the same person and even time has slipped by. It is Waheguru's grace that this haveli has stood firm on its foundations'. As Santo saw the thali shaking in Mehri's hands, she quietly steadied it, 'Bharjai the whole tribe was one while your devar stood firm on the other. Even after getting married he kept on talking about you, he could never forget, your affection and memories'. Mehri began to cry, 'Sant Kaur God will bear witness to me. Whenever, I spread butter on the roti, it appeared as if Sahib Singh would come from behind and catch hold of the corner of my chunni. "Bharjai give me some more just a little more..." I used to always cry, keeping these tears a secret from my Shah. People are always fighting, but what is this resentment, that even while living one is left with yearning to
meet each other?'  "When your Shah passed away, I wanted to be near you and to console you. But there was no way I could assert before the menfolk. I pleaded with them almost everyday. I would specially appeal to Zoravar. But, they closed all avenues to my reaching you'.  'May the brothers live long. It is so difficult to curb man's mind. Once it takes a track it goes on it. I should have come earlier as well. But meetings too are preordained'.

After ages Luddiki lay down in the baithak with the colourful windows. Pushing away the Shah, Didar Singh came and stood near Mehri. He tickled and fondled Luddiki and said, "I have heard about the popularity of this Mehri mutiar". The bride Mehri started to laugh, then blinked her eyes and said coquettishly, "Of course, why not! I am the daughter of the Bagga Sardars of Madina and married to the Kukka Sardars of Buzurgwal. In this reason enough for the drums to thunder and to proclaim my popularity". It was just this vivaciousness of Laddi which bewitched Didar Singh. As he went nearer and touched her, his past experience lost its edge for him, bridging the gap of years between them. Chachi turned on her side, 'God! these are all tricks played by you. Could I ever imagine coming again and sleeping in this baithak. One side darji and on the other Shahji. The dream seemed to have disappeared. 'Come on Mehri as long as you live, it is these memories which will sustain you'.

3.3.2 Barkati's elopement with Tara Shah

Another important liaison takes place between the prosperous Tara Shah and Barkati the widowed daughter of the Teli's. Tara Shah almost abducts Barkati so that she escapes the wrath of her brothers who are thirsting for her blood to save the family honour. Having sought shelter in Shahji's haveli, Barkati is torn between her love for Tara Shah and devotion to her brothers. Such a clash is a popular conflict of Punjabi folklore. Barkati is torn between the two. Her brothers are determined to settle the provocative challenge to family honour and prestige. Prosperous Tara Shah is a high caste man, doing reasonably well with the support of his well to do cousins and numerous connections of his own. This dare-devil is challenged by the poor Teli brothers who have staked everything for their honour. The result of this unequal conflict is a foregone conclusion, thus deepening Barkati's crisis. It also highlights the economic and social vulnerability of a poor widow in a conservative society. (P.214-218)
The lamps had just been lit at the Shah's haveli when Tara Shah reached on his horse. Hearing the horse's hooves Nawab goes out to receive the visitor. 'Khusamdeed Tara Shah'. He went ahead and patted the horse, 'Sulaiman, where have you been moving around with Shah Sahib?' Tara Shah snubbed him, 'Oui Kanjara, what is this new taste for Persian?' 'Tara Shah, I am a Khalifa of the animals, what do I have to do with Arabic and Persian? May God bless you, the Mujrawalis who came, on Lali Shah's birth taught some grace to the entire village. Khusamdeed again'. Tara Shah's one hand clutched his stomach the other held the reins, 'You donkey, deliberately playing the fool, haven't you noticed someone else with me?' 'Ji, I did see a mild reflection in the dark'. 'Listen carefully Nawab, I don't have the time. She is my new beloved Barkati. Safely deposit her with Shahni' 'Ji'. 'Help her get down'. As Nawab held the soft hand of the woman covered in a Chaddar he felt an excitement all over his body. A little child began to whimper under the chaddar. 'Balle, balle, Shah Sahib, what is all this tamasha?' 'Yaar today the colour of my tamasha is red. My veins have come out, I have tied a cloth tightly on them. It was necessary to bring your Bharjai here'. 'May god protect you Tara Shah' 'Barkati go upstairs, touch Shahni's feet and seek her blessings'. 'Nawab, explain to Shahni that she is the daughter of the Teli's of Chak-Manhasa. She was widowed last year. After that I met her. If Shahni acts difficult, then let her stay at the Lasooranwala kotha, where she can do her own cooking'. 'Tara Shah turned the direction of the horse, 'Nawab Shah, in my absence you are her brother. Keep a watch, if some one misbehaves tell them that Tara Shah will be coming soon to settle scores'. Nawab expressed his agreement 'Ji' then offered, 'why not take a few sips of milk or daru. The two brothers should be back by now'. While leaving as if Tara Shah, threatened his absent brothers, 'my father may have given the deed of release, but I have an equal right on our grandfather's land. Just remind them, that the papers of that property are in my custody'. 'Shahji at least cleanse the wound with liquor'. 'Fool! I hope your intelligence has not gone to eat grass. This wounded stomach will burst open only at the Thana where I will lodge a case against the Telis. If they could not feed their sister they retaliated by attacking her beloved'. Tara Shah pulled the reins and disappeared from view.

Nawab picked up Barkati's child then comforted with maturity. 'Bharjai now you will have to cross this hurdle on your own. My responsibility is to repeat all that Tara Shah has said'. Barkati began to cry. 'Be brave bharjai, if there are any hurdles still left in the matter, don't mention them now'. Barkati wiped her eyes, pulled across the ghunghat and began to climb the stairs behind Nawab in the darkness. Nawab asked quietly, 'I hope both of you have performed the lavanpheras?' Barkati just nodded her head. From the porch Nawab called out to Shahni, 'you have guests from across the paar'. Carrying a lamp in her hand, Shahni came out of the kitchen, 'who is it Nawab?' 'From the house of Tara Shah's'. A veiled Barkati came forward and touched Chachi's feet, 'bless you! But I have not been able to recognise her'.

181
Nawab repeated, 'she is Tara Shah's wife'. 'Are you in your senses, no engagement, no ceremony and a wife without marriage. This does not appeal to us'. Barkati broke down and fell on Chachi's feet, 'I cannot survive on lies. As I got involved with the Shah I stepped out of my house. Early morning I was hiding near our usual meeting place, waiting for Tara Shah. Hearing the familiar trot of his horse I came out. At that very moment my brothers waylaid us and stabbed Tara Shah in the stomach. Shah quickly came on his horse, grabbed me and we escaped'.

'Satnam! Satnam!' Shahni was worried. Chachi asked with bated breath, 'by the grace of God, is our boy alright?' Barkati continued to cry, 'Shah was injured very seriously. But we had no time to stop. On reaching Panghali, Shah cleansed the wound with liquor, tied a cloth tightly and sped on his horse to leave me here safely'. Chachi scolded Nawab, 'Fool, at least you could have called out from downstairs, and given the boy some milk laced with ghee'. 'I had offered everything to him, but he refused, ask bharjai', 'I pleaded with him, don't take such a big risk for my sake. All he said was - "your brothers are out of their minds, if they get a chance to lay their hands on you, that will be the end". Leaving me here, Shah Sahib has left for the police station'. Chachi came near Barkati and looked intently at the child, 'don't tell a lie, but this is not Tara Shah's child? Tell us about the father?' Barkati's eyes again filled with tears, 'He has reached Baikunth. A year before last he passed away'. Nawab intervened, 'Chachi, the mother and daughter haven't had a morsel of food since morning'. Hearing the commotion Choti Shahni came out, 'who is it Chachi?' Shahni placed her hand on Bindradai's shoulder, 'Tara Shah's beloved'. 'How come she is here?' 'Devrani, her brothers have seriously injured Tara Shah. He has left her here with us, to go to the police station'.

'That's bad jethani, this matter will surely reach the police and the courts. Today the menfolk are not at home. I just hope we do not suffer mud slinging because of her'. 'Why Subhan Kaur, there was no other home for you?' Barkati began to cry loudly, 'Its all my bad stars, I am really cursed'. Choti Shahni again rebuked her, 'don't create such a scene. You will draw the whole village over here. Hold on to your courage, the men are not at home today'. Nawab pointed towards the pitcher of water, 'give her some water, it will soothe her nerves'. Choti Shahni took out a bowl of water from the pitcher. Then she again questioned, 'what are the names of your brothers?' 'The eldest is Ditta, the middle one Lada and the youngest Kuka' Birdradai frowned, 'what about your father?' 'Mahipat', Shahni softened and held the copper bowl for Barkati. She took out some sweets for the little girl. 'Come on cat, you have been hungry since morning'. 'Bharjai, what is the name of this girl?' 'Raseeli', 'Come Raseeli, sit near me'. When the thali was placed before Barkati she again burst into tears, 'yesterday at this hour I was preparing rotis. I really lost my senses to earn the wrath of my loving brothers. Now I don't know if everything is okay
with Tara Shah. Chachi said, 'Nawab putar, will our Tara Shah reach the police station, how was he at that time?' 'Don't worry, our Tara Shah is a strong one. Barkati Bharjai, your brothers will not be able to escape from the clutches of this dare devil'. Shahni said, 'he is after all my devar, but his deeds are bad, beating, killing, crime, court cases, police stations are all his pastimes. First he elopes with somebody's daughter and sister and then leaves her at the doorstep of his Shariks, with whom he has not even interacted for a long time. What does one do in such a situation?' Chachi reassured everyone, 'its only a matter of one night. Tomorrow the men will come and handle everything. We don't really matter in such affairs'. Choti Shahni said, 'Isn't it a saying, that "the rogues are always on a high". My dear devar is obsessed with the intoxicating power of youth. It will diminish, let him enjoy.'

In her rather unconventional situation it takes a long time and effort for Barkati to be accepted in the women's world of the Haveli. Barkati's soft, sentimental nature and the pain she suffers at being separated both from her beloved Tara Shah and from her brothers, invokes sympathy. Gradually Barkati is drawn into a comforting reassuring, warm and teasing relationship with the women. She shares with them her talents and introduces them to cultural patterns of Jammu from where she had descended. (P.218-221).

Many of the young girls of the village are suffering from the invasion of lice. Their mother's send them to Shahnis haveli to Umra Nain who is presently applying oil and styling Shahni's, Chachi's and Choti Shahni's hair. Umra Nain separates the girls with lice and applies her solution to wipe out the menace. Umra opened Shahni's plait and asked for some hot oil. As Barkati brought the bowl of ghee, the girls kept on staring at her. Chiron's Pasha could not help herself. 'On one side, Tara Shah as hard as the bark of a palm tree and on the other this bharjai softer than the gulbashi plant. How did this union take place without the horoscope's?' Chachi snubbed her, 'shut up, you are overstepping now'. Pasho did not flinch, 'you may scold me Chachi, but the whole world is talking about her. How many wagging tongues can you silence?' Shahni motioned quietly to Chachi, 'what is the world talking about, let me also hear?' 'That Barkati bharjai has not gone through a marriage ceremony'. Barkati looked at Shahni then laughed, 'the pandaji at the Thakurduar at Kotla had chanted the ved-mantras and tied the corner of my odhni to your vir. Now what more do you want?' Mohra's bibi began to investigate, 'tell me how did the panda recite the mantras, did he properly chant the shaloks? It could have been better if you had gone in for an anand-karaj, after all you already have a daughter'. Barkati's fair and beautiful face felt very lively, 'Bebe we have a different style in the hills if you like I can...'. Shahni stopped her 'no'. The girls began to insist, 'come on Barkati bharjai tell us'. It appeared as if Barkati had actually become Tara Shah's bride.
Keeping her face straight she recited like a panda:

'We are the kanya, you are the gotra
you are the gotra we are the kanya...'

Everyone enjoyed it thoroughly. 'Umra bibi, I will teach you how to make the top knot as our women do on the hills. Now Ladi don't move'. Seeing this lively beloved of Tara Shah made Shahni happy, 'she may be a daughter of the Teli's, but at heart a real pitcher of sweetness. She talks so rhythmically, how would she not appeal to our Tara Shah?'. Barkati began to comb Kesro's hair. Kesro felt irritated, 'bharjai, you have not parted my hair properly in the front'. 'Be patient girl, I will style your hair in such a manner that the young men will loose their balance'. Umra Nain was looking at Kesro's 'Kira' critically. Then said, jealously, 'Jammuwalli, the best jhoola is one made by mindis'. It beats everything from across the Paar, Potuhar or Sandalbar'. Barkati remembered the good times with Tara Shah and began to hum:

'She is sitting with her hair open,
She is sitting showing her back,
Gora is sitting with her hair open,
Shivji is sitting having turned away his face.
The vermilion mark is shining on Gora's forehead...'

The devotional fervour in Barkati's melody put the women in a devotional mood. Chachi said, 'what a lovely picture of Gora Parvati. Here Gora Devi had opened her hair and lo Shivji turned up'. 'If all goes well we will surely go and pay respects at the Devi's durbar'. The girls got after Barkati, 'one more melodious song from the hills bharjai'. Chachi also got into the mood, 'come on sing something which pleases Tara Shah'. Barkati's eyes drew the map of her village, while her heart reflected fondly on Tara Shah's love.

'Mian Majnun,
your pearl white teeth.
Mian majnun,
your big bold eyes
which take one's heart away
Mian majnun
your thick locks...'

184
As she sang, Barkati burst into tears. Finishing with Kesro's hair she went in the inner rooms. Shahni was sympathetic, 'Chachi, this poor bahuti is right in feeling this way. Since the day he left her here, there is no news or letter. After all she has left her home and hearth for him'.

Barkati's existential crisis, her longing and the issue of her social status is finally resolved after the judgement of the court case between Tara Shah and the Telis of Chak Manhasa. Tara Shah wins hands down and it is a proclamation of victory of the mighty over the weak. (P.228-231).

Every Sultan of Turkey is a 'Khalifa' and a Khalifa is one who wields the sword. Tara Shah first eloped with the sister of the Telis of Chak Manhasa. Then the court sent them to prison for attempted murder. As the judgement was pronounced the Shah's turbans had gained a couple of inches in stature. Today Tara Shah was in a generous mood. He touched the feet of the two Shah brothers in full view of the crowded court room. This gesture made them feel very emotional. There may be many arguments and fights, but sharik brothers too constitute one's strength. Everyone began to congratulate the Shah's. 'Why not badshaho, they are blood relatives. The great grandsons of Bhag Singh and Charat Singh. The tree is the same with different branches'. Then Badshaho it is the famous tribe of the Shahs, proving their might before the poor Teli's. Shahji was suddenly alert. He called Kashi Shah aside, whispered something, 'Kashi Ram Mahipat is standing there. The rules of law apart, here the heart of a father is involved. He seems to be completely crushed after hearing the verdict. It is not easy to recover from such a big shock'. Kashi Ram did not agree, 'it will be like rubbing salt on his wounds'. 'Bharaji if you like, go and console him, I want to have a word with Munshi Ahmad'. Shahji saw from a distance the thin worn out father of Barkati standing alone, hiding from the people, wiping his tears with the corner of his turban. Getting near, Shahji placed his hand on Mahipat's shoulder, who immediately burst into tears, 'Rabba, its always the poor who pay a price for the sins of the rich. This girl has ruined us. When she left she took away our honour as well. When the sons of the family fought to save it, they were sent to prison. The poor face only ruin'. Mahipat looked at Shahji with hurt and hateful eyes, 'on one side the mighty Shah's on the other the daughter of a poor Teli'. Mahipat took off his safa and held it in his hands, 'I have lost my honour and my turban Shahji. But remember the last sayings of this Teli. If my daughter is not respectfully installed in your house, then the curse of her father will befall on your entire Khandan'. Mahipat helplessly put his hands on his chest and spat bitterly, 'hai, hai, with every sigh I will curse you Shahji, A poor man's evil eye is very potent'.

185
Shahji and Mahipat together drew a lot of people around them. Shahji acted sensibly, ‘Mahipat, the dispute has been decided in the court. Now listen to me, your daughter is under our protection and will stay in the house like other bahus. If your son’s had not taken the initiative the matter would not have reached a point of no return. It will be our endeavour to bestow on you proper respect according to our relationship’. Gurdit Singh came nearer, ‘the inherent goodness of families can never be hidden. Shahji’s words carry a lot of weight’. His praise, softened Shahji further, ‘Mahipat from now on you are our ‘samdhī’. Mahipat again began to shed tears holding Shahjis hand, ‘first the daughter blackened the face of the father, then Tara Shah scored a fast one over us. Shahji our house has been ruined’. Shahji again consoled him, ‘be brave Mahipat, whenever, you feel like crossing the river, come over to have a look at your daughter’s house and stop by’. As Tara Shah came out of the court with his gang of rogues and badmashes he smiled viciously at Shahji and Mahipat standing together. ‘By the grace of God, what’s going on?’ Tara Shah’s Yaars began to tease:

The name khwaja khizr with no water,
the name Shah with no ledger,
the name Noor Ali with no eyes.
Wah! Wah! this is the Rajput name of Teli Mahipat.

As Mahipat began to shake with anger, Tara Shah’s two witnesses Shera and Atta Mohammad laughed, ‘badshaho, you have been hit hard. Today is the day for celebrations’. Tara Shah joined his friends for a session at Macchi’s Tandoor. The two Shah brothers took leave of the court with mature measured steps...

3.3.3 Laxmi Brahmani and the Sayyid

The affair of widowed Laxmi Brahmani with the Muslim Sayyid is one which tends to shake the foundations of the barriers of religion, caste and morality. The pressure to bow to the dictates of conformity harassed Laxmi. Having broken all these bonds, Laxmi Brahmani faces the predicament of an ill-gotten pregnancy. It is again the women of the haveli, specially Chachi Mehri who helps her out of this crisis.

However, after bowing to the dictates of custom, Laxmi is unable to forget her love. She cannot blame her lover for anything, and regrets refusing his offer of settling down, for false
societal values. Her pining takes the matter to the men, who debate the issue, wondering how to resolve this disharmonious situation. The women of the house know of this liaison with the discovery of her pregnancy (P.221-223).

Preparations are being made in the Shah's haveli to extract the 'ark' (fermented essence) of saunf, ajwain and pudina. The brass utensils have been brought out from the basement and properly cleaned. Shahni asks Mithi to fetch Dhandai for this task. Laxmi Brahmani is reluctant to call her. She wants to take out the 'ark' herself, and eventually has her way. Laxmi began her work, Shahni glanced at the young girls around her, 'those down with the days of the month keep away, do not let your reflection fall on the 'ark'.

Not looking at each other Shaano and Channi quietly stole away. Shahni laughed indulgently, 'look how quickly these marjani's have matured'. Her hands on the copper vessel, Laxmi Brahmani was lost in deep thought, staring at Shaano and Channi walking away. Even when they were out of her sight she did not blink. Shahni scolded, 'Laxmi, you are not concentrating on your work, just take away your hand, it will burn'. As Laxmi heaved a sigh, Shahni felt worried. She came near and patted Laxmi, 'just a little while ago you were full of excitement, now what has happened all of a sudden? You silly woman, 'ark' is medicine, if you will feel so mortified while taking it out, it will lose its effectiveness'. Laxmi looked away from Shahni. A signal from Shahni, and the girls and Kammi's discreetly walked away, 'what are you worried about. Received any letter from your in-laws?' Laxmi's heavy chest heaved another sigh. She uncovered her duppatta nodding her head, 'no'. Shahni asked sharply, 'any problems with your body, you are looking rather pale'. Laxmi collected the small pieces of firewood, adjusted the flame and blew hard. Then spoke with a heavy voice, 'Shahni what can I say? This unfortunate one has suffered a fate worse than death'. Shahni kept on looking at Laxmi intently for a long time. Then whispered coldly, 'what is it?' Laxmi nodded her head and broke down. 'Hail may I die, Laxmi, your husband is in heaven, why did you let this calamity strike you?' Laxmi kept on crying and blowing to sharpen the fire. Chachi Mehri called out, 'child the Tandoor is ready, come and make the rotis'. As Shahni finished spreading ghee on the rotis she wondered, 'it is really Kalyug. A widowed brahmani and such deeds'.

Laxmi takes the help of Shahni and Chachi to get rid of her unwanted pregnancy. Yet the pain is not enough for Laxmi to forget her love. Infact she pines for her lover harder, moaning at her own cowardice and lack of clarity. It is this reluctance of Laxmi to accept the dictates of society which create a crisis in the anthropological world.(P.232-234)
Laxmi Brahmani is busy grinding onion and garlic paste. Going near her Shahni patted her back, ‘you good for nothing woman, have not the dark clouds yet receded from your heart?’ Laxmi wiped her eyes, then placed her head on her knees, ‘what can I do Shahni, climbing down from the Tibba and falling into the well. I have no control over this restless heart’. ‘Why girl, did you meet him again?’ Laxmi did not affirm or deny the accusation, ‘what can a poor soul like me do Shahniji, I do not know with what magical touch, the Sayyidzada claims rights over me. I try to control myself but my mind and body is magnetically drawn towards him’. Laxmi began to sob. Shahni went near and sat down, ‘how did this Brahmani find him? You didn’t have any regard for the confines of religion?’ ‘It is the deeds of this unfortunate one. A year before last I had gone to my Nanke at Naushera. The Sayyidzada gave me such a penetrating glance that I was won for ever’. Hearing Chachi’s footsteps, Shahni became alert and asked Laxmi to hurry. Laxmi finish your work and come to the ground floor. We have to put the grains in the sun’. Chachi Mehri looked sharply at Laxmi and scolded her, ‘you stupid girl, carrying on with your ghazal-ghort be patient, its not as if the world has to listen to your deeds all the time’. Opening the door of the stores, the intoxicating smell of wheat and barley saddened Laxmi, rekindling fond memories, and making her shed tears once again. Shahni pretended to be ignorant for a while, then said affectionately, ‘Phite Muh’, it is only yesterday that you were able to get rid of that problem. It is a sin committed by us. Why did you make us do all that? All you had to do was to seek shelter in the Sayyidzada’s backyard and produce a bastard’. Laxmi spoke with remorse, ‘I was only afraid of my own people and the world. God is a witness, the Sayyidzada never coerced me into anything. He never went back on his word. When I broke down and told him he said, “its my promise, why don’t you agree, I will take you to my home from the front deodhi”. ‘Shame on you, sired by a Brahmin falling for a Malaich. The way you are addressing him as Sayyidzada. This is the way it goes for them, the first year Julaha, then Sheikh, and finally a Sayyid. Leave it girl, just throw him out of your system. Being outside your caste and religion he should mean nothing to you’.

Laxmi picked up the sack of bajra and then fell on Shahni’s feet, ‘what can this unfortunate one do. The world does not understand my pain. How can I explain to people that it is impossible to live without him’. ‘Be in your senses girl. Just get it clear, no Brahmani has ever had or will have a namazi Sayyid as her companion’. Laxmi pulled her hair and began to beat herself, ‘I know it and try to explain it to myself. But this heart plays truant. Shahni a new life got severed from my body. I committed a sin. Yet, I am always pining for him. It will be impossible to survive all this, Shahniji I will die’. ‘Ha! its all Kalyug, offering your body to a man from another religion. Just think about it. How will you partake food in his kitchen? You a Brahmani by birth letting a Malaich soil your body’. Laxmi’s thin face suddenly felt agitated, her breasts under the shirt began to tremble. ‘Forgive me Shahniji, its all my bad stars, whenever,
I think of him its like the damp earth caving into the floods. I will die without him. 'Shut up and don’t ever repeat this again, just throw that man out of your life. Forget his memories and go, bury his effigy forever'. Laxmi held her ears, ‘the Gods and Goddesses will forgive my sins. The powers in the sky are witness to the fact that he is the master of my mind and body’. Shahni’s voice suddenly became cold, ‘you daughter of pure Brahmins, it is as if death is meandering around you. You will die. Your brothers and biraders will hack you to pieces’. Lakshmi did not flinch but defiantly glared at Shahni. Shahni came near and shook her hard ‘now listen carefully, when you were pregnant, Chachi extended her protective hand. All for keeping the respect of your revered father Brignath. Now its your choice to cast off your religion and become a Bhatni, Sheikhni or kanjari offering ‘juhar’ and ‘salaam’. We have washed our hands off you’.

That night Laxmi spent in the Shah’s basement crouched among the sacks of grain, while discussion continued in Shahji’s baithak late into the night. When Laxmi’s brother Parasram came back from visiting his jajmans at Kotli Lahoran, he was straightway called to the Shah’s haveli. Shahni is pensive. ‘She who has defied all norms is sure to excite the wrath of her brothers’. Chachi Mehri puts in her words of wisdom. ‘Too much desire within beings disaster’.

‘Curse on the foolish girl, Sayyidzada, the son of a man may anytime shift his infatuation from one to another’. ‘She is not the first in the family to falter. Her good for nothing Masi swayed with the current and left behind her home and kin’.

‘Insatiable desire and excessive hunger runs from one generation to another in a family. Now this restless being can only quench her thirst in the river.’

Chachi Mehri was lost in deep thought, then after a short nap opened her eyes, ‘girl if one thinks carefully, these Sheikhs of Naushera are hardly Sayyids of Baghdad. They would have only converted to Islam about a hundred or two hundred years ago. Before that possibly they were fish eating or kheer eating Brahmins’. Shahni was stunned, ‘Chachi I hope you are only talking in your sleep. Once your religion is defiled it is gone for ever. After two hundred years, Sayyidzada’s will not carry on with their ancestral gotras. Its all darkness Chachi think...’ ‘What can this old woman do, she is exhausted with thinking too hard. It was me who got the concoction from that bitch Jamalo to keep the honour of that Brahmani. So, I am directly held responsible for this sin. My conscience troubles me, after all I am the murderer. While this foolish one satisfies her lust I get all the curses’. ‘Chachi, it is all Laxmi’s destiny, we did all we could. Now the matter has reached the men and they would decide accordingly’. Lying on the cot,
Chachi began to sing:
Times past never return
deeds accomplished cannot be undone,
Destiny is predetermined.
Receding waves of sea,
an arrow shot from the bow
and words spoken
are beyond recall
Joyous moments of love spent together
never come back.

3.4 Marriage

Marriage is the most important landmark in the young girls journey of life. The three stories which culminate in marriage are diverse in style and approach. Mithi's wedding is the marriage of a traditional Khatri girl, with all its ceremonies, farewells etc. Kartaro's is that of a poor girl married with the benevolence of the Shahs. However, the most interesting is the runaway marriage of Fateh, and its acceptability in the village is a rather unusual response in a conservative society.

3.4.1 Mithi's grand wedding

Mithi's wedding is the typical traditional wedding of the Punjab. A formal proposal is made for the girl which is readily accepted. Grand and elaborate preparations mark the entire wedding and its rituals. The baraat is received warmly and showed lavish hospitality, gifts are exchanged, the mirasis perform and the wedding is solemnized. Mithi accepts her destiny and prepares herself for a new life at the Duggals. As she wears her wedding dress she also crushes her hidden dreams and desires which are safely locked in her heart. Away from her dreams and friends she begins a new life with a feeling of uncertainty. Her wedding specially highlighting
non-Muslim preference for marriage outside the village. Thus creating a spatial distance between the residential localities of the two families related by marriage (P.308-314).

Mithi’s lucky star shines brightly. One evening when Mithi’s maternal cousin Gun Kaur got down from her horse, she met everyone warmly.

Masi, is everyone hale and hearty? ‘Yes child Gun Kaur, no letter or rukka, how come you are here suddenly? How are your in-laws and our son-in-law. Has someone escorted you with the horse? ‘Masi, everything is fine, I have taken my husband’s permission and come. Let me relax for a while, then I shall narrate the whole story’. Mithi’s mother made her niece sit on the manji. ‘Sadke, go child Mithi, get some lassi for your sister’. ‘Wait Masi, my jethani-sas had advised me not to touch a drop of water or a morsel of food without clinching the issue’.

‘Hai, hope all is well’. Gun Kaur opened her little bundle and took out a few girih-chuara’s wrapped in a red cloth, ‘Masi, please put it in your lap’. ‘Now enough of puzzles’. Gun Kaur laughed, ‘call Bebe well, come here Bebeji I have to tell you something’. As Gun Kaur met Bebe, she warmly gave her blessing, ‘so Gun Kaur is fine, so are her in-laws, and even my son-in-law, so how has my girl reached here?’ ‘Bebe congratulations! I have come with Mithis proposal’ Wanto was excited, ‘why didn’t you tell us before Gun Kaur?’ ‘Masi, it is always better to finalise auspicious things in a hurry. All of a sudden my jethani brought up the issue, my jeth endorsed it and before I had finished my meal, jeth Raja had already arranged for the horse. Mausi, no point in delaying predetermined arrangements’. Wanto interrupted, ‘wait, Gun Kaur, tell me, whose proposal is it? Your devar’s?’

‘No my jeth’s son’. ‘My child she has only one son, what choice she has for selection and preference’.

‘Bebe this is something you cannot take lightly. Though he is an only son he is a handsome and tall boy. Looking at him is a treat for the eyes. Moreover, he has studied up to tenth standard. Masi please call Masarji as well. Jethji has given his command, that I have to wet my lips only after the proposal is accepted’. ‘Wait, don’t say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in a hurry, let my son come’. The grandmother felt indulgent towards her grand daughter, ‘Gun Kaur, look at the girl, she does all the house work. As for her looks, what can I say? It’s the parents who give birth, while beauty is bestowed by God’. ‘Bebe, Mithi is my sister. My sasuralwallah’s have only gone for this variety of saplings. Jethani said that, “yours is a solid family with strong roots. If we get a girl from your garden, it will make the foundations of this house strong”. Bebe laughed, ‘don’t mind Gun Kaur, but yours is a rather quarrelsome family’. ‘Bebe, they are
good at heart, only a bit out spoken and impulsive though. See, how fast they sent me here with the
proposal'. When Mithi's father Jeevandas came to know of the proposal, he quickly sought Shahji's advise.
Then returned and congratulated Gun Kaur. 'Congratulations! congratulations'.

Mithi went and hid in the 'pasaar' Bebe made everyone taste lumps of jaggery and sent her Shagun for
the boy. 'Child, this is God's grace, Mithi's stars will finally meet their destiny'. The next morning, the
women of the neighbourhood came over to sing Suhaag. Gun Kaur kissed Mithi, affectionately, spat
on her palm, and wished goodbye to Bebe and Wanti. Quitedly told Wanti, 'if you had not said 'yes' I
would have faced a tough time at my in-laws'. Mithi's father, put the money for shagun in a small packet
and handed it to Gun Kaur, 'how can we compare with them. They are a prosperous and prestigious
family. Convey it to them, our sense of gratitude for they thought of us'. As she got on the horse she
laughed, 'begin preparations in full swing, my family would prefer an early wedding'. 'What's the hurry?'
'Bebe, its better to be relieved of a girls responsibility as soon as possible. Moreover, the boy has been
recruited in the army'.

There was massive activity in the household. The duppatas began to be adorned with tinsel. Mithi's
grandmother was worried about the phulkari. Mithi's girl friends gathered around her. 'Come on tell us
something'. 'What can I say, I am equally ignorant'. 'Forget it, don't pull a fast one on us. Didn't your
masi's daughter give any details?' 'Bebe at least tell us the name of the boy, we will compose such
'sithnis' that the city bred would look for places to hide their face'. 'The boys name is rather sweet, Mehtab
Chand', Channi hugged her, 'Mithi, so now your name will be changed to Mehtab Kaur. Bebe where
is her sasural?' 'At the home of the Lakanwal Duggal's'. 'So Mithi, now you will be a city girl, will
you recognise your friends from the countryside?' Even before, the congratulations for Mithi's 'Kurmai'
were accepted, the horoscopes were matched and the wedding dates fixed. The house resounded with
Suhaag Wanti kept on shedding tears, Mithis grandmother consoled her. The 'Karahis' were set up at
home. Relatives began to trickle in. Mithi's 'maian' ceremony began. Dressed in shabby clothes, her face
reflected both worry and excitement for the future. The grandmother who was very particular about
shaguns insisted, 'come on, seven suhagans (married women), come and apply paste on the girl'. Sisters,
sister-in-laws, Chachi's, Tai's, Masi-Phuphi's all'. Barkati laughed. 'May I join in?' Shahni and Chachi
held their breath, 'what has this women asked for?' Mithi's dadi was in a generous mood, 'ofcourse, no
one can be a bigger suhagan than you, who is carrying Tara Shah's child'. As the women sang 'suhag'
Mithi began to cry:
'I am surrounded by my dolls, but have lost the desire to play with them. I am being separated from my parents and friends. My desires will now rest in my sasural, my mother's aanchal is wet with tears, my father has shed tears to fill a river, my brothers have cried all over the world, while my bhabhi's are happy in their hearts....'

The girls shed tears. Shaano hugged Channi, 'don't get so sentimental even you will go, one day', then asked Mithi 'have you sent the horse for Dodhi, she is your fast friend'. The girls left the elders and huddled up in the 'pasaar'.

Before the wedding, Mithi shares her hidden secrets. Seeing Mithi lost in her own thoughts, Channi said, 'now that everything is settled for you, why worry about others?' Mithi felt sad and burst into tears, 'I will tell you something, but swear on me, you will not share it with anyone'. 'Sure' remember the Jammuwalla's who had come to Shahni's haveli,'The two brothers, what about them?' 'The younger one'. 'Yes Mithi, speak'. 'What can I say'. Mithi covered her face with her hands. 'He is trapped in my heart, while, leaving he presented me a hanky'. 'Hai, I will die, Mithi you hid it from me for so long'.

Channi herself had a massive crush on those Dogra brothers. She thought for a while and said, ' My friend, don't ever mention him again. If you keep him in your heart, the husband will come to know. Men have such devices by which they can touch and tell'. Shaano came near, 'I am sure Harbanso told you all this'. Shaano teased her, 'now that you will belong to somebody else. Do one thing. Take out that handsome face from your heart and give it to me. When ever you come for your trips home I'll lend it you. So that's settled'.

The day of Mithi's wedding brought rain with alarming ferocity. Almost the whole day was gone waiting for the 'choora ceremony' to begin. The Nai-Purhoits of the Duggals had still not reached with the giri-chaura. Then whispering began, 'hopefully the samdhis have not taken offense on something'. When the the purohit of the samdhi's drenched in rain reached the doorstep, it brought relief to everyone. A wave of spontaneous congratulations, 'Wanto, congratulations, your 'chuara has come, now the janj would be on its way'. The Nai-Purohit began to be entertained lavishly. Puris, Karah, Kheer-Khoya, and whatever, they wanted. It rained heavily for two days, creating problems for the baraatis. The kuttcha
paths were slippery, the cha's were full of water and the Tongas had to be left behind. As the baraat reached on the horses, every baraati was drenched to the core. The elders advised the women, not to start their 'suhnis' before the baraat took some refreshments. The entire village gathered together to offer their hospitality to Mithi's baraat. Mattresses were spread on the manji's in the jangghar, a fire was lit to dry the clothes of the baraatis. As kehwa laced with badaam and pista was served to the baraatis, the boy's friends began to ask Mithi's brothers, 'so after all that rain, only kehwa?' The hookah's were ready for the baraatis. The baraatis made themselves so comfortable on the manjis as if they were enjoying the luxury of a Shahi dera. Someone's feet were pressed, or some got their head massaged from the Nai's. As the Halwai's Chulais cooled down, Shahji called the Mirasis. He gave a hint to Moolu, 'remain in control, the baraat has reached here with great difficulty'. Moolu beat his daffli:

'Listen everyone.
Those in service of the Raja,
at the house of Jeevan Shah.
Strong,
powerful,
clan of the Duggals,
Shah Ram Chand,
Shah Kishan Chand,
Shah Bishan Chand,
Shah Karam Chand,
Shah Dharam Chand,
Shah Deewan Chand.
Shah Dhyan Chand,
Shah Mehtab Chand,
have brought their baraat,
adorned with two hundred horses,
How does our small village,
look after the royal guests...
their deeds are good,
their name held in high regard.
Their turbans are lovely,
their appearance is great,
their features are sharp.
so is the mind.
The colour is fine,
tongue sharp too,
wrist a bit tight...

'Oui Mirasi, mind your tongue'. 'Sorry, for the slip, I mentioned the other ones. They were your Sharik Duggals. But I swear on the mirasis, they didn't give a penny'. 'From which place? 'The Shariks from Faizabad'. The boys Chacha's felt thrilled, 'give him more, let him be satiated'. Moolu Mirasi called out his 'jai':

'May the orchards of the Duggals bloom,
the ones who reside in durbars and high places. Listen everyone,
Neelkot,
Kaacchkat,
Vasankot,
Shahkot,
Jalivahan,
Rajghat,
Rangilpur.

After crossing Jaalkot they reached Lakhanwal,
during the Khalsa rule,
took charge of the Diwani for the Maharaja.
With their intelligence and astuteness were granted jagirs...

The baraat was thrilled by such lavish praise. The boy's grandfather took our five takkas from the edge of his turban and gave it to the boy Doda, 'he has made us happy and deserves a reward'.

3.4.2 Fixing of Kartaro's wedding

The fixing of the wedding of the young girl Kartaro, is an important day in the haveli. Kartaro has grown up in the haveli and helps Shahni with the household chores. In return for the services rendered by her, the women particularly Shahni and Chachi Mehri are very relieved
to have successfully planned a happy future for her. Settling Kartaro and finding for her a husband is an important responsibility which is gladly owned by the women. Kartaro is hopeful about the future. The fear of not getting married like other girls and going to her sasural haunts her. But at the same time the thought of leaving the haveli forever saddens her. However, the sudden fixing up of Kartaro’s wedding is an interesting event, with much excitement and practical calculation. This episode reflects on the limited options available to a poor girl (P.77-80).

On the first neondra, Shahni cleaned up the kitchen. A huge deg of kheer was cooked on a slow fire. The semolina began to be roasted in the karahi. As Chachi added in a handful of badaams and raisins, Kartaro’s mouth began to water. ‘Shahni give me a bite, just to taste’. Chachi snubbed her, ‘be patient Kartaro, the Karahi is pure now, let the Brahmin pandas partake the offering first’. Shahni laughed, ‘yes, why not recite some hymns, be patient, your craving should wait at least till the Panda’s comes’. Kartaro carelessly complained, ‘Shahni, the Brahmins have a hold on God as well. Here the utensils full of milk are waiting for them. It is only poor Kartaro’s heart which feels empty deep inside’. Shahni put down the karahi and told Chachi quietly, ‘Chachi, give my salwar-kurta, hanging on the ledge to Kartaro. When she wears it after her bath, it will soothe her nerves’. Chachi went inside the pasaar and brought the suit, ‘go and bathe quickly, you have to roll the puris Bhagwan panda must be on his way’. The row of pandas amused Kartaro. Kartaro began to tease the little boys. ‘Come on cat up, if you don’t eat, how will you learn to recite the Vedas? If you don’t learn to recite the Vedas? How will you get people married?’ Bhagwan panda’s son Shrinath looked carefully at Kartaro, then turned towards his Uncle and said, ‘why don’t we fix the marriage of sister Kartaro with Kulluwalwallah Sahibditta’. ‘My God! I’ll die’, Kartaro hid her eyes with her hands, and ran to hide in the Choti baithak. Shahni laughed and placed some more halwa in Shrinath’s thali. ‘Sadke jawan, Pandaji, this small child has such an intelligent mind. After all he is the son of the Kashi Brahmins’. Pandaji lifted his head from the thali and said ‘Shahni, the boy has said something very auspicious. So what if this will be Sahibditta’s second marriage? He is well provided, a milk giving animal at his doorstep and a kiryana shop. What more does one need in life, a women of good bearing, a small plain quilt for covering and some grain to eat?’. Shahni passed the bowl of kheer, ‘Pandaji, how old would he be?’ Chachi Mehri interrupted, ‘whatever, may be his age, it is acceptable to us. Today is an auspicious day. Bhagwana, by the evening reach our Shagun to him’.

The Brahmin boys were given gifts after their meal. Shahni tied the shagun of gori-chuara in a small red packet and handed five coins of silver to Pandaji, ‘Pandaji if you can make the life of this orphaned girl,
it will also relieve us of a big responsibility. After all it is a good deed. We will do everything possible for the wedding'. Pandaji touched his turban and asked Chachi, 'if the Kulluwalwallah asks the age of the girl, what do I say?' Chachi glared at Pandaji, 'Bhagwan if only we ask the age of the one going in for a second marriage, you ask us about the girl's age? Thus we will surely tell. Just take the name of the nine stars and fix the wedding of this girl'. Pandaji was not distracted, 'Shahni, try and remember how old she must be?' Chachi made some mental calculations, 'about sixteen or eighteen'. Shahni who did not want to participate in this game of deception, said innocently, 'Chachi I think she should be older'. Bhagwan Panda reminded again, 'yes, her parents died in the epidemic'. Chachi was suddenly worried and interrupted decisively, 'Bhagwan, now everything is clear. Count her age on your fingers and catch hold of the Kulluwalwallah'. Shahni called out to Kartaro who came out and immediately began to clean the utensils. Shahni felt a surge of affection for the girl, 'poor thing, she would have lost her youth amidst dirty dishes. May God give her an auspicious new beginning'. Kartaro was rhythmically shining the brass utensils with the ash. Chachi rebuked her, 'be careful, don't move so much. You must wear a vest underneath. Tomorrow, wash you hair and show them to me. Hope they are not swarming with lice'.

The lamps were lit in the evening. There was an air of wait and expectation. Pandaji returned. Handing out Patashas he congratulated Shahni, 'congratulations Shahni, have something sweet ready, Kartaro's proposal has been accepted'. Shahni called Chachi, and sent for Bindradai. 'Congratulations, everyone, Kartaro's engagement with the Kulluwalwallahs has been fixed. Maa bibi just call out for the girl'. As Kartaro casually came out carrying the jute strings for the manja's from the basement, the sight of Bhagwan Panda sent her heart fluttering. 'Kartaro, finish your work and come here. Panda ji wants to bless you'. Covering her head with her odhni Kartaro stood shyly before them as if she was everyone's darling. 'Come on touch his feet, Pandaji has brought your shagun'. A stunned Kartaro looked around, unable to comprehend what was happening. When the realisation of it sunk in she clung to Shahni and broke down, 'no Shahniji I will not go to a stranger's house. I beg you, don't send me away'. Maa Bibi chided her, 'shut-up and be in your senses. Don't talk rubbish on this auspicious day. It is because of that innocent little boy that your lucky star found its destination'. Shahni offered the bowl of milk to Pandaji, 'please take something Maharaj, what did the Kulluwalwallahs ask?' Bhagwana does not believe in hiding anything. I explained the situation clearly. "She is a fine girl and is under the shade of the Shahs..." Pandaji gulped the bowl in one breath. Chachi Mehri understood and told Shahni, 'child, bring some more milk laced with ghee. Poor Bhagwana putar must be really tired'. Pandaji said casually, 'Shahni, add some giri-churara and heat the milk on a slow fire'.

197
3.4.3 Fateh's elopement and marriage

Fateh is one of the most beautiful and attractive Arain girls of the village. Unlike the others, Fateh is full of romance. She falls in love with a man of her choice and elopes with him. Openly expressing her emotional and physical passion for him, Fateh defies all the rules of custom. It is the village elders who deftly handle the issue after discovering the hideout of the couple. The two are quickly married and the matter of her protest and articulation of desire is set at rest. Fateh is happy at what the future has in store for her, as she has trodden the path of life with her own determination (P.193-198).

The aroma of the 'hing' purchased from the Balauch still enveloped the village when something unfortunate happened. Arain's Fateh had not reached home.

'Hai, this kind of blooming youth should be covered by a 'kafan'. Imagine, no word of her after she left home in the morning'.

'Hope, no one is taking revenge. Must have murdered the girl and thrown her in the fields'.

'Forget it, the girl is at the peak of youth. The cruel man, before attacking with his knife will surely have fun'.

Goma was the first to offer a clue, 'My hunch is that the Balauch selling Mugli-ghuti has instigated the girl to leave home. That man has soorma laced eyes, which are like those of a snake charmer. The kurta adorned on his broad chest was so appealing that the young girl's lost their heart to him'. Loharan's Hussna chipped in, 'the Balauch slept in the dera at night. By the time of Namaz, both the camel and its owner had disappeared. It is said that the Balauch's have legs of iron, and can quickly go from one place to another'. 'God knows, nobody has seen anything with their own eyes'. Andher sain ka, who has cast his evil shadow on this village, that a young girl chose to blacken the face of her parents'. Mohra's Bebe grumbled, 'how long does it take to lose one's balance of mind. It is Alia's fault, he should have married off the girl earlier. After all full pitchers of butter milk are bound to spill. Why would not anyone try to lick it'. Shahni said slowly sitting near the Tandoor, 'its bad Bebe, Alia's honour and self respect is also ours'. 'I swear by the Guru's, daughter. Even I feel strongly for Alia. How many shocks can one bear in
the evening of one's life? He lost his wife long ago, and did not marry again for the sake of these girls'.

When Shahji returned from the courts in the evening he sent for Alia. As Alia crossed the threshold of the haveli, his tall carriage had lost its stature and his turban looked limp. Then he said in a choked voice, 'this is like living death for a father'. 'Sit down, don't lose heart in this hour. Tell me frankly whom do you suspect?' Shahji, she used to speak to everybody, laughing and giggling away. Whom can I pin point. Rabyan's nature is entirely different'.

Chote Shah also joined in, 'if those silly ones have crossed the river, then either it is Ambrial or Sambrial. If they have reached Gujrat, then by train to Lala Musa'. 'That doesn't seem possible. In broad daylight hundreds of people can recognise you. It will not be possible for the Balauch to abduct a girl in an alien land. I would suggest, lets look around in our own back waters before raising a hue and cry'. Hearing this Alia's heart began to beat wildly. Chotc Shah looked at his brother and said in a clear voice, 'one evening I saw Fateh and Dhadhiwala Shera near the river bank, they had apparently come out after a bath'. Alia asked with bated breadth, 'were they together?' Kanshi Shah nodded, 'Fateh came out of the field, ran towards the river and took a dip. Then I saw Shera coming out after a bath, and singing in his melodious voice. I just stood there transfixed listening'. That evening Chote Shah was returning from Bhagowal. The sun was gradually disappearing under the enveloping blue sky. As he turned the horse from the river bed towards the village, the sound of vivacious laughter from the corn fields made him stop. What did he see from a distance - Alia's eldest daughter emerge from the 'Kikar' shrubs and leap like a dear towards the sands. She quickly took off her kurta and odhni and began to swim with the flow of the river. 'Don't go ahead, you might be sucked in by the whirlpool'. Kashi Shah wanted to call out, when he suddenly saw the other reflection. Shera came out of the river and stood on the sands. Tightened his tahmad and yawned, then spread out his arms as if calling out to the river, in a clear voice:

'As I board the palanquin of love,
my heart beats fast.
The hajjis go to Mecca for Haj,
I am at peace by looking at your adorable face'.

Sitting on his horse Chote Shah was lost in remembering Illahi. As he meditated it was as if his Guru-Pir came and stood before him. When he recovered from this heady experience, the stars were twinkling in the sky and the bewitching half moon completed the picture. The river blessed by God flowed before him as if holding within it the continuity and timelessness of human existence. In that brief moment, Kashi Shah could see the visual of the abode, the final resting place beyond time and space. Here, pinning
devotees reach to unite with their Lord. Shahji got up, 'Alia if by the grace of God, Fateh is found, then is it possible to make an alliance with the Dhadhiwalas?' 'Ofcourse, Shah Sahib, if the stars of the girl are good'. Shahji turned towards his brother, 'let's take Maulviji along, also Mauladadji or Fatehaliji'.

Alia felt very panicky, 'Parvardigar, nothing could have been more devastating than such a blow for this poor man'. As Maulviji walked along, he inwardly smiled at this strategy of the Shahs. 'Whether, the one having eloped with her is a Jat or Balauch she would have surely crossed the Ravi by now'. As the horses crossed the village and reached the river bank, Chote Shah located the spot. Indeed, under the open sky either it is the kanjar's or a pair of fresh lover's discovering their passion, who seek shelter at night. Shahji had guessed correctly. Behind the thick shrubs, both of them were in deep sleep, entwined with each other. The elders waited and avoided looking at each other. As if Shera had heard some noise in his sleep he opened his eyes, looked around then woke up Fateh, 'look Fateh, near those stars there is a slight opening. When Paigambar Sahib went to meet God, as he ran, a layer of dust began to gather behind his feet. This was the milky way'. Fateh spread her arms and pinched Shera, 'go away, let me sleep'. Shera pulled her towards him. She started acting difficult. To keep their self respect, the elders announced their presence, 'just get up, dhi Fateh, such outrageous behaviour'. 'Hai, I will die, O, My Allah'. Both of them got up with a start. Fateh clutched Shera's head, 'I swear by Allah, if you go back on your promise, I'll kill you and drown in the river'. Shahji spoke sternly, 'being a daughter, you cared a damn for the honour of your family. You should be severely punished for this offense. But your good luck favours a reward instead. Shera, tomorrow your 'nikaah' will be solemnised, is it acceptable?'

Shera looked down, 'Ji Shah Sahib, Maulviji, go with Shera and explain to the family, the urgency of the situation'. Then he talked firmly to Shera, 'I turn my back to this kind of callous behaviour. But Burkhardar you are getting a chance to come out clean. So make the best use of this lease of life'. Alia's throat felt tight. he placed his hand on Shera's shoulder, 'don't go back on your word putarji, I have no face left to say anything, after all I am the girl's father'. As Shera offered his salaam to Alia, Fateh hid her face in the odhni and broke down. Alia rebuked her, 'why are you crying now? Now that your deeds are exposed to the world. Pray, that whatever, Shahji has decided for you is faithfully, executed. Otherwise my daughter the reward for such a deed, would have been to hack you into pieces, and throw them in the river'.

Thus, Fateh's wedding becomes a very lively affair, with lots of teasing, leg pulling and sexual innuendos. The next evening, Shera's 'junj' reached Fateh's doorstep. The women, received them with 'Sithanis' (P.197-198):
'Babb aapne hi change re
Sher Ali Lal Chira
To Chadte hain Janj re
Sher Ali Lal Chira...'.

After the nikah, all the young girls surrounded Fateh and Shera. Both of them made a striking couple. Rasooli came near and pinched hard, 'come on Fateh, swear on God, that only today you have become a bride'. Hearing this made Sher Ali blush. Fateh laughed and hid her face in her hands glowing with intricate designs of mehandi on them. 'Never leave this good for nothing. Keep him tightly under your leash, otherwise he will go fishing in the river'. The girls began to sing.

'Aaar bela paar bela,
Vicch babul gherya...'

Rabyan who was standing near would look at her sister Fateh and then at her groom. Reshma came, and hugged her, beginning to tease, 'why gulbadan', just look at yourself as well. Now that Fateh has found her anchor, let's see where you go for a dip? Noorie, pulled her odhni, 'look into her eyes, it's not one but two Chenabs reflecting brightly'. 'Leave me alone'. Noorie did not turn, then in everyone's hearing distance said, 'why not tell all of us about the bank on which your boat will come to rest?'.

3.5 Gender, Power, Sexuality - The Scenario of Marital Adjustment

Marriage brings along with it a practical adjustment to reality. After the excitement and glittering ceremonies, one has to bow to various routine imperatives: reconciliation to domesticity and to sexuality, consolidation of one's position in the family, producing children, maintaining one's attractiveness, and charm over the husband and at times curbing one's awakened passion to the dictates of social custom.

3.5.1 Bindradai - Curbing of passion

Bindradai the wife of Kashi Shah is an unhappy woman. As a wife she has everything she had ever coveted, a good house, prosperity and children. Yet she is unhappy and cries.
inwardly at what she is missing. She has lost the old rhythm of her relationship with her husband. The withdrawal of his physical passion in pursuit of his spiritual quest, has left her alone, hungry and unhappy. There is no way she can articulate her as yet unsatiated desire as a woman. Even it is a torment for her to admit this failure of her marriage to her Jethani Shahni. For she has to always reconcile herself with the image and reverence shown to her ‘Sufi’ husband. A reverence which she herself feels as well, thus making her gradually regard him from a distance. He is no longer her husband, enjoying the ordinary pleasures of life but a spiritual being who exists on a higher plane, someone who has to be respected and held in awe. It is this contradiction which is breaking up Bindradai (P.284-285).

‘As the Shahni’s crossed the shops, they pulled their veils across their face. Shahni avoided the dirty lane. She looked at Bindradai who was smiling to herself. ‘No jethani, I laughed seeing Jeewan Halwai’s Hatti, it just rekindled old memories’. ‘Come on share them with me for God’s sake’. ‘Jethani, those days, I was carrying Gurdas. My Shah felt affectionate towards me, and kept on gazing at me for a long time. As I started to get up, he said, “if you want something Bindradai just tell me”. And me, the foolish Shuban Kaur, I could have asked for some gold or silks. Guess what I demanded from your devar?’ A piece of jewellery or some fabulous silks is all I can think of. ‘Now don’t laugh, I asked for some barfi from Jeewan Halwai’. Shahni was laughing, ‘what did my devar say?’ He patted me on my head and said indulgently, “Bindra you are in your sasural and have not left this childishness behind”. ‘Bindradai, you are such an intelligent and perceptive women. But is this something to ask for? Our house is full of milk and cream. You are the indulged daughter-in-law. Come, since you have remembered the old romantic days. I shall treat you to some burfi’. Shahni looked around, lifted her veil, then pointed to the tray of burfi ‘A quarter ser of burfi please’ she untied the edge of her pallu and paid the money.

Bindradai was suddenly sad. ‘Okay, if it pleases you dear sister. You asked and I told you. So today I have accepted a gift from you, this Sangranth, consider me your Brahmani’. Shahni felt irritated, ‘come on, why start all this today? Our good deeds have not come to an end that we have to survive on others’. ‘What can I say, jethani, your devarani has lost the colour of life’. ‘Shut up, control yourself, don’t speak wrong things’. ‘Jethani, your devar has become so obsessed with spirituality and devotion to God, that this unfortunate one has lost all that she shared with him’. Shahni’s heart missed a beat, ‘I hope you are in your senses. Argued with my devar or something?’ ‘I swear by the Gurus, why should I lie to you? My elder bharjai had taken me to ‘Mian mast’ a year before last. Jethani, I was given a lethal potion to win him
back. But my heart could not agree to such deceit. My husband is like God. I could not play games with this 'Sant', to enjoy the mundane pleasures of life'. 'Bindradai, you have been carrying such a heavy burden in your heart. Shri Ram! Shri Ram!, my devar is a revered soul. It is the reward of our good deeds that Kashi Shah has been born in this house. May he live long. But devarani, why did the Creator play such a game?' Choti Shahni said slowly, 'sometimes, I sit all by myself feeling frustrated and cry'.

'Bindradai, the hunger of one's body is an all-consuming passion. Pray before, Dhamdev, to bestow drops of water to cool you down, while the passage of time, lulls the intensity of your pain'. As Bindradai climbed the steps she was again the protective indulgent mother, 'Jethani Gurdas has a real craving for sweets. At night he keeps lumps of jaggery hidden under his pillow. He will love a piece of this burfi'.

At the entrance of the kitchen, Shahni wondered, 'why should one be deprived and left thirsting for one's desires at an opportune stage of one's life. 'Mebronwa! keep your benign and protective gaze on this house'.

Bindradai's frustration and unhappiness finds reflection in her outbursts and silent resentments in various activities of the household and on ceremonial occasions. For all that is left for Bindradai is her anthropological role to sustain her while her existential being is troubled deeply. The occasion is the distribution of clothes and gifts in the family as 'shagun' after the birth of Lali Shah.(P.160-162)

The attention was once again diverted to the clothes, 'Bindradai just count the number of silk suits'. 'There are six Chachi, five for the boys 'Phupis' and one for the boy's mother. 'If you ask me, the sixth one is for the boy's Chachi'. 'If one accepts that then which one is for jethaniji?' Chachi felt pensive, 'I wish Kashi Ram had thought about it, where he had bought six pairs for the shagun, he could have got seven'. Choti Shahni spoke with a slight irritation, 'I am no one to rebuke him, but all the saving is done on me'. 'Come on, he got you a lot of silks when Gurdas and Kesholal was born'. 'True Chachi, but that extravagance was shown by my jeth'. Chachi called out to Maa bibi, 'go downstairs and find out if the seventh pair has been left at the shop'. As Maa bibi came back she started teasing Choti Shahni, 'Kashi Shah will never lose out to you. The sixth pair is yours, while there is a pink one for Shahniji, just open the other bundle and see'. As the pink silk, with its salma and bead embroidery was taken out, it seemed to overshadow everything else in view. Chachi Mehri kissed it. and placed it on Shahni's lap praising Kashi Shah for his taste, generosity, and Shahnis luck in possessing such a considerate devar.

Choti Shahni could not hide her jealousy, 'whatever, you may say, even I like the pink one. The red one
from my wedding is as good as new'. Chand Kaur came out with a suggestion, 'Choti bharjai, both are equally beautiful, you can later, pass them on to Gurudas and Kesholal's wives as their wari'. 'No that's a lie, my heart is set on the pink one. If on such an occasion I don't speak my mind, then will I do it in my old age?' The older ladies felt irritated and apprehensive at Bindradai's behaviour. 'Bindradai try and see reason, your jethani is seeing this happy day after such a long penance'. 'Sister, I am even happier than her but this is a question of one's choice of colours'. Shahni did not let this incident dampen the spirit of the day, 'I respect your choice, after all by the grace of God you are Lali's Chachi. Pick up the one you like'. Bindradai was very happy, 'Jethani you know what I want, but if your devar creates a fuss?' 'Forget it, I am giving this to you for sharing my happiness, if my devar says something, I will handle it'. Seeing the kabuli daryai for her, made Chachi cry, 'I bless your lord Bindradai, but you tell me will there be an occasion to wear it or I might just present it as someone's wari'. 'What is this Chachi?' 'Rabyan bring Lali here'. Shahni placed Lali in Chachi's lap, 'Chachi, swear on me. He is your son, not mine'. Rabyan got a kesri suit and pink chuni, Maa bibi a tehmad kurta etc. Noorie and Channa were called to embroider and apply tinsel on the duppalas. The women gathered together for ghoris...

3.5.2 Facing neglect, rejection or abandonment by the husband

The plight of the women as wives has an element of uncertainty. If they fail to perform their anthropological roles or lose out on their charms, the possibility of abandonment or reconciling with a second wife becomes very real. It could be Maa bibi, whose husband Illahi has left her for another woman. The helpless woman has no choice but to seek shelter in the haveli. Or Hakam who brings in a new wife Bholi after Goma is unable to produce a child. A similar crisis is faced by Wadhawa Singh's wife Nacchatar Kaur. Shahni herself is threatened by the possibility of such an eventuality. Thus, the whims and fancies of their men continue to rule the roast. Failure in their anthropological role becomes the excuse to find an easy replacement for the wives.

3.5.2.1 Maa bibi - The long wait

The story of Maa bibi represents one instance of the sad plight of many women abandoned by their husbands. Her husband Illahi has left her in pursuit of the bewitching
Bharvi a Kanjari from Hindustan. Maa bibi has sought shelter in the haveli and is under Shahni's protection. In return, she looks after the haveli, doing many odd jobs, going to the fields with the food etc. Though Maa bibi has found her place in the haveli, yet she is generally tossed about as a woman without status. Trying to be cheerful she continues with mundane living while waiting for Thanedar Salamat Ali to trace her husband. Time moves on, till one day her wayward husband comes back to claim her as suddenly as he had disappeared. Completely, bewildered and lost he is almost an emotional wreck. After severe reprimand and warnings, Maa bibi begins life afresh with him, reconciled to her destiny, but now stronger as she has the backing and support of the haveli (P.47-48).

'Maa bibi picked up the lamp from the crevice and went towards Chachi's cot. Chachi lay covered with a 'loi', her head facing the wall. Maa bibi quietly sat down, pressing Chachi's legs. She began to think about herself. For an unfortunate one the future is like that of a bleak dark winter night. At the thought of her husband's infatuation with a prostitute she broke down. Chachi uncovered her face and began to comfort Maa bibi. 'No child don't cry for such a good for nothing man. After being kicked out from everywhere he will be back with you. So don't worry. Remember my words'. 'Chachi, this time when Thanedar Salamat Ali comes to the village. Please tell Shahji to talk to him. May be my man could be reformed with a slight use of force'. 'Maa bibi these matters are not solved by the twirling of men's moustaches but by divine justice delivered by God. Your stupid fool, will either be back by winter, or would be hanging around as a 'pimp' somewhere in the prostitutes mandi'. 'Chachi, I have heard that Kanjari Bharvi belongs to Hindustan. If she takes him across the five rivers then how will I meet him in this birth?' 'Shut up girl, talk some sense. Lovers don't die for all that glitter. A prostitute only loves dimes. After being kicked out of everywhere he would come and seek you'. 'May the power of your words, make this happen'.

The long wait is finally rewarded by Illahi's return. This again leaves Maa bibi nervous and confused. It is Chachi's practical acumen which helps in deftly handling the unusual situation. Chachi wants to make sure that Maa bibi is never left alone again and spends the rest of her life with the security of her husband's care. (P.223-224).
There is a commotion outside the haveli. Chachi looked down from the balcony and called out. 'Who is it Nawab? Leave me alone, let me go upstairs, my Umda lives here.' 'Nawab Channa, who is it? Whose voice is this. Probably Maa bibi's husband Illahi.' 'The same one Shahni, he seems to have lost his balance.' Shahni quickly called out to Illahi, 'come on here, leave your work.' Her head covered with a black odhni. Maa bibi came running, 'you called me Shahni? Anything to be done?' 'Be careful Maa bibi, by the grace of God, Illahi is waiting downstairs.' 'Hai Allah!' Maa bibi began to rub her palms, 'what should I do Shahniji? Tell me.' 'Be brave, you have to rekindle an ashen flame. After years your husband has come in this direction. It's all the grace of God. Go comb your hair.' Chachi was supervising the 'ark'. Seeing Nawab upstairs she asked, 'who is it?' 'Congratulations Chachi, by the grace of God your son-in-law is here.' 'Who, Oh! Illahi, come in putarji, make yourself comfortable, someone quickly get a manji.' Illahi continued to stare rather blankly. As Maa bibi came near he could not recognise her. Chachi offered him a bowl of lassi, 'today this mother is feeling really satiated with your return, putarji have some'. Illahi gulped the bowl of lassi and asked, 'where is my Umda?' Chachi said affectionately, 'here is your property Maa bibi.' 'No...No, not her. I want Umda. Please let me meet her.'

Chachi advised Shahni, 'give Maa bibi something glittering to wear. So that she becomes the gorgeous Umda jingling her trinklets.' 'Putar Illahi, seeing you after ages, were you away on some work.' Nawab laughed, 'Allah beli why ask him? He is busy in the service of love. Chachi he is not even in his senses. I don't know how he has found his way here.' Chachi signalled Nawab to stop 'let me talk to him. Putar who is this Umda Begum?' Illahi nodded his head, 'one Begum, and numerous Nawabs. Everyday new pleasures of life.' Chachi called out to Rabyan, 'give your brother-in-law something sweet. Take out some jaggery from the pitcher. Let me have a look at his bride.' As Maa bibi came out with Chachi she could not be recognised. Over the 'Chamki' dress a tinselled pink duppata. Blooming in her long neglected youth. Chachi pushed her ahead, 'young man, she is no less than Umda, perhaps even better. Putarji take her home. Hope you remember where it is?' Illahi laughed, 'home is where Umda is'. Chachi came near Maa bibi, 'these are all the blessings of God. Go down from the Tabela stairs and enter the 'Charkhawala Aangan'. The kotha has been freshly washed. I'll send you a pitcher of water. Quickly make some sevian. Rabyan will go and keep some utensils.' Shahni took Maa bibi aside, 'don't argue too much with him. He is under a spell. Look after him well. God will reward you.' As both of them went down, Chachi sent word for Bebe Karbari, 'Rabyan balli bring Bebe Karbari with you, she has to cast off Illahi's spell'. Bebe had seen Maa bibi and Illahi going downstairs. She came up, got a pitcher of water filled it and cut the water with a knife.
The reality of a man bringing in a second wife, apart from being a blow to the honour and prestige to the first one also requires a lot of practical adjustments. These include sharing the man with the other woman, accepting her presence and ignoring the favouritism of the husband towards the younger one. This, this conflict between youth and age finds expression in the power struggle between the two women. The husband seemingly seeks to keep a balance between the two. Both the women try to assert themselves. The first wife trapped as she is with no choice of a different future, has to keep her position intact, while the second one has to build her foundations in the new house by dethroning the first. This is the basic conflict between Hakam’s first wife Goma and the new bride Bholi. (P.156-159)

Goma’s Sauten Bholi finished her meal. She put the karahi of milk on the Chulah and began to break the sewian. ‘Thank god, I am feeling relaxed. The other one is a rather parsimonious kind of woman, she eats like a miser and quarrels a lot with him. She got a real solid beating yesterday. It was not my fault at all’. ‘As Bholi was about to offer a bowlful of milk to Hakam, Goma, quickly grabbed her plait and abused her, “you bitch, atleast let him look at me sometimes. You cruel man, are you the only one who has ever kept two women? ’Dmias’ keep four women. But they give due regard to both the old and the new. Today with this one and tomorrow with the other. kanjari, he is my man from the last ten years. You came yesterday and have begun to control him. May your bridal bed rot”. Sain had no0 choice but to beat her. That will cool her off for a couple of days. Bholi coquettishly looked up and began to sing, the words deliberately meant for Goma to hear:

‘Wah ri wah,

a grain of ajwain

wah ri wah

look at the Nain acting pricy’
Hearing her voice, Goma spit venom, 'Phithe muh, having the cheek of making sevian for that, khasam (husband). Why not add, a dash of poison in the flour'. Bholi replied haughtily, 'I can add it in your meal. You will be relieved and we can live in peace'. 'Not daughter of the pimps who sell daughters. You will not be relieved of me at least for some time'. Bholi was now careless, 'let everyone hear the tales of my enmity. Have you ever heard of a 'sauten' being tortured so much? If my parents family sell daughters yours is a highly respected one with their own Shah-Shahukara, isn't it? They have no shame in marrying off their barren and dry daughter?' The neighbour Veeranwali could not hear all this, 'mind your tongue. She is already burning with jealousy. Time too has not been kind on her. My sister, the fertility of one's womb is all the blessing of God'. Bholi took out a burning piece of wood from the chulah, 'Hey sauten, today I will see your end. I'll put your hair on fire, even if I am sent to Kalapani. Atleast I'll get rid of you'. Goma looked down from the balcony, 'you low-caste one, have some fear of the powers above'. Bholi began to cry loudly, 'God, why did you drive a nail in my destiny, by hanging a Sauten in front of me'. 'Stop it you spider web'. Veeranwali joined in, 'you are the one who has come as Goma's sauten. On top of it such arrogance. This is a curse for a woman'. Bholi was now really agitated, 'listen all of you, the supporters of my Sauten. I did not bring my doli on my own. Ask this hollow vessel, if only she had given birth to a puppy. I would have found, my anchor somewhere else', Goma too was on fire, she pulled a cloth on her face and began 'siapa'. 'My mother residing in heaven why did you give birth to me? If you brought me to this world then why married me off to this man? Call me in heaven Ambri, otherwise, do something to this sauten'. Goma began to beat her breasts:

'hai hai sauten hai hai
your past and future hai hai
your brothers hai hai
Your Chacha taya's hai hai'

Hearing this Bholi wailed loudly, 'listen everyone, wailing for me even when I am alive. What more has this bitter tongued one in store for me? May you be afflicted with leprosy, I have not ruined anyone's house'. Feeling she had overstepped Bholi now softened, 'my parents married me off, so what is my fault? Jani Jaan why not call me as well, I'll drown in the Chenab'. Goma flashed her teeth, 'only beautiful women drown in the Chenab, have you seen your face in the mirror?' 'Obviously it's better than yours, otherwise he would not have come on his horse to take me'. Goma lifted her veil and spat, 'another word and I'll kill myself with the fires of your chulah'. Bholi collected the whole village, 'those who wanted to marry brought me here while this unfortunate one has to suffer the beatings and insults of everyone.
I'll not touch a morsel of food as long as you are here'. When news reached Hakam in his shop that war had been declared in his house, he threw the scales and rushed, 'this haramzadi, ulu ki pathi, let loose her fury on the poor unhappy soul'. Seeing her husband walk in Goma quickly hid from view. Bholi being beaten hard, gave Goma a real sense of satisfaction. She crossed the neighbours houses and reached the haveli. Chachi Mehri scolded her and said 'what's the matter, all the buttons on your kurta are open?' 'I have opened them myself, to let the air in, so that my heart can cool it off a bit'. Chachi Mehri again snubbed her, 'are you in your senses?' Goma laughed, 'Chachi, I am really happy, swear on God'. 'Goma, now stop bragging'. 'Listen Chachi, my sauten got a real beating today, which is making me feel so light hearted'. 'Now watch your words. If you express so much of joy, Hakam might just break your bones as well'. Goma happily sat on the doorway, 'may the bones of my enemies break, may Bholi's heart burn and turn to ash, today, I am at peace with myself'. Goma began to wriggle about:

'Wah, wah ri wah wah.
What a rose flower
Wah wah ri wah wah
The swirling waters of Chenab
Wah wah ri wah wah.
It's the rule of my lord'.

3.5.3 Dethroning the mother-in-law

The consolidation of the position of the wife in the family is finally complete with the dethroning of the mother-in-law and her loss of power. A process requiring a great deal of time, tricks, strategy, manipulation of the husband and guts. The process is the same whether enacted in a Muslim family where marriage among close relatives takes place, or among the non-Muslims, where a girl takes longer to adjust to her new surrounding. As the wife assumes power she begins to assert.

3.5.3.1 Sajda versus Begma

Begma is very oppressed by her phuphi and mother-in-law Sajada bibi who constantly taunts her, pushes her beyond endurance and makes her work. It is her friend Rasooli who
helps her to find a way out and to establish her control in the family. (P.112-115)

'Rasooli looked in, 'Begma bharjai, I am going to pluck cotton in Shahji's fields, propose to work for about a week. Why don't you come as well, atleast a pand or two of cotton will be ours'. 'No Rasooli, its the order of Phuphi Sarkar, I have to plaster the roof, then clean up the house'. Rasooli had tamed her 'Khala-saas' she explained, 'learn from me - this is how you operate first glare at your phuphi, once you overcome your sense of shame, half the battle is already won'.

'Then?'

'Then what, instead of grumbling silently, begin to shout loudly. You shall win the battle and your command will be obeyed. 'Forget it, my man really worships phuphi'. Let him, sadke, when he comes asking for his rights then push him away'. Begma doubled with laughter, 'you are being very bold, what if he gives a tight one?' 'Let him, but don't allow him to touch you. See how I managed it. On one hand I fought with my Khala and on the other slept with her every night. My man, would sometimes throw the utensils, or shout at the dogs giving me a hint to join him. I slept carelessly. One day when I had gone to give him food, he grabbed me from the back "Bibi, behave yourself, otherwise..." I shook him off violently, "listen my man, she is your mother and my Khala. If she begins to play the cruel mother-in-law, the fight is no longer between you and me. Let me tackle her on my own. Take away your manji from the house. Go stay with your father at the well, while I enjoy a blissful sleep with my mother-in-law".

'Begma bharjai, hearing this completely unerved my gharwala, he pushed me and threw me on the ground. I did not cry or grumble. Just dusted my clothes and said clearly, "both of you mother and son can hack me to pieces. May Khuda dry up your well. Let your seeds rot, and infect the harvest with worms", it was as if Rasooli was not talking to Begma but to her own husband. 'Begma bharjai, it was that day and today. As if a spell had been cast on my man. He pulled me close and said coaxingly, "no Rasooli don't curse me on my lands. Have I ever treated you badly. Even if Bebe misbehaves your husband will always support you". Begma's eyes began to flutter, 'then what happened? 'Listen in the evening when the tandoor was lighted up and I got the dough, my mother-in-law as usual began to grumble. "You pig headed, Rasooli why did you put damp wood in the tandoor? It is generating fumes all over". Before I could say anything, my man came to his mother and began to shout, "listen carefully Bebe, if you misbehave with Rasooli, you will be left alone moaning in this house. Khala was worried, "why is it so?" "Bebe, it is like this, I have handed over the lambardari of the house and kitchen to Rasooli. Whatever, your daughter-in-law cooks, savour it and relax. If you still want to work then fill
the quilts, work on the spinning wheel, say your prayers, keep *rozas* (fasts), Bebe you have ruled for a long time, now it is time to handover the reins*. 'Bharjai Beguma, it was as if my mother-in-law was paralysed, she fell on the manji and began to cry'.

'She got up after a while fairly calm and reconciled to the changed equation. She said, sweetly, "even glorious kingdoms have seen their nadir, so what is my subedari? Cook on your own and distribute it. I'll do what you want, I am at your service. Just tell me, who gave you this magic spell?" 'Begma Bharjai what could I say, that the magic was my own and the one who played into it was your own son'. After Rasooli left, Begma bibi carelessly began to make toys of clay. She had just finished with a camel when Sajda bibi returned with a basket of mud, 'hey, you bad breed, you haven't even set up the tandoor, you shirker'. Rasooli stood-up, 'listen carefully phuphi, enough of your *nadirshahi* I will not do the plastering today'. Sajda stared, 'I hope no jin-bhut is residing in you'. 'No phuphi, no *jin-bhut* or evil shadows, now the days of your rule are coming to an end'. 'Control your tongue, stop barking like a dog'. 'Phuphi Sarkar, I kept quiet for so long, now I will speak. I am no one's slave. I work very hard. Mix the fodder for the animals, make cowdung cakes, take the buffaloes to the pond you name it'. 'Stop, praising yourself, as if you are not the daughter of a Jat farmer but a mughal princess. Come on shed off your anger and plaster the roof'. 'Listen carefully phuphi now I am free of your bondage and will not take any insults'. Sajda bibi began to rub her hands, 'Phithe muh, don't show so much of malice, you are my brothers child and I have really indulged you, look what I got in return'. Begma got up, as if she had finally learnt the power of youth and said defiantly, 'your insults have settled in my stomach as a painful gas. Listen phuphi, if your don't mend your ways, I will prove myself true to my salt by setting up my own jhuggi'. The saying, *Ganji nahaigi kya aur, nichore gi kya*, will come true for you? Sajjada bibi was stunned, quietly she rolled the dough for the rotis. 'Hai! these are all the games of fate. It is only that woman who rules whose husband is young, strong, overbearing and potent like the rising sun. The star of my husband is now setting. What more is left, just the bitter taste. Be patient Sajjda, thank God for all you have. You have a *kulli* to stay, a *julli* to cover yourself and some *gulli* to eat. I brought up my devar like a son. But look at destiny. Till yesterday, I led him on my little finger, now Begma is shooting off from his shoulder. Come on Sajjda don't take it to heart. A woman on a rising ascendant will surely have the man eating out of her, hands. So Sajjda it was good as long as it lasted.
3.5.3.2 Bebe Nikki's cynical response

Even Bebe Nikki, the wife of the grand old man of the village, Vadda Lala faces the reality of loss of authority in the family in relation to her daughter-in-law. She discusses the transition with her husband (P.292)

like the queen of this house its 'Rajmahishi'. Bebe Nikki laughed, 'my innocent man, there is a lot of difference between the rising, blooming Rajeshwari and the declining Rajmata. The first one has all the rights and power while the other only an ornamental value'.

3.6 Women on the margins of society

It can be seen that, 'the existence of a recognised group of prostitutes is, of course a logical corollary of the conception of separate worlds and symbolic shelter' (Papanek 1982:46). This comes about in terms of the marginal significance given to the husband-wife relationship in the conservative Punjabi society, very few avenues for its emotional and sexual expression, and the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' women which inhibits the formation of close bonds between husband and wife by laying down parameters of virtue and respectability. The text too looks at the cultural presentation of these women who live outside the confines of the household. It is these women who symbolise romance, passion, refinement, talents etc. attributes which men savour and crave for. Infact a complete other to what their own women are not expected to be.

Fantasies and imagination about kanjari's, become a very important part of a young man's growing up experience. A real experience of one eventually initiating him into real manhood and also raising his prestige among the peer group. This unfolding of the mystery of sexuality is a life long process, with the Kanjari being there to provide that relief and
excitement which mundane domesticity prohibits. The women on the margins are not condemned but remain outside the social structure. 'These women were not pariahs or outcasts, they lived among us, and Gujrat contained them as a part of its life. Like other castes they served a purpose and were not scorned because they served it. They were not accepted or respected, but neither were they treated with contempt or prudery' (Tandon 1961:106).

In a graphic description of Hira Mandi of Lahore, Prakash Tandon (1961:180-184) discusses the courtesan culture of West Punjab, with their complex gradations of living spaces and occupants. 'There were four classes of houses, the very select ones of the well-known singing girls, (called to perform on weddings and functions), those of the nautch girls, of the special courtesans, and of the common prostitutes. There were of course different grades within each category' (Tandon 1962:186), indicating the level of their popularity and clientele. Yet each in her own way constituted an object of desire. The impending arrival of Buddha and Hussaina in the village creates a great deal of excitement and romance in the atmosphere. Both of them have been invited to perform at the birth of Lali Shah. The young men wait with an unexplained anticipation (P.162-168)

The Shah's have arranged a mujra-tamasha.

'Do you know that Lakhawalian Buddha and Hussaina have been sent an advance offering of hundred and one rupees'. People began to enquire from the Shah's Kamins. 'How come Chote Shah who refused the celebration on the birth of his own son, came around to say yes this time?' Badshaho, the boy Lali Shah is a long awaited reward. For everyone it is a time to celebrate.

'Yes, one look at them will create a flutter in our heart and soothe our thirsty eyes'. 'Mohommaddina Umda Kanjari, has gone to the Peroshah's to congratulate them. That's why it is the turn of Buddha and Hussaina, Isn't it?' 'Nawab Ustad, I hope you have acquired a new dress for the occasion, otherwise yaar, the fairies will not even spare a glance at you'. 'Badshaho, tell us will the women get down at the Shirinwala well or Dara's Chabootra?' The young men sang Heer to lessen the moment of waiting. Kokila started off:
A pair of lovers
came and professed their love,
on the river banks.
It was a game of love,
played by the two roses in full bloom.
They were congratulated by everyone,
sadke on the river Chenab
where Heer proclaimed her love
consumed in the whirlpool of emotions....

Everyone, gathered remembering their own beloveds and romances while offering Salaam to 'Mai Heer'.
'Both Heer and Ranjha are present in this majlis. As our folklore says, everytime the quissas of their unique love are sung, love will blossom in the heart of the lovers, their eyes will glitter with the glow of love. Similarly whenever, the painful notes of Heer are remembered, the souls of Heer and Ranjha will be present in every such majlis'.

'Look over there wearing her wedding dress, Heer Syal is present in our gathering'.

'On the opposite side, - in the garb of a jogi Darvesh, Ranjha of Takht Hazara is waiting on the river bank. That is his form. Yaaron, offer your Salaam to the divine lovers'.

'Accept our Salaam mai Heer! The boys moved their hands with reverence'. Kokila got up and spread his arms.

May the path of the lovers brighten up,
the Sun reflecting its brightness on them,
lightening them from inside sparkling their souls.

Lying on the sands, Bakhtawar got up, 'there is a mazar of 'mai Heer' in Jhang Syal. I must ask for a boon and reach there one day'. Gholu teased him, 'yaar Bhakhtawar, take Noorie along. She remained, pretty loyal in your absence'. Ladda came and joined in, 'I have mixed the fodder and come. God knows if it will be easy to get away for watching the mujra. You know the temperament of my Baba'.

A full moon night. Tents have been set up for the talented ones on the river beds, the covered ground, paan
daans, ittardans, peekdans, baskets, shamadans etc. The young men of neighbouring villages too had gathered on the river banks clapping away. Some one brought the news from Shahji's haveli. 'Yaaron, the Lakhanwalian, will reach tomorrow by boat.'

'So that means, tonight we will not move from the river bank.'

'As it will be morning, two moons will rise from the east'. Kocchar's Bodu, slapped Jalalu on the back, 'the sarangis and tablas are still far away, and you are talking of the rising moon in the morning'. 'The world can say whatever, it wants, for us Buddha and Hussaina will always be moons'. 'Okay, but the quissa of a rising moon in the morning is an innovation'. Kokila laughed, 'Badshaho, there is nothing difficult in this. Just narrate the quissa to my Chacha, he will quickly rhyme it'. Buta knotted his hair again, 'my father was telling Bebe, that Kunjawali Gohar jaan claps rhythmically like the chiming of bells'. 'Forget it yaar, as far as clapping goes, even the Mirasis and Naqqals are no less. Spread your hands, and rhythmically beat them. The dancing girls reap the benefits of their training'. 'Leave it, all they do is to sing a few intoxicating numbers, swing about in their ghungharooos and torture men's hearts. How else do they make a living?' Madad Ali's eyes opened wide, 'it is said that a Kanjari's kiss and lick destroys a man'. Buta added proudly, 'it is not necessary that Kanjari's start hugging everyone they can lay their hands on. They are women of refined taste and style. The dresses they wear...'. Jalalu snubbed, 'you fools, why build castles in the air. Tell me Buta, when were you born to have already visited Lahore for a glimpse of the Kanjari?' 'I swear by God! I have seen it all with my own eyes. On the wedding of my younger 'mama' at Sodhra, Kunjawali Mumtaz was called to perform'. 'You slimy one, why didn't you ever mention it before? Just one glimpse of a Kanjari in her shimmering dress is enough for a man to fall madly in love with her and go berserk, sing tappas all the time'. 'Don't believe me, they are such a picture of grace and beauty, that one is bewitched even by the hands which, offer you salaam'. 'Come on Buta, what was the Kunjawali wearing?' Buta was now really acting pricy. Spreading his hands on his forehead he exclaimed, 'she was in full finery, wearing a shimmering dress, with pearls stiched on it, a fully sequined and tinselled dupatta making a complete 'Jal' (web). A tikka on the forehead, ratan chaunk in her hands and pure gold earings'. Moolu was now convinced that Buta had indeed seen a Kanjari. He came nearer and asked, 'do you remember something which the mujrawali sang?' Gohar snapped, 'it must be some kaifi or tappa eulogising love. Come on yaar recite to us'.

I only remember:
'Na us bewafa mein wafa
Na us behaya mein haya'
(neither the disloyal one, has a sense of loyalty,
nor the shameless one has a sense of shame)

Gohar and Jalalu pulled Buta in a warm embrace, 'Oui, Buta you are quite a man, why did you keep this a top secret for so long?'

The groups of men sitting on the sand felt enamoured of the moon. The groups recited tappas, or quissas of Puran Bhagat, or Sassi Pannun and Mirza Sahiban. As Sharifu came out after a dip in the river, he threw away his wet tahmad, 'Oui, I am not feeling shy of myself but of you'. Gohar laughed 'what's there to feel shy? You possess nothing unique. This is the source from which the world originates and continues'. Gulzari nodded his head, 'one should not boast about it too much. The elders say that by fantasising about its pleasures all the time, one becomes impotent.'

The arrival of Buddha and Hussaina is equally dramatic and intriguing. From behind the northern mountains, the pink odhnis began to swing like waves. The reflection was sheer magic in the water. The boat comes in slowly, while the young boys hearts flutter as they gape at the odhnis. There is a sudden commotion, 'has anyone seen them before?' 'No one seems to have arrived from the Shah's haveli to receive them, how will we recognise them? How shall we differentiate between Buddha and Hussaina?' Kashi Shah got off his horse to welcome Buddha and Hussaina. He looked around, and noticed the excitement of young men of the neighbouring villages gathered to welcome the visitors. His words of advise 'young men, you may call it a mujra tamasha. but it requires a great deal of learning and discipline. So we should give them proper respect'. The boys were hardly interested in these sermons. 'Sure, we will respect them, but we want to know which one of them is Buddha and Hussaina?' The boats reached the river bank. Buta looked carefully hiding his face from the glare of the early morning sun. 'Look Buddha Kanjari's face is just like my Bebe'. Doda explained. 'Buta now this is what I call talking like a Sikh. Singha, no one can compete with Buddha till Rawalpindi. Her rendering of thumri and tappa is so distinctive'. Jalalu felt irritated, 'leave the experienced one alone. Look at Hussaina, it appears as if Heer Syal has come alive in person. What beauty and blooming youth!'

The mallahs anchored the boats, the sound of bangles and trinklets reverberated in the atmosphere. Jalalu placed his hand on his chest. 'I am dying God, its impossible to bear it anymore'. As he spoke
he fell on the ground and began to roll. Buddha laughed, 'Sadke on your inexperienced youth Channa. This eagerness is not because of the glittering clothes and jewellery, it is the eagerness of your young blood. Come on, the son of your mother, offer your Salaam to the fairy Hussaina'. Then she looked carefully at Buta, 'you innocent one, who is still a child. Even if you comb the world, no dancing girl reminds anyone of his mother. I out of all people am the famous Buddha Kanjari'. 'Come on Singha, once you have called me Bebe, touch my feet so that I can bless you. I even want to call you Barkhurdar'. Buta did not look at any of friends or paused to think. He went forward touched Buddha's feet, touched his head with his hands and got up. 'May you live long, have an eventful youth Singha. Sadke, at Shah's village, I got a son without asking'. Buddha turned towards Chote Shah, 'this lap is feeling rich, Shah Sahib, have you ever heard someone innocently addressing a Kanjari as his mother. These are all the blessings of Zahir Pir Sakhi Sarvar. Shah Sahib congratulations on the birth of Lali Shah', 'Thank you and congratulations to you as well!'

As Buddha and Hussaina moved ahead with their typical swing, the young men looked at each other lustily. Completely infatuated, Bakhtawar called out. 'Rabba may we know - whether the shoes which adorn their feet are the lucky potuhari or saleemshahi one's?' Kashi Shah looked back and said in a clear voice, 'Barkhurdar these are not Potuhar but Saleemashahi's?' Then moved ahead, his footsteps indicating that the atmosphere built-up in the village was not one for a dance performance but a 'Surood-saman' (Spiritually elevating performance).

Another discussion in the baithak highlights the role of the Kanjari in men's life. It also emphasises the clear cut demarcation between the wife and prostitute, who is a part of the milieu but not absorbed in it. She survives but on the margins. (P. 281-283).

... Fakira's attention was diverted to Dadasaheb's reward, 'Shahji, you took the reward and reached the city, so what did you do there?' Shahji looked at his younger brother, 'the moment I had Dada Sahib's prize in my hands, the idea of studying law consumed me. I left the horse at the station, boarded the train and reached Lahore, quickly buying books of law'. 'That's all Shahji'. Ganda Singh started speaking loudly, 'why do you keep on asking, that's all Shahji, that's all Shahji! Don't you know the difference between the Todarmali and Jat offsprings. Where did Barkhurdar go after winning a reward - straight to buy books. No songs or mujra... 'No'. Ganda Singh kept on glaring at Shahji mischievously, 'see this is the distinction between Todarimali Khatris and Jats. Winning the first reward of youth and where did Shah Sahib reach? To buy books of law. Now listen to the story of the Jat, if he gets hold of some money, off he goes to the dancing girls. Ah! those ghungaroos and dainty feet. A man would only want to keep on kissing them
and fall flat there.' Jahandadji mentally drew a visual of the whole scenario and savoured the moment, smoking his hookah. Din Mohammad could not help it, 'Khalsaji, so did you manage to climb those coveted stairs?'

'I did. But I was helpless, the girl was a virgin yet to blossom, like the green stalk of mustard, my heart could not reconcile to it. I happily gave her a handsome reward, got on my horse and reached back home'. Mauladadji laughed, appearing ten, twenty years younger than what he was, 'Khalsaji, this is hardly a brave feat, that sweet poppy deserved a proper evaluation'. 'That I did Badshaho, once in a year. After every harvest I paid a visit to the beauties'. Gurdit Singh said, 'if you ask me it was a costly bargain. One who drinks to his fill has a hope of getting sober again. This is like running after a hare, neither the giving nor the receiving heart got satisfaction'. Ganda Singh felt really inflated by a few inches 'now listen, this happened a year before last. I went for the baishakhi mela at Wazirabad. It was a lively crowd, Kushti, Saunchi, Kabbadi - the usual mela stuff. There I bumped into Madhiwala Kabool, first we had jalebis followed by hot milk. Then proceeded to the tent of the 'talim-walis' (the trained ones). Badshaho, Kabool has watched the performance of every courtesan in the area. As we passed one tent, we heard the 'athwara'.

On a Wednesday
I hope my beloved is in high spirits.
On this day,
I am not in my senses,
I am enamoured of my lord,
who pulls the threads of my life.
So today it's Wednesday,
my love will come
anxious about my well being.

'I was convinced, this has to be Ayesha's or her sister Nooran. We reached inside, the place was lighted up, a waif like virginal girl performed the dance, while Ayesha enticed everyone with her singing of 'athwar'. 'I did not say anything to Kabool, but kept on looking at the innocent girl and Ayesha, a confusion in my mind, blurring my vision. As the girl offered her salaam, I gave her eleven rupees. Ayesha also joined in and offered her salaam. I could not take my eyes off that bewitching face. I took out eleven more rupees and presented them to her'. Now listen to what the dancing girl Ayesha says, "Singhji, this reward is not my due today, but I accept it humbly. From now on this girl is at your service".
Mauladadj, I felt sad, thought wistfully, that these were the shades of life. The first time I reached her 'Chabara'. Aeyesha was a little girl, and now it was the turn of her daughter to be initiated. "Aeyesha, you are the calculations of life go on, but for me both of you are alike". Aeyesha looked down and offered her salaam, "your dimes have always been really lucky for me. May God protect you". 'Wah! wah! the bibi said something which carries weight in gold'. Jahandadj also appreciatively endorsed, 'very true, on reaching that Chabara one becomes a real man. They possess beauty, manners, music, culture and morality. Their lips with which they speak are sweet anyway.'

Shahji laughed like a veteran. 'In this otherwise satisfying game, the only lack is of stability and domestic bliss. As for the heart, it can readily weave its love nest there'.

3.6.1

The collage on the women's world, brings to life the richness and diversity of the inner world of the women. It is a world full of colour, life, excitement and passion. It is a world of struggle with the self and the anthropological world. It is in this struggle that the women move out of the confined roles prescribed for them and express their dreams, desires, unhappiness etc. Shahni, Bindradai, Chachi Mehri, Rabyan, Barkati, Laxmi Brahmani, Fateh, Mitthi, Goma, Shiri are all women of substance. They share a deep bond with each other - the umbilical bond of womanhood. It is this link with each other which gives them the strength to assert their identity, at times within the framework of the patriarchal world, at others questioning the world. A deep insight into the bond linking Punjabi women across caste, class and regional boundaries is provided by Gill's analysis of Warris Shah's Heer:

...Heer does not opt for an easy solution of death like any ordinary girl she succumbs to the historical weight of centuries of historical repression. No wonder every Punjabi girl can easily identify herself with Heer, for her martyrdom, if this word is still to be used is in her suffering, in the torturous existence she leads at her in-laws. But her struggle is crowned in the cosmic voluptuous celebration in the Kala Bagh, the black forest, the garden of eden. The celebration is a victory of mind and body, of cosmic forces of virtuous steadfastness over the stubborn under currents of anthropological world. Here, again, Heer is in perfect consonance with the flights of every young girl of the Punjab, who must suffer but who must also succeed (Gill 1989:164).
References:


Gill, Harjeet Singh (1977) A Phulkari from Bhatinda, Punjabi University, Patiala.


Kakkar, Sudhir (1979) *Indian Childhood,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi.


