THE PRACTICE

3. Sati in Rajput families of lower than royal rank.

While attention remains focussed for the most part naturally on sati by the rajas, or legally married wives, and concubines of rajas, there seems to be little doubt that sati was also practised by the wives of men of the royal family who stood lower in rank than the raja himself. This would thus include wives of the younger brothers of the rajas, wives of princes and other near blood relations. In the nature of things the evidence in this matter is somewhat less specific, because so much of life in the hills centred around the raja. But even so whenever we are in a position to locate it, the evidence seems to point to sati being practised at this level also widely.

The large number of harejies at Kandi, Suket or Naggar are in themselves fair indication of this (see figs. 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29). The stones there are far more in number than the number of rulers who actually sat on the throne. And one is naturally led to assume that many of these slabs commemorate deaths of the princes of the blood royal followed by sati of their wives and concubines. Such a situation would entirely
be in keeping with the idea, that the honour of the family must be kept unstained and quite clearly the preservation of this honour was in the care not only of the Rajput chief himself or of his wives, but also of those who stood immediately close to him.

One could take the case of the brothers of Raja Pritam Singh of Kulu about whom we have detailed information in the Haridwar bahis of Pandit Som Nath cited before. The younger brother of Raja Pritam Singh, Charan Singh, is recorded as having died in A.D. 1798 and when his ashes were brought to Haridwar they were accompanied by the ashes of 6 wives, 1 khwaja, and 2 maidservants. Yet another of the brothers of Pritam Singh, Mian Prem Singh, is likewise recorded as having died in A.D. 1798; 5 khawas and having burnt themselves with his dead body.

1. Both these brothers, Mian Prem Singh and Mian Charan Singh, like Raja Pritam Singh, were saptarshi, not being born of a legally wedded wife of their father, Tidhi Singh; the colophon at the end of an illustrated Sundar Shringar manuscript in the Chandigarh Museum, describes Pritam Singh as 'born in the palace' of Tidhi Singh. See B.N. Goswamy, "An Illustrated Manuscript of Sundar Shringar", Roopaksha, 1972.

2. Kulu Bahi of Pandit Som Nath Chaklan.

3. Kulu Bahi of Pandit Som Nath Chaklan. With both these entries there are of course long lists of other persons like purohits and attendants who came with the ashes of the Mian's and their satis.
There is clear evidence recorded by Moorcroft again on this point. For Mian Fateh Chand whose wives were preparing to become sati when the Mian was cured by Moorcroft, as he mentioned, was the younger brother of Sansar Chand.

According to a tradition when Balwant Singh of Jasrota who was in exile from his home, died at village Lanj, in the former Guler territory, six of his wives became sati when he was cremated by the river side. This spot is still pointed out by his descendants who are settled in Tika Bandrala. From Jammu there is similar evidence. One of the sons of Raja Gulab Singh, Mian Udham Singh, pre-deceased him (in A.D. 1840) and since the ban on sati had yet not come into being in these parts, his death was followed


2. Pandit Vastu Ram of Tika Bandrala near Mauza Lanj interviewed. Pandit Vastu Ram comes from a family of Khajuria purohits who served Balwant Singh and came away with him from Jasrota. I am grateful to Prof. B.N. Goswamy who brought this fact to my notice.

3. It is not certain, but he is probably the same who figures in some of the best known Sahari paintings of the pre-Kangra school, in the hand of the artist Nainsukh.

4. According to Thakur Han Singh, along with the six rani, a she elephant also died at this time by thrusting her trunk into the fire of the funeral pyre. Whatever the authenticity of this tradition this recalls to mind instances of similar 'suicides' by animals at the death of their masters.
by the sati of his wife Sukhdevi who was from Kalesh.

Satis from the wazir families are likewise known and must indeed have been common where the wazir was a Rajput of a high grade. One knows of the wazirs in certain states being other than the younger brother of the Raja himself; in such a case the practice of Sati was only to be expected as belonging to their family. But even in other cases, one hears of sati. The wazirs of Nurpur, unrelated to the rulers, were also of the proud Pathania clan. It is from this family that the chivalrous Ran Singh who led the revolt against the British in 1845 came. The family estate of this family at Basa Nazirn at the foot of the Nurpur hill still has some dehriya by the river bed. In Akhnur there is the well known shrine of Trinta Bhagwati which celebrates the sati committed by the wife of a member


2. See, thus, the practice in Chamba, where in several reigns the Raja had his younger brother for a wazir.

3. The valour of Mian Ran Singh is celebrated in a folk ballad or Var which is sung to this day by the dhadhia in Nurpur.

4. Wazir Kartar Singh, minister in the state of Himachal Pradesh, comes from this family.
of the wazir family of Pawar Rajputs of Ambera. That sati however falls in a slightly different category as will be seen below.

Evidence becomes more and more difficult to locate as one comes down in the ranks of hierarchy among the Rajputs. For even though one does it, it is rather scattered in nature and serves more or less as a reminder of the fact that the rite was one that was to be strictly observed by "all true Rajpoot females."

Seven dehris, all of Kharwal Rajputs stand together in village Thural, in Kangra district though these dehris belong to different families. Out of these dehris, one belongs to a family of Iika Bhander, 3 to Tika Thana, 1 to Tika Naiker and 2 to Tika Ghur. The story very commonly told about the sati of Tika Thana has already been mentioned. Another dehr of a Katoch family stands in village Saracha in Kangra. In village Ghare, 4

1. Narsingh Dass Narjis, larakh-i-Doura Dass, op. 322-323.
3. Shri Rashamber Singh of village Thural interviewed.
4. The information of dehris like this listed here is based for the most part on the field work, done during the course of this work in the hills.
Brahman, in Chamba, people worship sati imma, who was a Rajput woman, wife of one Daniji. The shrine of this sati is devoutly worshipped. People come to it for the grant of a wish or mannats and pay homage to her stone image. In her memory a mela, a fair also gathers every year. In village Balugalo, in Nurmur, there is a dehri belonging to a Rajput lady. Dehri of Pathania Rajputs are found both in village Kothi and village Dhameta in Nurmur. The sati of village Kothi is referred to as being of the "Dhuan Vansh" which clearly is an error for "Tasar Vansh" another dynastic name of the Sundar family of Nurmur.

One can quite clearly not be emphatic for want of certainty about the amount of evidence which might have existed once and no longer exists now, but the suggestion does clearly come to one's mind that the lower one came in the stratum of Rajput ranks the less was the incidence of sati. Fairly clearly, this is not to be ascribed to the lack of faithfulness or devotion among the wives of Rajputs of lower ranks, the matter is


2. Chaudhri Nanak Chand Sonha of Nurmur interviewed.
to be explained, as we have seen before, in terms of the close connection between Rajput pride and the custom of sati. The less the pride that a Rajput family had to uphold or claim or live up to, the smaller was the obligation for going through the rite. At this level if sati was practised it was a matter of personal choice or preference rather than a social or moral obligation.

Other than Rajput sati:

What we have said above seems to be even truer of sati among other castes in the hills. These one can almost certainly regard as clear cases of wifely devotion because of the absence of social or family obligation to become sati. To be sure such sati were not altogether rare, although these must only have been relatively far fewer. It is interesting that in the plains we hear quite often of Brahmin sati, but not so in the hills. This may well have had something to do with some difference in the status that the Brahmins

1. In the plains especially in Bengal, Brahmin sati are indeed very commonly heard of, especially during the early period of British ascendancy.
enjoyed in the plains and the hills. In the plains they stood perhaps indisputably at the head of the hierarchy of castes, thus having the kind of obligations of pride that the Rajputs had in the areas where they were not only the rulers but also stood in same ways at the top of the caste ladder.

The monuments commemorating the sati of castes other than Rajputs were for the most part less imposing and less cared for, so that one comes upon anonymous monuments like heap of stones known locally as Pathera-da ghbera or chharsa. It is difficult to identify the castes or families to which these heap belong but heaps like these are found at many places like Khilra (see fig. 40), Jaisinghaur, Sarayhat, Jogindernagar, Mahal, Sooti Khad, and Mahadev. A Meheri of a sati is found at village Dogh (fig. 88). It is not clearly known as to which caste the sati whose dhari it belonged to, but since the area is inhabited by Labans, and the management of the fair held in honour of this sati is also done by the Labana caste, it is not unlikely that the sati also comes from the same caste. Dhris belonging to some Good

families are found in village Tharu (fig. 92) and village Thar in Mandi, and also in village Ghur (fig. 86) in Kangra. A dehri of a Koli lady is found at village Jhikali Bet in Kangra (fig. 90). In village Neusheera stands a dehri of a Brahmin sati, and one at Bhirour too. In village Sutchler, a story is told about a Brahmin sati of that village. When Pandit Jodha, it is said, was about to die, he said to his wife, who was coming down the stairs: 'This is the right time for your also.' saying this he died, and as did his wife there and then. Both the bodies were cremated together and a dehri to honour the lady was made (see fig. 90). There is even a dehri of a Saktiyara woman, Harijan in caste at Kila Bahu in Jammu; another Harijan dehri stands also at

1. Shri Mast Ram Seel of village Sukhpaul in Mandi interviewed.
2. Shri Gokul Chand of village Tharu interviewed.
3. Shri Balwan Neeru Ram of village Thural interviewed.
4. Shri Sunder Singh of village Jhikali Bet interviewed.
5. Shri Parshotam Dutt of village Neusheera interviewed.
6. Shri Tej Ram of Bhirour interviewed.
7. Shrimati Phula Devi of village Swan interviewed.
8. Shri Kora Ram of Jammu interviewed.
Akhnur. Of the Akhnur dehri it is said that the wife of
1
the Marijan burnt herself along with her little daughter.
The dehl of a woman of Gaddi tribe stands at village
Tank in Mandi. A sati melas is held on 9th Jeth (May-Jun)
in honour of a Satl of the Sunari women in the goldsmith
caste in village Khera in Mandi district. Four dehris
2
in a group stand at village Kutah near Jai Singhaur, but
it is not unfortunately known as to which caste they
belong to. A woman of an unknown caste belonging to
village Saka in Jammu, is said to have become sati
together with her dog when her husband was murdered by
3
some people. We find also a dehri of a Kumihar or
potter's family at Kila Sahur in Jammu. Similarly the
number of dehris which are scattered around, Rawa, Litto
4
ja dehri at Jhiri belong to families of different castes
who migrated to India from Pakistan. A dehri of a sati

1. Shri Phatu Ram Rajo of Akhnur interviewed. One of
reasons given for the sati is that the wife found that
there was no one to look after her child.


4. The original dehri was somewhere in Pakistan and
the present dehri was recently constructed after the
family shifted to this place.

5. Pujari Krishan Dutt of village Jhiri interviewed.
of a Tarkhan or carpenter family is found at village Mandkai and one of Chamars at village Bhimour, both in Jammu district. In Daskaal, a village a few miles from Akhnur stands a group of six dehris of different castes of satis, one of them being of a Harijan sati. As many as seven dehris stand near an old temple of Swami Kameshwar Ji in Akhnur; once again the castes of these satis are not known beyond the fact that are not dehris of Rajputs. Two dehris of satis of Mehra families are found in Nurmur and another three dehris of women of an unknown caste exist in village Jajawi in Nurmur. Two dehris, one in village Khara and the other in village Uthra, are also of women of non-Rajput castes and in a very dilapidated condition. Apart from these, one comes across numerous dehris all along the Jammu-Akhnur road, and a few are scattered in the field off the main road. Dehris are to be found in Jawalamukhi and in the Sinla hills. In the latter, for instance, in village Koran

1. Shrimati Anbo Bhagal of village Daskaal interviewed.
2. Pujiari of the temple of Swami Kameshwar Ji of Akhnur interviewed.
3. Chaudhari Nanak Chand Sobha of Nurmur interviewed.
4. Dr. Om Parkash of Nurmur interviewed.
is a "monument associated with the memory of Pārīta Ghoti of a satī, where a fair is held annually in the honour of this satī."

Muslim Sati:

Of quite extraordinary interest is the evidence that we have about what can only be described as 'Muslim satī'. In some of the states in the Kashmir region there had been many conversions to Islam, including those of the ruling families, starting from the 14th century. Thus we find the rulers of Kajauri and Bhimbaḍ Kheṭer and Panch, among others, becoming converted to Islam from time to time. The remarkable thing, however, in all the families was the survival, as we have seen, of many Hindu customs, especially among the women who were generally more conservative in their beliefs.


This old Hindu affiliation was apparently so strong that even when a Kashtwar princess, sister of Raja Kirat Singh who had become a Muslim, was married to the Emperor Farrukhsiyah, she continued to be regarded as a "heathen" and became probably "the chief cause why Farrukhsiyah was dethroned and murdered."

We have also seen the endorsement of a jagir by Raja Muhammad Tegh Singh (A.D. 1789-1822) upon his Hindu mutchit whose services he apparently retained and the invocation of "Shri Rama Ji" by Murid Khan of Murmur, a son of Raja Jagat Singh, the opening lines of a document given by him.

It is against this background that one is able to understand 'Muslim satia' from these hill states. The Emperor Jahangir was much perturbed at the thought and wrote:

"The people of this country were in old times Hindus and the landholders are called Rajas. Sultan Feroz made them Muhammadans,

3. This document is in the possession of Pandit Som Nath Chaklan of Hardwari.
but they are still called Rajas. They still have the marks of the times of ignorance. One of these is, that just as some Hindu women burnt themselves along with their husbands, so these women are put into the grave along with their (dead) husbands. I heard that recently they put alive into the grave a girl of ten or twelve along with her (dead) husband, who was of the same age. Also when a daughter is born to a man without means they put her to death by strangulation. They ally themselves with Hindus, both give and take girls. Taking them is good, but giving them, God forbids. I gave an order that hereafter they should not do such things, and whoever was guilty of them should be capitaly punished..."

An interesting tradition is preserved about Raja Dharam Chand ruler of Bhimber, who, having been converted

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to Islam, was re-named Shahdaq Khan. He had a wife by the name of Dhakiyal; during a visit to Delhi, however, he was made to marry another girl, a Muslim. In a tragic incident Raja Dharam Chand was killed. Then the Raja was buried, being a Muslim, his rani Dhakiyal who could not bear the shock, also wished to give up her life in the true manner of a sati Mata wife.

According to the story, in response to the intensity of her wish the grave of the Raja who had been buried a few days before, opened, and the rani entered it, thus becoming sati and keeping alive the Rajput tradition. The graves of both the raja and the rani are at five miles from Shimbex town and are still held sacred both by the Hindus and the Muslims; several religious ceremonies like hair-cutting are performed by the families of Chibh Rajputs there.

From the 16th century we have another account that is of interest in this context. This is about Raja Biram Dev of Jammu who, according to tradition, was married to the daughter of a Muslim ruler. The raja

was murdered by some Muslim troops and when his Muslim wife heard of his death she erected a tomb in his honour and had herself buried alive. A child who was later found at the tomb was adopted by Guru Gorakh Nath, it is said, and became known as Siddh Gori. The samadhi of Siddh Gori is at Swankh in Tehsil Samba.

Some practices associated with sati

Of the cruelty which accompanied the rite of sati sometimes, like when the form of the rite without the substance of devotion or courage was gone through, we do not hear much in the hills. This may be due perhaps to the scantiness of the evidence which we are able to locate on Sati, or on other things, from the hills in general, but local tradition asserts that satis in the hills were volitional. It is difficult to decide whether this view is correct or not, but as far as available evidence goes, we have very little of it to indicate that force was used in the matter of satis in the hills. Thus, while from the plains there are several instances of satis being dragged to the funeral pyre, satis which thus served to cause the conscience of the

1. There is an important Natha, Jogi, Jaddi here now popularly called Siddh Swankha.
community or the state, from the hills this kind of evidence is rare. If we have any evidence on the point at all, it points to the practice being gone through with resolve and good cheer. One can think in this context of the exemplary courage of the Rajput rani of Ranjit Singh or of the rani of Sail Chind of Bilaspur who could not become sati immediately upon the death of her husband but burnt herself the moment her circumstances permitted.

This is not to say that sati held no fear because in human terms it is not difficult to imagine the trial that this must have meant. Courage of the highest order must have been required on the part of the sati, and we occasionally come upon traditions in which is reflected the need to gather it when the Supreme moment arrived. Then, it appears, the performance of some mechanical or traditional act helped the intending sati to overcome some weakness. We hear of huge round stones, thus, to which sati, before going to the funeral ground, used to come. They, it is said, used to remove these stones and see something under them, after which
they did not feel the fire on their body. The belief further was that only those ladies were able to see something under the stone who were faithful to their husbands, not others. There is also mention of a kund near Jhikli Bet in the water of which the Rani's used to see their face before going for sati.

Only in one case we have recorded evidence of an unwilling sati from the hills and that is of interest. This belongs to a late date, in the 1st half of the 19th century, and is from Akhnur.

"A quite young widow was brought to her husband's funeral pile, and, according to the custom, she was seated on it with her husband head in her lap; but when the flames reached and began to lick around her, she was unable to endure it, and rushed out to escape from them. This was a thing that seldom happened, and the disgrace of it was not to be tolerated now; the people round,

1. One of such stones is placed inside the Sambhath Temple in village Mahadev in Suket. see fig. 52.
2. See fig. 52.
most of her husband's relatives and
her own - drew their swords, cut her
down, and, hearing abuse on her, forced
the poor girl back on to the fire, and
completed the ceremony."

Sati with a token of the late
husband and
Exception to the rule of Sati

It being not always possible for the wife to
burn herself with the body of the husband, like when he
died at a far off place, sati was at times practised
by the widow taking a token of the husband to their
funeral pyre. At the death of Raja Raj Singh of Chamba
at Netri, thus, his wives who were in Chamba practised
sati there with his **kalghi**. The death of Raja Suchet
Singh of Sambha at far away Lahore, led his wives to
immolate themselves at Samba and Rannagar along with his
turban. Only rarely must it have been possible for a

1. This practice goes back to quite early times
and was described as 'Anumarana'. See Upendra
Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India*, pp.
141-143. The continuance of the practice in
Muslim times mentioned in "Life and Conditions of
the People of Hindustan", by Kunwar Muhammad
Ashraf, Article No. 4, *J.R.A.S*., of Bengal (Letters)
rani to play a stratagem like the one, that the rani of Raja Man Singh of Kulu, did to obtain the head of the Raja to become sati with. In the case of the death of Raja Sail Chand of Bilaspur, we hear of his younger rani who burnt herself putting on the clothes of the late Raja and mounting the funeral pyre.

With all the effort that one can make on this behalf the precise extent of sati even in the royal families is difficult to determine. Not all rani became sati at the death of their royal husbands, for we do hear of widowed rani often in the hills. The feeling one has, however, is that the choice to become sati or not was not really as open as the references to widowed rani outliving their husbands might at first indicate. It is likely that the exceptions to the rule of sati existed because of some of special circumstances.

It is certain, for instance that the injunction of the Dhamashastras that "pregnant women or those that

have young children", should not practice the rite of sati, was widely followed in the hills. Thus we find that when Raja Lakshmin Varman of Chamba died (A.D. 820) he left no son, but his rani, who was pregnant at the time of his death, was carried off into 2 palika by the family priest. Rajanaka Naga-pala, also of Chamba, we know, prevented his mother Salha from following his father in the pyre, "with difficulty and through his younger brother (who was still) an infant".

At the death of Raja Janardan of Chamba, his rani was 4 ensnare and did not practise sati. At the time of Rana Jhinna's death, in Kulu, one of his wives was carrying a child and the other rani of the Rana, before setting fire to the fort, sent her out of the fort. There are references to many widowed ranis living about whose reasons for not committing sati we do not know anything.

Thus, the two ranis of Raja Ajit Singh of Kulu on hearing

of their husbands' death (A.D. 1841)," instead of going on to be burnt with his remains according to the custom of the family, ... returned to the palace at Sultanpur, and began intrigues with the Sikh officials with regard to the choice of a successor to the title of Raja...."

At the death of Raja Mahinder Pal of Basohli, his son Bhupinder Pal acceded to the throne, his mother, the Jasroli rani, rendering him great help in administering the state. At the demise of Raja Semant Sen of Suket his rani did not practise sati, but instead escaped with her child.

Apart from this, finally, there are cases where the Raja himself left injunctions that there should be no sati after his death. These wishes seem to have been honoured. We hear of the rani surviving, thus, the deaths of their husbands like in the cases of Umed Singh of Chamba (A.D. 1764) and Ranjit Dev of Jammu (A.D. 1781).


3. Hutchison and Vogel, Vol. I, p. 314. "Umed Singh died on the 13th of Baisakh, Vik. 1520 = A.D. 1764, in the 39th year of his age, and the 16th of his reign. He left orders that no rani was to become sati at his funeral."

Other types of "Satis":

In the hills the word sati seems to have come to stand not only for what we commonly understand to be sati (the wife joining her husband on his funeral pyre); it was loosely applied to cover a variety of types of voluntary deaths. What emerges from the consideration of the evidence, on the subject is that when a woman took her own life for a noble cause or sacrificed herself for the public weal, she was honoured by the community and designated as a sati. Occasionally we do find cases where the element of sacrifice is not there so much as that of devotion or loyalty but the highest honour attached to a sacrifice for the public good. Somewhat lower in this category of 'satis' one case where a woman put an end to her life in protest against a wrong. This kind of death came quite close to a custom like Pawa which was widely prevalent in the hills and which referred to a person, generally male, taking his own life when he was unable to get a wrong redressed or an injustice removed.

There are several samadhs or sthans which are associated with sacrifices of this nature. The samadh of Bawa Kahan in Akhnur who committed suicide to protest
against non-payment of debt and whose wife burnt herself along with her daughter thereupon, is such resorted to. Bawa Kahan and his wife have acquired something of the status of saints for at their shrine first fruits are brought and regular worship is offered.

At Jhiri near Jammu, there is the dehra of 2 Bawa Jitto and his daughter Bua Kauri. Bawa Jitto stabbed himself to death to protest against the oppression of an official and his daughter, who was believed to be a form of Durga, herself made a fire and burnt herself with the body of her father. The shrines commemorating these two deaths are again two of the most popular in the hills.

The most famous of the sacrifices in the hills, however, may be said to be of Suhi Rani of Chamba, who offered her own life so that the curse on the new 3 capital was lifted and water could come to the town. The beautiful and pathetic folk songs that celebrate this

2. Krishan Dutt, Puja of the sthan of Bawa Jitto at Jhiri interviewed.
sacrifice make her out to be a sati in her own right.
A similar story relates to the Rukmani Kund in Bilaspur
where a lady of that name offered her life so that
water could fill in baoli there.

One of the oaths most highly honoured in the
Jammu region is that of Bua Bhagan who took her own
life to save her honour that was threatened by some
soldiers of Raja of Bhadoor and was later honoured by
a samadh being made in her name. There is also, in
Jammu, the dehra of Bawa Hambo whose wife, in mistaken
belief that her husband had burnt himself when he went
to plead his cause with the Raja took her own life
and, later was followed by the Bawa who had earlier
been alive, but chose not to survive his wife.

Some of these sacrifices are of the character
of the kind of satis that we find mentioned.

1. The song begins: "Sukrat kuriyo chiriyo, Sukrat
devi re dehra ho." See figs. 62, 63 for portrayal
of the princess and the scene of her departure for
the sacrifice. These representations are of course
recent.

2. Pandit Ram Dass of Bilaspur interviewed.


I 2
elsewhere, and also in the *Rajatarangini* in which we hear of a mother, a sister and even a daughter-in-law burning themselves as "satis".

**Sati Worship**

Quite clearly the occurrence of a sati in a family long/long in the past even now is a source of honour and pride to its members. But she is also held in great awe. This belief clearly is that having become a sati, and thus having performed the supreme sacrifice, she somehow commingled with the gods after her death and came to possess the power to bless.

1. Thus: "These ma-satis were of all classes from potter-woman to the princess. At Pataudi the most conspicuous cenotaph is that of a Jaisalmer Maharani who had come to her father's house accompanied by her young son. He was thrown from his horse and killed, and she insisted on ascending the pyre with him. It is also said that occasionally when the widow shrinked from the flames the mother would take her place." Rose, *Glossary*, Vol. I, pp. 200-01.

The worship of sati thus becomes a part, and forms, of that ancestor worship in which the blessings of those that have departed are sought on all occasions. Thus, in families which have dehri of their own, first fruits of every harvest one taken to the dehri, and only then is the rest of it taken home. A newly-wed couple is invariably taken to the dehri, where the couple circumambulates thrice around the dehri to receive the sati's blessings. At child birth, the child is taken to the dehri again for being blessed by the sati. The ceremony of hair cutting is performed at the dehri. Daily wula is performed at dehri, which are close to the homestead of the family. As a part of the wula, incense is burnt, flowers and some small coins are offered at the dehri as at a shrine dedicated to a deity. The mohar inside the dehri is given a bath with water. Thus the sati becomes, at an informal level, a kind of Kul Devi who is constantly invoked for securing the well being of the family.

A sati is something to swear by and undoubtedly as in Rajasthan, so in the hills, the saugandh or oath of the sati must have been the most solemn that anyone could take. Even today, long after the custom has ceased
to exist the sati are held in the highest of esteem
and their commemorative stones or monuments are approached
with a definite degree of awe and reverence.

The complete and unquestioning faith in the sati
is exemplified in the way in which old Gyan Devi of
Thural in Kangra district still ritualistically goes
through the ceremony of performing worship at the dehris
of her ancestors (see frontispiece). Before starting
from her house to go to the dehris, she takes a little
saffron in a small silver cup, some flowers, a little
oil, some small coins, incense, some times even small
piece of a red cloth for the sati, and a bowl of water,
all in a platter. She begins the trip by dipping
three fingers of her right hand saffron which has been
mixed into a paste and puts three dots side by side on
the ground; then she draws a circle around each of the
dots (see figs. 54, 55, 56). The first of these marks
are made near the tulsi plant which stands in the

1. Shrimati Gyan Devi of Thural interviewed. The
dehris are visited very frequently although not
on each day. On special occasion there is
virtually nothing that is done without first
worship being offered at the dehris.
courtyard of her house. After walking every ten or fifteen steps she again made similar marks on the ground. These marks she explains, indicate the path taken by the sati and they still lead the villagers to the athan, as to the athana of some other Devi or Devta.

When the dehri is reached first of all the mohara inside the dehri is bathed; one of the ladies who helps her pours the water from the vessel over the mohara; then the kapar or the piece of cloth is offered to the sati; this is later given to the oldest woman of the village in charity. Then the bhoo which consists of our is offered to the sati, and the flowers and coins are placed inside the dehri. Incense is burnt and the ceremony ends with circumambulation thrice around the dehri.

On their way to the dehri those who go chant a song in which the blessings of the Devi are invoked and her praises sung.

Not the same devotion or reverence is shown by every one as would be evidenced by the state of neglect in which many dehis and beas in the hills are today to be found. This can be put down to various
reasons including a thinning to an extent of the emotion which a sati evoked at one time. But this neglect comes more perhaps from a reluctance to undertake the effort of observing a ritual with regularity than possibly from a lack of respect for the sati. Undoubtedly, things have changed a great deal and sati is fast turning into a memory of the past, but to the older generation still, it makes an emotional appeal like few other things do.

In some of the families of course the belief in sati continues to be strong. The little earthen lamps that are burnt before barasaras, the saffron mark upon moharas inside dehri which one sees occasionally, all bespeak of the continuance of this faith. And one also comes across in the hills a person like Thakur Nasib Singh Jamwal who goes to the dehri of the sati of Mian Jodh Singh (fig. 58) an ancestor, regularly, sometimes twice in a day, to burn incense and take a round around the dehri.

Elsewhere, the homage to the sati has become a part of melas or fairs of which people in the hills are so fond. There are fairs that are held every year and fairs held for nine days of the Navratri, twice a year. At these not only is worship offered at the shrines, but much else takes place including a bazaar that comes up, and wrestling matches that are organized and music that is made by nearly everyone. But, it is on the quiet days that one can still find people going solemnly with offerings to the dehras and samadhas as they are taken to the shrines of Birs and Siddhas, in gratitude because a wish or sannat wished at the dehr earlier, has come true. A baby boy has been born, or a sick person has recovered, or a fortune restored through the blessing of the sati.

But where the sati can be benign in popular belief, she can also turn angry and nothing is more to be feared than the wrath of a sati. The

1. Typical of such melas would be such as that of Devi Sakrath or that of Merti.
fear goes back long into the past, because it has long been believed that a sati's last words come out to be true. When the rani of Raja Suraj Sen of Mandi threw their daggers on the wall of the Damedam palace, they also uttered the curse: "Mandi Kolsara Haram Khor ki Parsul", meaning "Mandi will always be in the hands of faithless and disloyal servants." The list of treacheries in the history of Mandi is said to bear this out. The curse that the rani of the Rana of Anantpur pronounced Jalpu and his descendants before going to pyre, again, is believed to have come true, for all the members of the family of Jalpu turned one by one lame, deaf, deformed or imbecile. At the incident following the death of Maharaja Khazak Singh, son of Ranjit Singh, who was believed to have been slowly poisoned to death, makes grim reading. When his

widow, Ishwari Kaur, sat on the funeral pyre for becoming sati, some of the Darbaris, we learn, pleaded with her to bless Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh. Agrarily she retorted that "as is sown so it will be reaped," saying this, she placed the head of the Maharaja on her thigh preparing to be burnt. At this Raja Dhian Singh requested her to take the crown from the head of the dead Maharaja and place it on the head of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh. The sati retorted "that it is not the crown which make a king. Kingship is given by the Immortal Being (Akal Purakh)." When the request to her was repeated, she angrily took off the crown from the dead Maharaja's head and threw it on the earth. Then she became sati.

Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, it is said, became sick at that very moment and ran high fever. Later he died on the same day, by the falling of a beam from a Deohri from under which he
was passing. One can see then how the word went around that the sati's curse had had its effect.