

6. *Sati* Worship and Marwari Public Identity in India

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The legal debate in India over the worship and glorification of *sati* (widow burning, previously spelled "suttee") stands unresolved at present. After several years of controversy, the practice of worshipping *sati* was made illegal in 1987 after the death of a young Rajput woman named Roop Kanwar. At that time the Indian government revised the colonial legislation banning widow immolation to include *sati* glorification, and thereby outlawed ceremonies, processions, or functions that eulogize any historical person who has committed *sati*. The law furthermore prohibited fundraising or the creation of trusts to preserve the memory of such persons. ¹ This legal debate over *sati* worship provides a context for examining the cultural politics of how Calcutta Marwaris have been among the most vehement defenders of *sati* worship in the last several decades. Many Marwaris maintain that the worship of *sati* has nothing to do with actual widow sacrifice, and assert that *sati* worship is an essential part of their religion, tradition, and cultural identity. The Marwari temples for the glorification of their "Rani Sati" lineage goddess are among the wealthiest temples in India, adding class and ethnic components to the ethical controversy. Indian feminists and social reformers contend that *sati* worship goes against women's democratic rights, because worshipping *sati* as a cultural value, they argue, leads to widow murder. The final legal decision is still pending in the Indian Supreme Court.



How can a practice such as *sati*, long declared illegal by the former colonial government and denounced by feminists and social reformers, be a culturally valued ingredient in the way that some Marwaris construct their identity and traditions? To understand, we must first distinguish between *sati* (actual widow sacrifice) and *satipuja* (the worship of *sati*). Even though no Marwari I met



advocates *sati* in the modern age, many (if not most) of them want to preserve their traditions of *satipuja*. ² An analysis of Marwari belief and practices of *satipuja* provides a means of understanding how a community both practices kinship and defines its public boundaries. The question of law is always already present here. Competing questions of democracy, secularism, tolerance, and the rights of communities to worship freely are central to how Marwaris themselves have understood the *satipuja* issue.

A special issue of the Hindi literary journal *Dharmayug* was devoted to a discussion of *satipuja* in 1981, shortly after the controversy created by the 1980 procession of Marwari women in Delhi. Mrs. Dinesh Nandini Dalmiya, an accomplished novelist and poet, expressed her views as follows:

Through education and legal action, the gut feeling for *sati* practices and other customs related to *sati* can be stopped to a great extent. But in spite of this, there will be one or two cases of *sati* and people will keep on worshipping at *sati* mandirs. Glorification of village culture is the norm in the country. There has never been a ban on glorification nor can there be any. Along with temple construction comes the question of our citizenship with religious rights and freedom — and how can you stop that? 3

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Others refer to family and tradition and defend their practices of *satipuja* in terms of the language of community rights. Kalavti Goenka said, "Rani Sati is our lineage goddess. For 400 years she has been worshipped by our family. The *puja* occurs twice a year, on two auspicious days. In our family, weddings, tonsure, naming ceremonies and other occasions would not be complete without her blessing." 4 Her husband, Natawarlal Goenka added, "there is no question of any encouragement given to the practice of *sati* by building a temple. Jhunjhunu's Rani Sati was a brave and sacrificing woman who inspires us. If worshipping her is found to increase incidents of *sati*, then they could also start banning the epic Ramlila's scenes in which the *sati* is shown. This is a question of our faith. Steps taken against the Rani Sati temple will be considered by us to be a step against our citizen's rights and our freedom of religious belief." 5

In the twentieth century, the lineage goddess Rani Sati has become an important symbol of religious duty and community identity for the Marwaris. The Jalan family, to which the legendary Rani Sati originally belonged, is one of the many lineages that constitute the Agarwal subcaste of the modern Marwari community. Rani Sati was the first in a succession of thirteen *sati* in the Jalan family. The precise date of her death remains unclear, though years as widely divergent as 1295 and 1595 are the two most frequently cited dates. In 1996, Rani Sati temples all over India celebrated the 400th anniversary of Rani Sati on Rani Sati's "birthday" of December 4th. 6 (This date may suggest an oppositional stance to the illegality of *sati*, because December 4th is the same date the colonial government banned *sati* in 1829.) To celebrate Rani Sati's four hundredth anniversary, the Rani Sati Sarva Sangh temple board organized a large *yagna* (a public fair organized around a vedic sacrificial ritual), ostensibly for the Goddess Durga, at the site of the main Rani Sati *mandir* (temple) in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan. Before the *yagna* took place, one member of the Calcutta-based board of temple trustees told me in an interview that he anticipated over one hundred thousand persons would attend the celebrations, with twenty-five thousand alone expected to come from Calcutta.

Rani Sati's 400th anniversary celebration did not fail to attract the attention of Indian feminists. The Mahila Atyachar Virodhi Jan Andolan (People's Movement Against the Oppression of Women), a volunteer organization and feminist activist group, filed a writ petition with the Jaipur High Court claiming that the *yagna* glorified widow immolation and was against the dignity and democratic rights of Indian women. Their legal counsel in the Jaipur Court argued that the organization of such a grand event within the premises of the Rani Sati temple constituted the glorification of someone who had committed *sati*. ⁷ The High Court responded by dismissing the petition, on the grounds that the *yagna* was offered for the Goddess Durga. However, the High Court ordered the temple authorities not to glorify *sati*, and ordered that the *yagna* had to be held far away from the main Rani Sati image. ⁸

The *yagna* was thus held in a makeshift three-story tent two hundred feet away from the Rani Sati image installed in the *garbhagriha* (the main temple hall). The High Court furthermore banned the offering of the *kalash* (a cup of water symbolizing fertility), the *chunari* (wedding veil), and the *chhappan bhog* (a 56-course meal offered to the goddess), rituals that were all seen as constituting part of the legally-disputed practice of *satipuja*. The following excerpt from a contemporary newspaper account tells of the changes that the temple authorities had to make to comply with the order from the High Court:

Following the order, the elaborate lighting arrangements have not been put to use. Said to have been brought all the way from Calcutta, where the Rani Satiji Mandir Trust has its head office, the use of light fittings, in the form of towering gateways, images of Subhash Chandra Bose and so on, were not permitted by the district administration after the first day. ⁹

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It is notable that the Jhunjhunu villagers had almost nothing to do with the temple board or the organization of the 400th anniversary celebrations. This was not merely a "local" event. Even the lighting and decorations were brought from very far away. Rather than encapsulating the sentiments of the local Jhunjhunu community, the Rani Sati anniversary festival instead served as a focal point for a diasporic group, the Marwaris, to celebrate the ties of a geographically dispersed imagined community and its remembered traditions. The original plan for elaborate lighting would have commemorated the birth centenary of Subhash Chandra Bose, a Bengali nationalist famed for his military heroism in the fight against colonialism. Had it ultimately been allowed, Subhash Chandra Bose's image would have created a connection with Bengal and would have also added a feeling of militant nationalism to the ostensibly religious festivities. This sense of militant nationalism was important in two respects. First, the image of Subhash Chandra Bose was a reflection of the nationwide celebration of Bose's birth centenary, thus emphasizing the national character of the *sati* festival. Secondly, the

inclusion of an image of a militant nationalist by Marwaris echoed the tropes of militant Hindu nationalism that are frequently used by the traditionally "warrior" Rajputs in defending their own practices of *sati*.

Temple authorities defended their religious rituals to the press, contending that the worship had nothing to do with perpetuating actual *sati*. Mahavir Prasad Sharma, the manager of the Rani Sati temple, was quoted in a popular magazine as follows:

I am really amazed by this media over-reaction. None of these girls or any others who might have come here for the *yagna* is expected to burn themselves on their husbands' pyres. ... The idea is to give them a *pativrata* (devout wife) for role model. To inculcate values that will make them good mothers and wives. And you hysterical feminists won't even allow us to do that. [10](#)

Sharma's defensive statement reveals the tension between women in the Marwari community and the predicaments of modern feminism as practiced in India. As the most economically powerful community in all of India, the Marwaris' deployment of *sati* as a valorized symbol of women's roles presents a challenge to feminist denunciations of *sati* as emblematic of the forms of violence perpetuated against Indian women. Rani Sati, I will argue, has symbolized a community deployment of certain themes of domesticity by which particular sets of gendered social norms and domestic practices become associated with the public performance of a community identity.

The geographical location of the Marwaris' major Rani Sati temple in Rajasthan is a critical element of the story. The propagation of the worship of a Rajasthani *sati* goddess reproduces a strong sense of territorial linkage between a migrant group and its imaginary homeland. The question of "tradition" is paramount to this analysis. While acknowledging that Marwari practices of *satipuja* could conceivably be contextualized as a type of "invented tradition," [11](#) my research indicates rather that the relationship between *satipuja* and Marwari identity is not simply an example of "invention." Though Marwaris themselves stress the continuity of their traditions from a distant past in order to justify *satipuja* as a cultural and community practice, it is not important to my study to make a scholarly judgment about whether or not the Marwari worship of Rani Sati is in fact continuous over the last several centuries. I want to recapture the affective and political aspects articulated in experience, without making a judgment about whether or not a particular custom is actually "handed down."



I seek an approach to the study of *sati* worship that will achieve ethnographically grounded understandings of *sati* without abandoning a feminist critique and that also acknowledges the extent to which *sati* is a debated issue within the community itself.

Locating *Sati* in Colonial and Post-Colonial Contexts

In the early nineteenth century, the widespread prevalence of Hindu widow sacrifice posed one of the most difficult challenges for the British colonial government. While missionaries and various colonial officials vehemently campaigned against the practice, the colonial state delayed the passage of legislation until December 4, 1829, for fear of unrest and rebellion among its Indian subjects. The legislation that was eventually passed included punishment for women who tried to commit *sati*, as well as punishment for those persons who were found guilty of aiding a woman to become a *sati*. Reformist Indian leaders, headed by Raja Rammohan Roy, joined the fight against *sati*, beginning a social reform movement and the "Bengal Renaissance." The colonial state's preoccupation with *sati* has been richly discussed in terms of colonial discourse theory and the "invention of tradition" under colonial rule, [12](#) problems in academic representations of women's agency and consent, [13](#) and the phenomenology of pain. [14](#)

Despite the 1829 legislation, occasional cases of *sati* have occurred up to the present day. The most infamous case was in 1987, when an eighteen year-old Rajput widow named Roop Kanwar burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre in the village of Deorala, Rajasthan. To those villagers honoring her death, Roop Kanwar was known as a *sati*, a woman transformed into a goddess by having committed a Hindu ritual of widow immolation. Twelve days after the immolation took place, Deorala villagers persisted in glorifying Roop Kanwar's *sati* by conducting the ceremony of the *chunari mahotsav* (*mahotsav* is literally a "great festival") in which women offer their *chunari* (wedding veils) on the site of the *sati*, in order to obtain the blessings of the *sati* goddess. The public outcry that arose from the aftermath of Roop's death prompted the Indian state to revise the 1829 colonial legislation governing *sati* by toughening the laws on abetment to include a specific prohibition on *sati* glorification. [15](#)

The religious justification for Roop Kanwar's death served as a warning to many liberal Indians of the erosion of democratic rights for women under resurgent Hindu revivalism, making both *sati* and *satipuja* into a matter of urgent public debate. As might be expected, the proliferation of academic literature produced in the wake of Roop Kanwar's death overwhelmingly condemned the act of *sati*. Unlike the nuanced scholarship on *sati* in the colonial period, which examines the complex interplay between the community of believers, Indian social reformers, and the legal discourse of the colonial state, much of the literature about the cultural politics of Roop Kanwar's *sati* has tended to frame the issue in terms of a rather stark trope

of the cultural backwardness of those glorifying *sati*. Journalists and academics alike have tended to describe both Roop Kanwar's death and other cases of widow murder in the 1980s with expressions such as "turning back the clock." ¹⁶ In this rendering, the actions of Roop Kanwar and the Deorala villagers were often depicted — and, it was claimed, could only be understood — as belonging to a barbaric, bygone age enjoying new life under right-wing Hindu fundamentalism.

There are, of course, some notable exceptions to the "backwardness" trope in narrative renderings of Roop Kanwar's death, particularly the work of Ashis Nandy and Veena Das. Nandy has argued that the "progressive" response to Roop Kanwar's death had more to do with the threat of the "nonmodern" in Indian public life and the attempt of some to gain political power by virtue of a presumed "superior knowledge and morality" through which representation of unpopular viewpoints is suppressed. Nandy contends that middle-class feminism cannot speak for all Indian women, especially for those who valorize *sati*, and cannot explain why or how the figure of the *sati* comes to be valorized. These feminist authors, Nandy writes, continue a colonial tradition of delegitimizing minority cultures in the name of progress and democracy. ¹⁷ Das notes that this debate over *sati* partially concerns the rights of communities to construct their own histories. Das writes,

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The second question relating to the glorification of *sati* as well as preventing the veneration of *sati* matas raises the entire issue of whether a community has the right to construct its past in the mythic or the historic mode, in accordance with its own traditions, or alternatively whether the state may exercise complete monopoly over the past. ... on the one hand we have a hegemonic exercise of power by the state, which acts as the only giver of values — and this is affirmed when even its most vocal critics turn for help to the state; and on the other hand we witness constructions of past time in such a way that all new events are sought to be understood as mechanical analogies of a limited stock of past events, a process which often leads to hegemonic control being established over the individual by the community. This is especially so when the community draws its energy from the symbol of a divine sacrificial victim, as in the case of *sati*. ¹⁸

Das contends that critiques against the culture of *sati*, which grant power to the state as a value-giving institution, may no doubt serve a very immediate and very important political purpose. At the same time, she is aware that communities may exert a heavy hand in establishing their own hegemony.

Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari's work on the involvement of the Marwari

community in the production of the culture of *sati* raises several points that are important for my study. Vaid and Sangari's approach to the question of *sati* involves the argument that a lethal combination of ideologies, beliefs, and institutions (such as *sati* temples), along with material gain, serve to undergird the moral and religious conceptions that help turn widow immolation into *sati*. They write,

The history of Rani Sati temple indicates that the participation of Marwaris in a nationalist construction of '*sati*' with its accompanying patriarchal values and Hindu chauvinism, began quite early but acquired a substantial shape in this region only after Independence. The commemoration of Narayani Devi, hitherto worshipped as a *kuldevi* or family goddess within the privacy of Agarwal homes, was converted into public worship sustained by massive amounts of money. ... No longer a family deity of the Jalans, Rani Sati [the deified Narayani Devi] is now worshipped by many castes. Years of propaganda in the form of cultural programmes, commemorative and eulogistic meetings ... have paid dividends. [19](#)

Vaid and Sangari's account has the advantage of connecting *satipuja* to a wider political context, and shows how the different ideological interests of the priestly Brahmins, Rajputs, and *baniyas* (trading castes, including Marwaris) coalesce into a patriarchy that promotes a culture of *sati*. One way to respond to Marwari mythologies about the goddess of *sati* is, as Vaid and Sangari have done, to see these stories as mere rationalizations of *sati* in the modern age, and to call for an immediate ban of Marwari worship of Rani Sati. Yet by focusing on aspects of propaganda, money, and material advantage in explaining Marwari involvement, Vaid and Sangari's analysis also demonstrates the methodological challenges that feminist and materialist epistemologies face in describing the experiences of women who are not feminists.

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Through this analytical lens, Marwari practices of *satipuja* can only be read as backward, repugnant, and disempowering to Marwari women. Belief in the worship of *sati* is relegated to a willful and deliberate patriarchalism inherent within a resurgent Hindu fundamentalism. It is true that Marwaris have begun to shift their political support away from the Congress Party, and have become more active in right-wing Hindu politics in the last few decades. [20](#)

Yet simply explaining away *satipuja* as a type of fundamentalism does little to illuminate the complexity and tenacity of the practice. Even a sophisticated and deliberately political reading such as Vaid and Sangari's analysis is unhelpful in suggesting how we might derive ethnographic insights into the lives of those with whom we, as analysts, may disagree. We need to ask whether the political stakes in representing *sati* veneration as a social pathology (admittedly a strategy to fight for gender justice in a context

of right-wing Hindu patriarchy and oppression) may tend to distort the complexity of *satipuja* and present a serious problem in anthropological interpretation.

Even if the colonial and post-colonial states have not always been wrong in stopping cruel practices found in Indian society, a fundamental problem still remains unaddressed by Vaid and Sangari's approach: they cannot account for why Marwari women might desire to worship *sati*. Instead of concluding that Marwari women are either lying or living under false consciousness, I believe that the problem lies in the inadequacy of interpretive ethnography that informs works such as Vaid and Sangari's. My ethnographic research reveals complex connections between Marwari identity politics and *satipuja* that make it difficult to decide whether the worship of Rani Sati necessarily leads to actual incidents of *sati*. Instead, I focus on how *sati* has become both a valorized and a contested idea in the way that the Marwaris in Calcutta perform, create, and produce their community identity and their traditions.

Recent work in anthropology and religion is helpful here in recapturing *sati* as an object of anthropological analysis. Paul Courtright's writing on *sati*, sacrifice, and marriage shows how two centuries of colonial and secular rule have "undermined *sati* as an uncomplicated act of religious heroism, removed it from its religious context altogether as far as the legal system is concerned, and relegated it to the category of the criminal. ... [Yet] the underlying religious values that *sati* embodied have not disappeared in contemporary India ... and have adapted themselves to changing circumstances." ²¹ By positioning himself in this way, Courtright's approach does not in itself justify the act of *sati*, but instead acknowledges the continuation of values associated with *sati* that have in some form persisted despite the rapidly changing political context. Courtright thus opens up the possibilities for an analysis of the religious values associated with *sati*, even though actual *sati* has been socially and legally delegitimized. It reminds us that even criminal activity contains cultural meaning in addition to, and sometimes distinct from, the law and order questions of the state.

Part of the problem may lie in the co-existence of a multiplicity of meanings of *sati* in the field of religious studies. As John Hawley has described, in English the word *sati* refers to an action (i.e. to commit *sati*). Yet in India, the term *sati* has traditionally referred not to the deed but to the woman herself (from the Sanskrit feminine form of *sat*: good or true), who is rendered as a goddess for her super-human bravery and strength. The *sati* in the Indian case is never therefore a widow; she becomes a "good woman" because she is faithful to her husband and does not suffer the fate of becoming a widow. The *sati*, notes Hawley, is thought of as a *satimata*, a *sati* goddess mother who is believed to be a historical individual and whose life is mythologized as a paradigm of wifely virtue. ²² Other authors concur. Julia Leslie concludes that some women believe that the *sati*

is an ideal conclusion in the ideology of *pativrata* in which the *sati* gives blessings to both husband and wife. [23](#)

Lindsey Harlan's compelling work on popular religious practices among Rajput women helps contextualize the Marwaris' worship of Rani Sati as combining two Rajput traditions, those of the *kuldevi* (lineage goddess) and the *satimata* (deification of an immolated wife). Harlan argues that whereas for the Rajputs the *kuldevi* gives protection to both inner and outer realms of Rajput experience (the home and the battlefield), and tends to be worshipped publicly, the *satimata* relates solely to the inner world of women and is worshipped at home. [24](#) The Marwaris, I will argue, combine into one figure a *kuldevi* who is also a *sati*: a goddess who provides a public representation of protection to the community as symbolized by the virtues of an inner domesticity. I do use the term "representation" quite deliberately here, to suggest that the ideal, symbolized by Rani Sati, embodies a exemplar of Marwari domesticity meant for public demonstration and not necessarily a literal model that Marwari women blindly follow.

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Comparing the activist scholarship of academics like Vaid and Sangari (who emphasize the ways that *satipuja* constitutes a criminal act but do not take its cultural meanings very seriously) with the work of scholars like Courtright and Harlan (who choose not to contextualize contemporary practices of *satipuja* within a changing set of social relations that have banned and delegitimized *sati*) discloses the tensions that attend contemporary studies of *sati*. I have already pointed to the problem of insufficient ethnography in Vaid and Sangari's approach. Courtright and Harlan embody a more relativist position that leaves aside the question of a wider, contested cultural context. Their work has the danger of representing unchanging portrayals of religious practice and meaning, without accounting for the shifting and now-hostile political and social environments in which *satipuja* is practiced. Harlan, for example, writes, "I leave to others the task of addressing the political, economic, and social implications of *sati* immolations and assessing the extent to which such immolations were voluntary." [25](#) Even while conceding that she finds *sati* "horrifying," Harlan's relativism makes her approach ahistorical. The very fact that women worship *sati* in a legal, intellectual, and social climate that overwhelmingly condemns this practice is, after all, of central importance. As Asad has aptly pointed out, it is problematic to insist "on the primacy of meaning without regard to the processes by which meanings are constructed." [26](#)

The changing set of religious values surrounding *sati* thus needs to be paired with the changing role of women in twentieth century India, especially vis-à-vis the development of modern ideas of public and private. Much has been written about the production of the new woman in colonial India and her ambiguous relationship to home and nation. Yet very few studies on women

and nationalism actually demonstrate how the performance of religious rituals becomes part of the way that women helped define boundaries between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, and the home and the world, to formulate a new sense of self related to public ideas of family and community. Mary Hancock's work is a notable exception, and shows how women's religious practices are instrumental in helping them create a modern imagination of domesticity. Her research reveals how women who engage in *bhakti* (personalized devotional worship) both accommodate and resist ideological forms found in elite religious practices. ²⁷ Following Hancock's example, I explore how cultural forms are both appropriated and resisted by Marwari women's practices of *satipuja*. The tension between Marwari women's discourse and Indian feminism is of particular interest. While I do not disagree with Sangari and Vaid's argument that *satipuja* is patriarchal and part of a wider burgeoning right-wing Hindu movement, I seek to examine how Marwari women's practices of *satipuja* may purposefully entail opposition to the values of feminism, liberalism, and secularism.

The fact that a prominent *sati*-worshipping community does not advocate actual *sati* for its women is a crucial point in my analysis. The question whether some *sati* are authentic and some *sati* are not is not at issue here. All *sati* is murder. The issue here is *sati* worship. The challenge, then, is to find an alternative approach to *satipuja* that neither cedes a practical commitment to the cause of social justice and human rights, nor simplifies a complicated issue that raises many difficult questions about the role of gender in the making of "community" and "tradition" in India today. One of my goals is to show why and how the worship of *sati* functions as a public performance of a domestic theme as the marker of a communal identity. As many anthropologists and historians have pointed out, the experience of colonialism created an unstable civil society, within which definitions of the public sphere depended heavily on the reorganization and reform of what was characterized as the supposedly "backward" native domestic sphere. ²⁸ Since European powers had a deliberate policy of deferring the possibility of self-rule for their colonial subjects, who were deemed "unprepared," anti-colonial nationalisms embraced ideologies of indigenous domesticity as a way of making public statements about their civilizational attainments and their desire for nationhood while simultaneously creating a space of difference from the household culture of the colonizer.

Domesticity thus refers to much more than the usual portrayal of South Asian women's subordination, from ancient textual representations of women's roles from the sage Manu onward. Domesticity accounts for the changing political meanings attached to the Indian home (and women's place in relation to it) by virtue of the cultural impact of bourgeois ideology in the colonial world. So-called rites and rituals related to the home, associated with particular caste and tribal communities, can no longer be naively perceived as being located outside the world of politics and self-representation in civil society. Symbolic representations of the domestic realm, created by both

colonizer and colonized, have thereby been narrations of a much wider public ideology, namely, a testament to supposedly inner ideologies that define the civil and political potential of a community at large. This ideology has been especially important for Marwaris, a "pariah capitalist" internal diaspora community defined by migration and trade.

Marwari Migration, Domesticity, and the *Sati* Goddess

The Managing Committee of Rani Sati Mandir was formed in Jhunjhunu for the first time in 1912, and the Rani Sati Fair started the same year. Originally, the shrines to the *sati* were simple memorial mounds built on small quadrangular platforms (*chabutras*). In the early twentieth century, however, the temple at Jhunjhunu expanded greatly when Agarwal Jalan (a Marwari subcaste) devotees decided to build a larger temple. Construction of the present-day structure began in 1917. The temple was completed in 1936, when Seth Shiv Chand Rai Jhunjhunuwala donated 40,000 rupees to finish the seven-story main gate. ²⁹ In recent decades about one hundred thousand people have attended the fair each year, until it was temporarily banned in 1987. It was later revived. There is an interesting relationship between the development of the Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunu and migration patterns of the Marwari community out of Rajasthan. Though it must be pointed out that Marwaris are not the only caste community who honor *sati*, ³⁰ family chronologies and oral histories show that the cult of Rani Sati developed at about the same time that women began to migrate away from Rajasthan and permanently settle in other parts of India with their husbands.

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Besides the temple at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, one finds hundreds of temples for the worship of Rani Sati across India today, with about twenty-five in Calcutta alone. (Temples to Rani Sati can also be found in international locations like Hong Kong and New York.) One of the oldest temples to Rani Sati, besides the Jhunjhunu temple, is the Rani Sati Temple in Kankurgachi, just outside of Calcutta, which dates back to 1837, just eight years after *sati* was banned in Bengal by the colonial government. This poses an interesting question: Why did this migrant community choose to glorify the *sati* of a woman of their own lineage and caste, instead of choosing any one of the thousands of *sati* that had happened locally in Calcutta and that were not worshipped by the Bengalis? To answer this question, we must be cognizant of the connections between the worship of a Rajasthani *sati* and the development of a migrant community's identity and its traditions. Even a *sati* can have an ethnic and pan-Indian identity. Traditionally, after all, Rani Sati was the lineage goddess only for the Jalan *kul* (lineage), and only later became adopted by the wider emergent Marwari community.

The Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, headed by a

Marwari temple board registered in and administered from Calcutta, is said to be India's second wealthiest temple trust. Earnings from this temple, which come from the handsome donations of visitors and devotees, are just below that of Tirupati Balaji Temple in South India. Though one would not want to reduce Hindu temples to their material aspects, it cannot be denied that temples are big business in India, especially popular ones like the Rani Sati Temple. While economic explanations cannot fully account for the popularity of certain gods and goddesses within the Hindu pantheon, the financial aspects of temple construction cannot be underestimated. The construction of a *sati* temple in Deorala, the site of Roop Kanwar's death, was understandably read by many as providing encouragement for *sati*. If temples and temple rituals related to *sati* were banned, neither Roop Kanwar's family nor Deorala villagers could profit from her death through contributions made for temple construction on this site. For this reason, protesters of Roop Kanwar's *sati* called for a general legal ban on the performance of the *chunari mahotsav* ceremony in any *sati* temple. Since Roop Kanwar's death in September 1987, Rani Sati temple authorities have made conscious attempts to distance themselves from the legal controversy surrounding *satipuja*. One way that Marwaris answer the legal charge about whether their worship glorifies *sati* is by making a distinction between authentic *sati* of the medieval period and inauthentic *sati*, which might occur in modern times. They creatively produce distinctions between the ambiguous identity of their community *sati* goddess Rani Sati and that of Roop Kanwar, whose death widely delegitimized practices of *sati*.



According to popular community legend, about six hundred years ago a fourteen year-old Hindu bride named Narayani Devi came home for the first time with her husband (of the Jalan lineage) just after their marriage. Her husband worked as a merchant in Jhunjhunu. Muslim invaders suddenly attacked her husband and his companions, brutally killing them. Only Narayani Devi and (in some versions) a loyal Muslim servant named "Rana" survived the attack. According to the story, Narayani Devi then bravely burned herself to death by spontaneously bursting into flames to avoid being captured and kidnapped by these invaders. The servant Rana, following Narayani Devi's instructions, built a temple for her after her death, depositing and burying the ashes where his horse had stopped. This formed the site of the Rani Sati Temple. Some versions of the story claim that the name "Rani," which also means "queen," supposedly refers to a feminization of the servant Rana's name, in honor of the role he played in helping to establish the Rani Sati Temple. Rani was known as *sati* because she had sacrificed herself rather than become a widow, vulnerable to attack and violation by the invaders.

The Rani Sati myth appropriates many cultural values associated with the Rajputs, a traditional warrior class, including the importance placed on the *kuldevi* tradition. Some persons might argue that Rani Sati's

death should be referred to as the Rajput *johar*, by which a woman would kill herself in order to avoid capture and rape, and thereby maintain the boundary lines of the community. In fact, Rani is referred to as "Dadiji," or "respected grandmother," and the ostensible matriarch of a longer extended lineage. ³¹ Rani is simultaneously associated with reputedly ancient Hindu traditions of *sati* and Rajput ideals of heroism in warfare. The burning of a wife, whether it be on a funeral pyre or in a spontaneous immolation such as *johar*, is considered a manifestation of truthfulness, exemplified by a woman's self-sacrifice. The Marwaris, in emulating Rajput idioms, combine into one figure a *kuldevi* who is also a *sati*, a lineage goddess who provides a public representation of protection to the community as symbolized by the virtues of an inner domesticity. This ambiguous quality of the goddess has emerged as *sati* worship has become such a charged political topic.

A second way that Marwaris create ambiguity in the identity of the goddess is to claim that that they are totally opposed to the custom of *sati*, and that they are actually worshipping the goddess Durga or *shakti*. The original legend of *sati*, they claim, is a tale of gods and definitely not a human or historical phenomenon. The classical Hindu myth goes like this: Durga, in the incarnation (human form) of *Sati*, killed herself when the great god Daksha, her father, insulted her husband, Shiva, by not inviting him to some religious rituals. In this way Durga is seen as the first *sati*. In his rage after her death, Shiva carried her body across the earth and started his dance of destruction. To save humankind, Vishnu came up behind Shiva, and, taking his discus, cut the body of *Sati* into pieces. Wherever the pieces of the corpse of *Sati* fell, temples for *shakti* (strength) were established. By emphasizing this myth, and creating a distinction between historical time and mythical time, Marwaris produce a further ambiguity in the identity of the goddess. This distinction is important to the interpretation of the anti-*sati* legislation, because the state has declared it illegal to worship the *sati* of any historical individual. By at least publicly disconnecting *satipuja* from a purely historical Narayani Devi, and by assigning their goddess to mythology, they avoid problems with the law.

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In addition to the ambiguity created by the origin myths of the *sati* goddess, the symbol of *sati* found in temples is also obscure. The representation of Rani Sati as an idol in the Jhunjhunu temple is not, as one might expect, an image of a widow surrounded by flames. Rather, the idol, called a *trishul*, represents Shiva's trident, the weapon that Shiva used to carry the body of *Sati*. The *trishul* used to depict the goddess has two eyes on either side of the trident handle and a pair of lips below, along with a nose ring and a *bindi*, the red dot that Hindu women wear on the forehead to indicate that they are (or will someday be) married. The *trishul* is thus a multivalent symbol, making it unclear whether or not it symbolizes actual *sati*. In fact, this ambiguous depiction of the goddess-as-*trishul* has been an important defense used by the Marwaris in distancing themselves from the legal controversy surrounding *satipuja*. By using this representation, Marwaris claim that the image that they worship has absolutely nothing to do

with a historical *sati*, which otherwise would leave them open to the legal charge of glorifying *sati*. Many other *sati* temples in Rajasthan have begun to use the same image of the *trishul*, borrowing the Marwari form. The proliferation and commodification of images of Roop Kanwar, however, are of a very different nature. The commodification of Roop Kanwar's death has included the reproduction and sale of life-size photos of Roop decked out as a bride in the moments before she became a *sati*.

Though a few Marwari families do have temples to Rani Sati within their private homes, the worship of Rani Sati occurs overwhelmingly in "public" temples. ³² The popularity of Rani Sati supposedly began six hundred years ago, when, according to popular legend, at first Rani Sati was worshipped in the homes of descendants of the Jalan lineage. As Marwari migration out of Rajasthan increased in the first part of the twentieth century, Rani Sati was adopted as a *kuldevi* of the emerging Marwari community. This fact is important in understanding the historicity of community formation in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India. The patriarchal language of lineage (as symbolically represented by family, business, domesticity, and kinship) became a critical aspect in the formation of a wider public community of Marwaris that set itself apart from other communities, including the British. During the twentieth century, and especially over the last thirty years, Rani Sati has become a controversial public symbol of a community-identified goddess who reflects particular ideals of domesticity and gender roles that are valued within the Marwari community. This also suggests how the imagination of the modern community is tied to naturalized notions of fraternal brotherhood arising through the blood bonds of the lineage. A goddess that once protected the *kul* now protects the entire community.



This move from *kul* to community is potentially a critical site in understanding the transformation of lineage in modernity. Marwari practices of *satipuja* cut across the public and private divide, suggesting ideals of women's roles in creating both domesticity and a public communal identity. At first sight, *sati* might appear to be a strange representation of domesticity, especially if we take the word "domesticity" to refer to the household interior and the everyday labor ("housework") associated with the maintenance of the immediate nuclear family. *Sati*, we might argue, is the one who departs from the world and becomes divine, not everyday, and does not appear to be a part of the domestic order of things. Yet to understand the meanings of "domesticity" in Indian contexts, we need to extend our definition of domesticity to incorporate the hybrid nature of domestic practices in India as a mixture of European and local values. ³³ In the nationalist movement, Indian domesticity became politicized in the European sense that the colonized household became the proverbial yardstick of civilization by which Indian readiness for self-rule — and, indeed, political astuteness — would be

judged. Yet their cultural investment in the concept of *kul* plays a prominent role in how Indians create value in maintaining and preserving the family line, becoming an integral part of Indian appropriations of domesticity and domestic values. The common use of Hindi words such as *kuldevi* and *kuldeepak* (literally, "light of the lineage," or in our terms "shining star") attests to constellations of meaning attached to the importance of extended family and lineage.

But *sati* as a symbol goes beyond defining community boundaries. The term also suggests ideals of womanly conduct on an individual basis. As Harlan has pointed out, *sati* can refer to "a woman who has become capable of self-immolation. ... *sati* as a person is something one becomes gradually through good behavior ... it articulates ways in which those Rajput women practice good behavior by keeping in mind (that is to say, by remembering) those who have died as *satis*." ³⁴ The figure of the *sati* representing the devoted widow reflects the self-sacrificing nature that Marwari women are supposed to embody in their maintenance of the extended family, and indeed the entire *kul*. *Sati*, who serves as *kuldevi*, is the symbolic exemplar by which Marwari women should order their lives in ways that do not threaten the stability of the extended family lineage. A *sati*, in this sense, serves as a powerful symbol of women sustaining family, lineage, and domestic virtues. Worshipping the symbol of such ultimate devotion to *kul*, through performances that suggest the longevity, prosperity, and auspiciousness of lineage, creates a strong public identity. The *kuldevi* plays a central role in how communities understand their well-being. Marwari investment in *sati* and *kuldevi* as an index of wifely virtue has turned *satipuja* into a performance of community identity.

The practice of *satipuja* varies within the Marwari community in Calcutta, reflecting the ways that this community is internally differentiated by class and other status markers. Worship of Rani Sati generally varies by class position. Middle-class women living in Burabazar, the congested "old city" of northern Calcutta, might come out for the yearly December procession to honor Rani Sati's birthday. This occasion marks the only time during the year that more than five hundred Marwari women emerge from their homes to participate in an organized public or political event. I did not observe visibly wealthy Marwari women participating in the Calcutta march, which suggests that public participation and public advocacy for Rani Sati may include an element of class distinction. Wealthy sections of the Marwari community are likely to travel by plane to the main Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunu to take *darshan* (divine viewing) of Rani Sati there. Once inside the temple, Marwari women defy the legal ban by offering their wedding veil to be blessed by the goddess for long married life and happiness.



Satipuja also needs to be understood in light of the ambiguous



identity and social role of the Marwari community in Calcutta. As we have seen throughout this text, the larger national debate over whether the Indian state should practice tolerance toward the Marwari community's worship of *sati* is located within the more immediate context of the Marwaris' troubled social identity within Calcutta and northern India generally. The tension between the migrant, money-making Marwaris and local populations results primarily from class conflicts over the tremendous expansion of Marwari indigenous capital in independent India. It was only after the 1920s and 1930s that many Marwari families took up full-time residence in Calcutta and other big cities such as Bombay and Delhi. At that time, many Marwaris amassed large fortunes through war profiteering, gambling, and speculation, and emerged as the dominant capitalist class in twentieth-century India. The structure of Marwari business, trade, and industry is predominately organized by the extended family. ³⁵ Today, an overwhelming number of the top business houses in India are controlled by members of the Marwari community. Business itself is one very important reason why Marwaris continue to make such a strong cultural investment in the discourse of family. In short, this contentious economic history, which has played itself out in many areas of northern India, sets the stage for unwelcome receptions of controversial forms of Marwari culture on display in public life. The following is one such controversial event.

Under the aegis of the Rani Sati Sarva Sangh, Rani Sati devotees in New Delhi staged a procession on December 1, 1980. This procession, known as a *kalash yatra*, in which 108 Marwari women carried pots of water (in this case, a fertility symbol) on their heads to offer to the Rani Sati goddess, marked the construction of a new temple for Rani Sati at Jogiwar, near Chandhi Chowk. The trouble began when the Delhi police tried forcibly to stop their procession through the streets, warning the Marwari women that anti-*sati* activists might try to disrupt their procession. The women decided to march anyway, and confronted the group of feminist protesters with a loud exchange of angry words. One Rani Sati Sarva Sangh representative offered the following description of the clash:

Those women ... God knows who they were ... most were Christian and Muslims I think ... they kept telling our women, "Don't go there, they'll burn you." When our women tried to explain to them that it was only a *puja*, they just would not listen. And then when they tried to stop our *puja*, our women got very wild also, and started saying all kinds of things to them — you know, things like, "You women are used to having seven, eight men at a time, what do you understand about piety and fidelity?" ... They too were annoyed. After all, how can you interfere with anybody's *puja* like that? Don't we have the freedom of worship guaranteed to us? ³⁶

The procession, and the views expressed in the quotation, help explain how the march constituted a performance of community for the Marwaris. (I might note that this quotation reflects a man's perspective, and what the women actually did or said may have been different, but that the basic sentiment is consistent with what Marwari women have said in other circumstances.) Through the procession, and in their clashes with feminists, Marwari women mark symbolic boundaries of community through an emphasis on difference in family relationships. In this case the Marwari women specifically referred to their sense of devotion, faithfulness, and piety toward their husbands, compared to other women who would have "seven, eight men at a time." The quotation also marks a common tension between the discourse of feminists, who argued that the women in the procession were in danger of being burned, and the discourse of Marwari women. While feminist activists focus their attention on the legal dimension of organizing a ban on the *satipuja* practice, because of the way it would lead to illegal *sati*, Marwari women express their concerns about the creation of domestic ideology focused on the values of piety and fidelity, and their commitment to those values. The Rani Sati Sarva Sangh representative even located the protesting feminist women as being generally outside of Hinduism, claiming, "most were Christian and Muslims." This statement, which places emphasis on an imagined essential Hinduness of Indian civilization, suggests that there is a linkage between values of female autonomy and foreign influence through Christianity and Islam, which create a continuum of otherness that Marwaris are allegedly committed to resisting.

The Marwari women's 1980 procession for *satipuja* came under the purview of the national government, and was discussed in both the upper and lower houses of the Indian parliament. In the Lok Sabha (the lower house), Pramila Dandavate of Bombay North Central argued that the procession of Marwari women in honor of *sati* was a dangerous revival of the culture of *sati*, threatening the status of Indian women. Dandavate contended that the Marwari women's procession was actually glorifying a recent *sati* in the neighboring district of Hissar. Addressing her remarks to the speaker, she stated, "We implore you to take steps to see that the capital of our country does not become a centre for illegal, retrograde steps leading to the denial of the right to life for our women." ³⁷ Mr. Yogendra Makwana, minister of state for the home department, stated in the Rajya Sabha (the upper house) that the Rani Sati temple would be banned because the Sarva Sangh had caused a law and order problem. ³⁸ Indira Gandhi, India's prime minister at the time, ultimately took a hard stand against the development of a new Rani Sati temple in Delhi, declaring that *satipuja* was a "barbaric, medieval, and illegal" practice.

Paying attention to the timing and context of this initial public reaction against Rani Sati helps us to situate that set of events within a framework of more general anti-Marwari sentiment. The first time in recent memory that Marwari *satipuja* attracted public attention was in 1980, ostensibly in

response to the Rani Sati procession in Delhi. At the same time, massive anti-Marwari riots broke out in Orissa. ⁴⁰ One Marwari man, commenting in the Hindi journal *Ravivar* on the relationship between the Orissan riots and the Delhi procession, asked whether it was "a coincidence that we had this attack on Marwaris in Orissa when at the same time in Delhi there was also an attack. The difference between the two is that in Delhi business was not the target, but the center of the attack was on religious beliefs. Both religion and trade are part of the soul of the Marwari community, so naturally the attacks excite them." ⁴¹

Marwari promotion of *sati* temples represents an effort to elaborate a public performance of "community" that is at the same time a statement about the community's internal life. This internal life, I argue, is modeled on the idea of the primordality of the family lineage. By worshipping their lineage goddess, Rani Sati, Marwaris are asserting an ideal of wifely virtue in the public sphere that emphasizes the values of women's fidelity, self-sacrifice, and service to family. This then stands in for the identity of the community. The other part of the narrative being enacted through *satipuja* is a public assertion of the community's loyalty and attachment to Rajasthan. The Rani Sati festival has never tried to adopt any local, Bengali temples to Rani Sati. Though Marwari families may only visit Rajasthan a few times in their lifetimes, and sometimes not at all, they still retain a very strong cultural identification with Rajasthan.



The migratory and diasporic component of Marwari religious rituals enacted in Rajasthan is critical to the Rani Sati story. Several traditional Marwari rituals associated with marriage and childbirth depend heavily on the re-imagination of territory and place. New brides marrying into Marwari families are often taken on pilgrimage tours of the major Rajasthani temples, including Jhunjhunu's Rani Sati temple, to receive religious blessings for a long and happy married life. This is a grand-scale imitation of the way that rural Rajasthani brides visit each of their husband's village shrines and pray at each one. When a son is born into a Marwari family, the family will customarily bring the infant back to Rajasthan for his first haircut, so that the baby boy's locks of hair can be offered to the goddess in the native village. The same relationship between diaspora and homeland is true of the Rani Sati Temple. Though the major worship and celebratory rituals are centered around the Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu, the greatest support and enthusiasm for temple activities comes from outside of Rajasthan. While the two hundred Rani Sati temples scattered around India and in foreign countries serve the local needs of the diasporic Marwari community, the main Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu has a special place in the diasporic religious landscape.

Rani Sati in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan

The main Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, is about a five-hour drive from either New Delhi or Jaipur. Jhunjhunu is part of the Shekhawati area, from which most Marwaris emigrated, and encompasses the districts of Sikar and Jhunjhunu. The temple complex itself is located on the outer reaches of the dusty desert town of Jhunjhunu. Scooter rickshaws ferry pilgrims, devotees, tourists, and scholars from the central marketplace of Jhunjhunu to the temple site. As at most large Hindu temples, there are small shops outside and in front of the Rani Sati Temple, which sell coconuts and other offerings meant for giving directly to the deity, along with postcards, pictures, prayer books, images, icons, and other "religious" commodities to be taken home, blurring the line between sacred and secular. The temple is open for *darshan* (being in the presence of the god) from 4:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M., with a short break for lunch. There are five major worship ceremonies performed each day. Generally, when there is no special festival, about two hundred people visit the Rani Sati Temple each day.

Like all Hindu temples, the Rani Sati Temple is organized hierarchically, with minor deities arranged toward the front, and the main god or goddess positioned toward the back. When walking towards the main Rani Sati image (located in the rear portion of the temple complex, signifying its relative importance), one passes by enormous walls that list the names, addresses, dates, and monetary amounts of the donations given for the temple complex. Philanthropy is a central part of the temple community. In the back portion of the temple complex, photography is not allowed and the armed guards enforce this rule very strictly. The guards even objected vehemently when I began to write down names of donors in my notebook. I went into the large prayer hall, and watched as three or four Marwari women performed *puja* before the shrine. The women stood quietly, bowing their heads and putting their hands together in prayer. An *aarti* (worship) ceremony was starting, and the priests chanted prayers and offered incense and flowers to the deity. Temple musicians on the sides of the prayer hall beat drums and rang bells. The sound was deafening. A chalkboard listed the names of donors who had given money for the day's flowers and *puja* items.

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The Marwari families that I met at the temple complex spanned three generations, and included grandparents, parents and children. ⁴² Sometimes I observed that single men had come on their own, without their families. Several married women had brought their wedding veils (*chunaris*) to the temple to be blessed, in defiance of the legal ban on the *chunari mahotsav* ceremony since 1987. After taking some photographs of women posing for me as they held their *chunaris*, one woman and her family insisted on wrapping the *chunari* around my shoulders and taking my photograph, so that my marriage could also be blessed by Rani Sati. Obtaining the blessings of Rani Sati was a critical part of the Marwari experience of visiting the temple, and families would spiritually renew themselves through the blessing of the veil.

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The Rani Sati Temple has developed a national reputation. Officially known as the Shree Rani Sati Mandir, the temple was registered in Calcutta as a charitable trust in 1956–57. The first managing board of the society was comprised of twenty-one men, all described as "merchants," with ten coming from Calcutta, five from Bombay, two from Jhunjhunu, and one each from Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Nagpur, and Ahmedabad. ⁴³ According to the temple's documentation, the registered office of the society is located in Calcutta with the principal management carried on from Calcutta. The managing body, called Rani Sati Seva Sangh, has established hundreds of temples across India and even abroad, with temples found in New York, Nepal, Singapore, and Rangoon. The location of the headquarters of the Rani Sati trust — in Calcutta — is significant in the cultural identification of a diasporic community with its imaginary homeland.

The *sati* temples that are officially recognized by the Sangh must fulfill certain requirements. For one thing, they must include a brick from the original Rani Sati Temple in Jhunjhunu. Secondly, they must have an image of the *trishul* (trident) that has been made to order by the Jhunjhunu temple. Besides their religious purposes, the temples play important roles in providing charity and philanthropy in public life. According to a 1957 brochure entitled "The Memorandum and Rules and Regulations of Shree Rani Satiji Mandir," the following are part of the objectives of the Rani Sati Temple Society:

(A) To take over, carry on and manage the affairs of the charitable society known as "Shree Rani Satiji Mandir" established at Jhunjhunu in the state of Rajasthan and to conduct *puja*, worship and *seva* of Shree Rani Satiji Mataji and all other deities established in the temple premises belonging to the Society at Jhunjhunu and other place and places in India.

(B) To establish and construct such other temple or temples or such other deity or deities and other places of worship as the Society may think fit and proper.

(C) To start and maintain at any place in India alms houses, hospitals, dispensaries and medical stores for giving relief to the poor and needy people and Dhuramshalas according accommodation and lodgings to the sojourners belonging to the Agarwal Community.

(D) To establish and maintain Charitable and religious institutions in conformity with the ideals of the Hindu religion.

(E) To start, construct, establish, and maintain Hospitals, Schools, Colleges, Orphanages, Nari Ashrams, Widow Ashrams, and to render help to the widows and destitutes and distribute alms amongst the widows, destitutes and needy people.

(F) To search, find out, investigate and trace out the history of Shree Rani Sati Mata and other deities and to preach amongst the public the ideals and teachings of the said deities and to collect and preserve the Memorials of the said deities.

The list goes on to describe plans to create libraries, educational facilities, and exhibitions. Most important, goals A through F can be seen as "modern" goals for a temple, because they make claims to a secular moral legitimacy and in other contexts might alternatively be called "social work." The goals have the effect of redefining religion to conform to modern ideals of philanthropy and humanitarianism, by combining the worship of a deity with the construction of public institutions that contribute to civil society.

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This development of a sense of religious humanism through religious works in public life is important to how traditions of community and kinship can be re-energized with new symbols and reproduced in changing historical and social circumstances. One could easily make the argument that Victorian ideas about philanthropy influenced the development of Marwari (and Indian) humanism under colonialism. Yet at the same time, the cultural forms of Marwari philanthropy have qualities that make them uniquely Indian, reflecting a more indigenous character. The reproduction of the Marwari community through these "good works" depends heavily on very gendered definitions of community, tradition, and domesticity that are epitomized by the figure of the *sati*. Furthermore, these public-oriented goals help the community of Rani Sati devotees develop a social network through which both religious good works and business interests can be promoted at the same time. The compatibility between the mutual interests of economic and symbolic capital (to borrow Bourdieu's terminology) becomes a fertile site where kinship patterns can be reproduced through the Marwaris' construction of tradition, gender, domesticity, and community in public life. At the same time, the performative production of domesticity, through the public activities of the temple, reinforces sentimental attachments to ancestral and sacred homelands.

One way that the Rani Sati Temple purports to do good in public life can be seen in the following example. One of the trustees told me in an interview that the Rani Sati Temple promotes widow remarriage. On two separate occasions, the trustee claimed, temple authorities actually prevented women devotees from committing *sati* on the temple premises. In each case, a

woman had come to the Rani Sati Temple with her ailing husband, who had then died during the visit. The two women, it was claimed, had both proclaimed their intentions to commit *sati* on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands. Temple authorities solved the problem by locking the women up in their *dharmasala* rooms until after their husbands had been cremated, thus preventing them from becoming *sati*. Although I make no claims about the truthfulness of these stories, they were told to reinforce the idea that there was no connection between the *sati* temple and actual *sati*. While the Jhunjhunu temple no doubt holds a central place in the imagination of Rani Sati devotees, the regional temples also provide local (though regionalized) religious space for worshippers to do public *puja*.

Rani Sati in Calcutta

Since the Roop Kanwar *sati* in 1987, Marwari public practices of *sati puja* have been a contentious issue in Calcutta and West Bengal, due to the economic strength of the Marwari community residing there. Calcutta, even more than Rajasthan, has for a long time been seen as the hub of the Marwari community. Until the Roop Kanwar *sati*, however, the large number of Rani Sati temples in Calcutta went relatively unnoticed by the culturally dominant Bengali community. In October 1987, in the wake of the Roop Kanwar *sati*, the Bengali newspaper *Aajkal* carried a story about the oldest Rani Sati temple in Calcutta, the 1837 temple near VIP Road at Kankurgachi. The article was written by four Bengali historians who were surprised to find a *sati* temple in the middle of Calcutta. They wrote:



Many non-Bengalis live in the neighborhood.... In this area, the *sati* temple ... is one hundred and fifty years old. The prevention of *sati* law was passed in 1829, and this temple was founded just eight years later. Now, within one month of accepting the Prevention of *Sati* bill in Bidhansabha [parliament], a religious fair is going to be held for the propaganda of *sati*....

We thought that the temple would be small and many people would not know of it. But we were wrong. Local people helped us go to the temple. Seeing this big temple, it seems that the religious business is very successful here. ... It is said that the ash of the *sati* is buried under the altar.... This temple is a branch of the *sati* temple in Jhunjhunu of Rajasthan.

But the question is — why did they have to borrow a *sati* image from Rajasthan? In Bengal especially, many women had become *sati*. Mohantas [one of the priests] could not answer this question. After all, in this area of Beliaghata, Bengalis are not a majority. Is this temple a part of the plan of expanding business by Rajasthani businessmen? There is a picture on the wall

of a *sati* who is burning on her husband's pyre, and a goddess (Durga) is standing beside her.

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On the way out of the temple, the four scholars were invited to come to the *sati* fair. Worship will be performed throughout the day. A booklet, describing the greatness of *sati*, will be distributed free of cost. [44](#)

The question about regional identity that the four Bengali historians raised, of why the Marwaris chose a goddess of their own region and community to commemorate *sati*, is an important one in understanding the importance to the community of *satipuja*. Especially so, as the authors of the *Aajkal* article point out, because Bengal was itself home to hundreds of local *sati* and had a strong *sati* tradition. By using a goddess of the Jalan family, a lineage that ultimately became one of the main genealogical branches of their community, the Marwaris have one of their "own" women as *sati*, therefore constructing the *sati* as internal to the community.



The quoted passage also gives us insight into Bengali perceptions of Marwari identity. The four Bengali historians twice point out the predominance of "non-Bengalis" in the neighborhood, marking a sense of difference between themselves and the community who worships *sati*. The context of this statement is a city that has prided itself on its intellectual culture, and has had a progressive Marxist government for about twenty years. The presence of temples for the worship of *sati* is an embarrassment that most Bengalis would not care to acknowledge, especially in light of continuing Bengali pride about the "Bengal Renaissance" of the early nineteenth century. Even though Marwari families have lived in Bengal for generations, Bengalis still culturally locate the Marwaris (and their *sati* temple traditions) as living and belonging outside of Bengal. Bengalis believe that the Marwaris stay only to make money, and see them as outside an imagined Bengali public sphere defined by a common language, literature, and culture.

The publication of the Rani Sati article in *Aajkal* led to controversy. In Rajasthan, the Rani Sati Temple was shut down and preparations for the August festival on Bhadra Amavasya (a Hindu month) were halted. In Bengal, media attention focused on the dozens of *sati* temples in Calcutta. Having recently declared to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly that the state was not party to the practice of *sati*, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu was forced to take action when confronted with the glorification of *sati* occurring "right under his nose," as his critics suggested. The West Bengal government banned the *sati mela*, which had been held each year on November 15th.

They also outlawed loudspeakers, fairs, and the processions associated with *sati* temples. ⁴⁵ After all, persons who publicly defended Roop Kanwar's death claimed that Roop had been a lifelong devotee of Rani Sati, and had even visited Rani Sati temples during her childhood in Ranchi, Bihar. ⁴⁶

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Owners, devotees, and patrons of the Calcutta Rani Sati temples, all coming from the Marwari community, protested the decision to ban the *sati mela*. A twelve-hour *bundh* (strike) was called in the old city quarter of Burabazar to protest the government ban on *sati* temples and *sati* glorification. The Rani Sati Mandir Trust raised the issue in the Calcutta High Court, claiming that the legal ruling violated their religious freedom. Eventually, the Calcutta High Court ruled that individuals had the right to worship in the Rani Sati temple and said that the temple should be protected from protesters who might try to interfere with the daily *puja* offerings. Despite granting these freedoms of individual worship, the court ruled that the annual public festival be subject to regulation by the state. It should be noted that there was a distinction between the way that Marwaris protested the banning of the *mela* and the way that they reacted to Roop Kanwar's death. While many Marwaris fought for their community rights in worshipping *sati*, some Marwari public organizations, as was noted by the press, protested against the Roop Kanwar *sati*. The president of the West Bengal Provincial Marwari Federation, Bishambhar Newar, publicly announced that the Marwari community did not support the practice of *sati*. ⁴⁷



Although the public outrage over the death of Roop Kanwar caused many Rani Sati temples to cancel their public festivals in 1987, within a few years these temples resumed their usual activities. For nearly the last thirty years, on each December 4th an annual procession is held in Burabazar, Calcutta, to honor Rani Sati's birthday. At the procession I attended on December 4, 1996, I saw a large crowd of some 400 or 500 Marwari women, ranging in age from about twenty to sixty, waiting restlessly in the streets. All of the women were elaborately dressed in red saris and *chunaris* (veils) like Hindu brides, and wore elaborate jewelry and lipstick. This was an unusual sight in the lanes of the congested business district of Burabazar, where the public spaces of streets and bylanes are normally occupied by men. All the women were barefoot. Most of them held cups (*lotas*) of water on their heads, notably the same fertility symbol used in the *kalash sati* march in 1980. Yet when I arrived there, instead of marching down the streets in a procession, the entire group of women was waiting restlessly on the street. Police had temporarily halted the march because an official permit had not been issued. Marwari devotees organizing and participating in the procession said that the Burabazar procession had started in 1967, some thirty years ago, and there had never been any trouble with



the police before this.

Teenage boys held up dividing ropes, marking off the group of Marwari women. The boys wore decorative pins with the Rani Sati symbol, the *trishul* (Shiva's trident). I walked around the dividing ropes chatting with the women. The women excitedly told me that today was Rani Sati's birthday. However, the women were somewhat impatient, as the police would not allow them to begin their march. According to one temple committee member, the temple authorities had originally received an oral agreement from the police allowing the procession. Yet on the actual day, some police came and stopped them, saying that the group needed written permission. The women stood and waited for at least an hour. The sun was scorching, even in "winter." A big water tanker from the Kashi Vishwanath Seva Samiti, a Marwari social service organization, was slowly rolling down the street. ⁴⁸



Volunteers rushed cool glasses of water from the truck to the tired and heat-struck women. After some time, the women sat down on the street as negotiations between the police and temple authorities continued. From time to time, the women sang *bhajans* (hymns) to Rani Sati, often joyfully proclaiming "Rani Sati ki Jai" ("Victory to Rani Sati").

Another smaller group of twenty or so people assembled in front of the Marwari women. Most in the group were men, in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and a few elderly women. The women were not wearing *bindis* (the ornamental dot worn on either a marriagable or married woman's forehead), so they were probably widowed. Though this small group was excluded from partaking in the procession, they loudly sang *bhajans* and clapped their hands, dancing and taunting the two policemen who stood at the front of the crowd preventing the procession from taking place. The two policemen watched, expressionless. I asked a Marwari man, Suresh Agarwal, why the police had objected to the march. Suresh appeared to be part of the temple committee because he wore the *trishul* pin. In response to my question, Suresh said, "you know, this is *sati*. They are thinking too much, being too brainy. But they cannot stop us. If they should ban our march, we cannot simply stop our feelings because they tell us to. We cannot stop our feelings."



The police stood at the front of the crowd of women, making sure that the march did not go forward.

Across the street, a large crowd had gathered in the Standard Chartered Bank. One young woman, Alka Jalan, wearing a temple badge, came to talk to me and said that the police were meeting in the bank, to decide about the procession. Speaking to me in fluent English, Alka informed me that she had just graduated from college. Since she was not married yet, Alka could not march in the procession. But her mother, aunt, and older sister were all marching together, and Alka took me over to meet them. At one point, Alka handed me a pin to wear that bore the image of the Rani Sati *trishul*, the same pin that she and the temple administrators were wearing. I felt that she was perhaps trying to show the importance of the event by incorporating a foreigner into the rituals. I was also confronted by thoughts about how my own investment in feminism was now directly at odds with that classic anthropological imperative for "participant observation." In my hesitation over whether or not to wear the pin and what the implications might be, Alka smiled and pinned the badge onto the shoulder of my *salwaar kameez* (a tunic shirt worn over baggy pants).



At last, the police gave their permission. The women all stood up, rearranged their saris and the cups of water on their heads, while men shouted instructions of how to organize themselves in lines. The procession slowly started down the street. A few decorated temple floats accompanied them, carrying images of Rani Sati. Men performed *arti* (worship) to the image before the motorized chariots set out. Another procession, of men carrying flags, was coming down the street, followed by a group of a dozen or so younger teenage girls, also dressed up in red like the women in the main part of the procession. A silver chariot carrying the abstract image of the *trishul* followed close behind, and the entire procession slowly made its way through the narrow and winding streets of Burabazar.

This vignette illuminates how "community" is re-imagined and rearticulated through the assertion of "private" norms of wifely virtue within that quintessential public space of the modern city, the street. The occasion marks the only time in the year when these middle-class Marwari women use a procession as a public forum for political participation to mark their traditions of community-identified domesticity. At the same time, this story also points to the exclusionary nature of the performance of community. Both widows and unmarried girls were excluded from participation in the main part of the march; only married women took a leading part in the procession. Rather than encouraging the practice of actual *sati*, Marwari *satipuja* contributes to the formation of a patriarchal, moral, and ritual community. The ritual is performative in the sense that it creates social meaning, and serves as an expression of particular social values. It would seem that *sati* serves as an image of the idealized relationship of the wife to the husband. These values include the propagation of a particular gender role for married women that reproduces the family in a way that preserves patrilineal descent and draws on connections to Rajasthan.





The media coverage of the Burabazar procession — or rather, the lack of it — surprised me. Leading English newspapers such as the *Statesman*, *Telegraph*, and the *Asian Age* had no mention of it. Only the Hindi newspapers that the Marwari community would regularly read, such as *Dainik Vishwamitra*, *Jansatta*, *Mahanagar*, *Parakh*, *Sevasansar*, and *Chhapte Chhapte* carried news of this unusual and controversial event. The lack of coverage of the procession and the controversy in the English-speaking media suggests that in Calcutta, *satipuja* is a practice which is fully internal to the Hindi-speaking Marwari community. I was once told by a Rajasthani journalist that the media had been discouraged from reporting on the *sati melas* by temple authorities in Jhunjhunu who were loath to attract unwelcome notice and criticism of the event. Was the same true in Calcutta? Another surprising aspect of the Calcutta procession was that some Marwari-run Calcutta schools closed down for the occasion. Nopani School in Girish Park had been closed that day on account of Rani Sati's birthday. A special *puja* was being held in the *Sati* temple that is located inside the school premises.

Marwari Women Debate the Valorization of *Sati*

To understand the cultural meanings of *satipuja* among the Marwaris, it is important to look at the social status and practices of Marwari women inside kinship structures and in the community generally. Most Marwari women are housewives, and do not pursue a career outside the home.



Increasingly, in recent years Marwari women have obtained higher levels of education. They have also assumed more active roles in public life through running their own businesses or involvement in charity work. The small percentage of Marwari women who do work outside of the home are likely either to work for the family business (especially if they are widows and running the deceased husband's firm) or else to take up entrepreneurial business ventures on their own, thus eliding the negative stigma attached to what Indians term "service" professions. In this way, they do not compromise the family's reputation by working for others, which would suggest that the family suffers from financial hardship.

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Even among these women entrepreneurs, one would be hard pressed to find many Marwari women who call themselves feminists, as is the case with Indian women in general. Many Marwari women have beliefs that are at odds with the Indian feminist movement, including those beliefs concerning *satipuja*. In an interview given to the Hindi newspaper *Rashtriya Sahara*, on October 12, 1993, Dr. (Mrs.) Kesum Khemani, well known in Calcutta for her work in developing Hindi literary culture, presented her views on women's rights in modern society. The reporter asked her, "What do you think about women and men both having rights?" Mrs. Khemani's answer provided insight into her attitude toward *sati*:

Now, taking the situation about the law against *sati* as an example, the government destroyed this harsh [practice] in order to stop it. Previously there was a custom of voluntary *sati*, because when the king (ruler) attacked, the wives would save themselves in this manner. To be a *sati* was the knowledge of unrestrained love, but society forcibly made a custom of turning widows into servants. Society made up this rule so widows are forced to become workers.

Khemani went as far to say that *sati* was banned so that widows could be forced to labor. However, the majority of the middle-aged and elderly women whom I have met defend the practice of *satipuja*, making a sharp distinction between the medieval and modern phenomena. They speak proudly of Rajput traditions of *johar*, when a woman sacrificed herself on a fire rather than give in to invaders who attacked and killed the menfolk.

Marwari women often distinguish between what they see as authentic and inauthentic *sati*. These categories are often translated into a historical framework of medieval (authentic) and modern (inauthentic). One Marwari woman, Mrs. Kusum Kanoria, explained to me that a woman who is a true *sati* will burst into flames spontaneously, without external intervention. Roop Kanwar, she argued, suffered a forced burning and thus she is not a true *sati*. Another Marwari woman, Sushma Goenka, a novelist and industrialist, explained how horrified she was to hear of Roop Kanwar's *sati* in 1987, but that this does not affect her inner beliefs about *satipuja*. She told me that in moments of danger or fear, when she turns to prayer, she finds herself praying to Rani Sati and gains strength in remembering her courageous act.



Many Marwari women and men also worship ancient and medieval *sati* /*kuldevi* other than Rani Sati inside their homes. These *sati* are in their immediate family lineages and have a closer relationship with the family, thereby being less public and probably not even known to non-kin outsiders. Worshipping these lineage *sati*, along with other household deities, forms a part of daily *puja* activities. The ritual practices of *sati* worship, along with certain forms of *vrata* ("vow," usually in the form of a fast), storytelling, and songs are part of a large continuum of auspicious practices associated with domesticity that are common to many Hindu women, to whom the maintenance of enduring family ties remains a strong value. But the worship of Rani Sati, outside the Jalan clan, is of a slightly different nature; such worship comes in addition to worshipping these other *sati*, and remains for most a public and community event.

The worship of Rani Sati in public life allows Marwaris to make a

public statement about the internal values of the community. Though it can be argued that values of women's self-sacrifice and devotion to the domestic sphere are pan-Indian themes, Rani Sati — as a lineage goddess identified with a particular *kul* — expresses the domestic side of a particular community identity, perhaps combined with an overtly oppositional flavor in the wider context that defines *sati* as criminal. Rajesh Kanoria, whom I interviewed at the Calcutta procession, gave me this explanation of why the Marwaris practice *satipuja*: "In our community, we value a woman's faithfulness to her husband, which is extremely important for the family. That is why we worship *sati*." When I asked him if Marwaris had any concept of male *sata* (in which a man would sacrifice himself on his wife's funeral pyre), at first Rajesh looked puzzled and then he burst out laughing. "No, no, nothing like that," he replied. This dismissal of the possibility of *sata* demonstrates how Marwari women are critical to maintaining family loyalty and cohesion. It is a woman's wifely virtue, the festival claims, that makes the community virtuous in the public eye.



Besides visiting public *sati* temples, some Marwari families have Rani Sati temples in their own homes. One of the Rani Sati Temple trustees, whom I call Toontoonwala, offered to show me a Rani Sati temple in his backyard, just adjacent to his house. The main idol was a photograph of the Rani Sati image at Jhunjhunu. On the sides of the temple, there were other photographs and images. What really drew my attention, however, was a garishly painted picture hanging on the wall. The relentlessly realist picture featured a young woman, smiling as she held her dead husband's body in her lap, sitting in the midst of a large fire. I felt rather stunned to see such a graphic image, and I mumbled something to him about how realistic the portrayal was. "Yes," Toontoonwala said proudly, "my own daughter-in-law made it herself for our family temple. But we cannot allow pictures like this in Jhunjhunu, we can only have this one in our private temple." His comment referred to the 1988 Supreme Court ruling that explicitly stated that the temple image of Shri Nayarani Devi could not be associated with a historical *sati*, and therefore *puja* to the *trishul* (trident) image could not be considered *satipuja*. The public nature of the temple and the legal limits of public life are recognized in his statement. Hence the real and pressing legal need for ambiguity in the public and official image of the Rani Sati goddess. But in a temple housed in a private house, such as that of Toontoonwala, graphic illustrations of *sati* are displayed.

Despite the popularity of Rani Sati in the Marwari community, it would be wrong to say that all Marwaris are in favor of *satipuja*. A few Marwari women and men have spoken publicly against the practice, on the grounds that it is degrading to women. One prominent Marwari social reformer, B. M. Singhi, expressed his views on the subject in an 1981 interview in the Hindi magazine *Raviwar*, which focused on *sati* worship in response to the 1980 Delhi procession. Singhi maintained:

It is wrong to say that *satipuja* has nothing to do with *sati-pratha* [*sati* as a cultural system]. If you do *satipuja*, then it is obvious that you will admire and want to do everything that Sati has done. It doesn't matter that you say you have no intention that women should become *sati*.

Rani Sati is today so popular that there is the belief that if you worship her you will accumulate a lot of money. Marwaris therefore don't worship her because she was so courageous. That is only what they say. The real matter is money.

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From way back I was against *satipuja*. But today there is a critical situation. If you want to curb *sati* the people in the Marwari society who feel that this practice is disgraceful and wrong should not sit quietly. They should stand against it. If people stand against it, the result is that other people and government will realize that Marwari society consists of many people who are against the practice of *sati* and are standing up against it. It will become clear that the people practicing *satipuja* are not the majority of the society. If this is made clear, then government will feel assured that steps to curb *satipuja* are not hurting the sentiment of the entire Marwari community but are only against some orthodox and backward Marwaris. [49](#)

Singhi's response gives us a critical insight into the problem of *satipuja* from within the Marwari community itself. Both Singhi and his wife, Sushila, are noteworthy for their long-standing efforts to encourage Marwari social reform on issues such as female education, widow remarriage, and child marriage. Though Singhi's argument also takes a developmentalist stand by considering *satipuja* to be backward, his critique of *satipuja* skims lightly over the potential problem that Marwari women might commit *sati*. Instead, Singhi's appeal for a governmental implementation of a ban on *satipuja* arises from his concerns over the overly-powerful influence of money on Marwari society. Marwaris, he asserts, are only really interested in making money, and really have no deep connection with Rani Sati that would justify their worship practices. Singhi's comment was a call to action to those who disagree with *satipuja* to come forward and voice their objections, and reminds us of the divisions that exist within the Marwari community. Clearly, we cannot understand the complexities of *satipuja* simply by adopting a Marwari point of view. After all, Singhi himself, though ostensibly an "insider," represents the kind of reductionism that I hope to avoid.

How, then, can the worship of *sati* be a valorized ingredient in the



way the Marwari community constructs its public identity, even though there is widespread disapproval of the practice? The public controversy over Marwari *sati* worship cannot be understood without acknowledging the transregional history of the Marwaris as a migratory group. Instead of dismissing Marwari women's worship as either criminal or backward, or else as part of an eternal, static tradition, I have attempted to understand these controversial practices as part of an internal diasporic formation, with important links to the advent of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism. Marwari practices of worshipping Rani Sati create important emotional links between a diasporic community and Rajasthan. Though *sati* cannot be justified as an act, the Marwaris extract from the figure of the *sati* a valorized ethics of wifely devotion. A parallel could be made here with Christians venerating martyrs but not promoting martyrdom as a religious practice.

While others read Marwari practices of *sati* worship as a rationalization or justification of widow immolation, for the Marwaris *sati* has become a prescriptive metaphor of wifely devotion to husband, family, and the *kul*. A Marwari woman can be *sati*-like, some Marwaris contend, without actually becoming a *sati*. The fact that the rituals of *satipuja* are undoubtedly patriarchal and confining to these women may be a matter of debate but not one of legality. The Indian Supreme Court has not yet made a final decision about whether or not the worship of Rani Sati amounts to the glorification of *sati*. In the meantime, this legal delay allows for a legal and cultural space for Marwaris to practice their public worship of Rani Sati.



Notes:

Note 1: The exact wording of government legislation against *sati* and *sati* glorification prompted much debate. In the Rajasthan State legislation, the first draft of the legislation proposed prohibiting the construction of new *sati* temples. This clause was objected to by Aruna Asaf Ali, who argued that merely excluding existing *sati* temples from the law would have no effect on the construction of a temple to venerate Roop Kanwar's *sati* in 1987, for whom the legislation was originally passed. Ali argued that this went against the legislation's original intention by giving protection to older forms of *sati* worship. Thus the legislation outlawing the glorification of *sati* for any historical individual was passed and is now under contention by groups whose ancient *sati* temples have been threatened. [Back](#).

Note 2: Shortly after the press announced Roop Kanwar's death, Marwari social clubs organized public protests to demonstrate their vehement disapproval of the practice of *sati*. Five hundred members of the Marwari Yuva Manch (Youth

Organization) marched through the streets of north Calcutta, with banners proclaiming "Stop glorifying *sati*" and "Ban *sati*." See "Marwaris against *sati*," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 11 October 1987. [Back.](#)

Note 3: *Dharmayug* 1981, 13. [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Ibid.*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 5: *Ibid.*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 6: Many devotees believe that the original Rani Sati temple in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, is actually seven hundred years old. But the devotees pursuing the legal case make claims that the original temple is just four hundred years old, because temple records are only available for the last four hundred years. [Back.](#)

Note 7: S. Mahalingam, "Glorifying Sati: A Maha *yagna* under police gaze.," *Frontline* 27 December 1996. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Soma Wadhwa, "Glorifying a Gory Tradition," *Outlook* 11 December 1996, 20–24. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Anapam Srivastava, "Women Activists stay away from '*yagna*' site in Rajasthan" *Times of India* (Bombay), 5 December 1996. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Wadhwa, "Glorifying a Gory Tradition." [Back.](#)

Note 11: Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998). [Back.](#)

Note 13: Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Wedge* 7/8 (1985): 120–130. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Gouri Salvi, "Sati: a Disturbing Revival," *Eve's Weekly*, February 7-13, 1981: 17, 49. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Jack Hawley provides an excellent summary of these developments. John Stratton Hawley, *Sati: The Blessing and the Curse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). [Back.](#)

Note 16: "Sati: Putting the Clock Back," *Link*, 14 December 1980, 19; C.N.C. "Ominous Throwback," *Mainstream*, 20 December 1980; P. V. Parakal, "Macabre Middle-Ages Rite Enacted in Rajasthan," *New Age*, 35:38 (20 September 1987). [Back.](#)

Note 17: Ashis Nandy, "Sati in Kali Yuga: The Public Debate on Roop Kanwar's Death," *The Savage Freud and Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). [Back.](#)

Note 18: Veena Das, "Strange Response," *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 28 February 1988, 30-32. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari, "Institutions, Beliefs, Ideologies: Widow Immolation in Contemporary Rajasthan," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 April 1991: WS 2-18. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Pradeep Shinde, "Shiv Sena Woos the Marwaris," *Bombay*, Mar. 7-21, 1991, 24-27. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Paul Courtright, "Sati, sacrifice and marriage: The Modernity of Tradition," in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 184-203. [Back.](#)

Note 22: John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Julia Leslie, "Suttee or Sati: Victim or Victor?" in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* (Delhi: Motilala Banarasaidass Publishers, 1992): 175-189. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Lindsey Harlan, *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). [Back.](#)

Note 25: *Ibid.*, 113. [Back.](#)

Note 26: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 43. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Mary Hancock, "The Dilemmas of Domesticity: Possession and Devotional Experience Among Urban Smarta Women" in *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage*, eds. Lindsey Harlan and Paul Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 60-91. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Fred Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). [Back.](#)

Note 29: Census of India, "Rani Sati Fair" in *Rajasthan: Fairs and Festivals* Government of India Publications, 1961): 85-91. [Back.](#)

Note 30: William Noble and Ram Sankhyan, "Signs of the Divine: Sati Memorials and Sati Worship in Rajasthan," in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity: Volume I: Constructions*, eds. Karine Schomer, Joan Erdman, Deryck Lodrick, and Lloyd Rudolph (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1994): 341-389. [Back.](#)

Note 31: According to the *Memorandum and Rules and Regulations of Shree*

Rani Satiji Mandir, "Any Bansal Gotra descendant of Seth Jaliramji [Narayani Devi's father-in-law] of the sixteenth century fame ... be eligible to be a member of the Society." In practice, there is not any exclusion of Marwari devotees due to genealogy. It is probably best not to take the details of foundational mythology too literally. (S. R. Jhunjhunwala. *Memorandum and Rules and Regulations of Shree Rani Satiji Mandir*. 1985.) [Back.](#)

Note 32: This fact concurs with Harlan's research (1992) on Rajput women that shows that the *kuldevi* is generally worshipped in temples found in public spaces. This is somewhat surprising, since the *kuldevi* ostensibly offers protection to both the battlefield and the home, which correspond to the male space (*mardana*) and the female space (*zenana*), suggesting how public life mediates private life. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Karen Hansen, ed., *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1992). [Back.](#)

Note 34: Harlan, *Religion and Rajput Women*, 79. [Back.](#)

Note 35: G. Piramal and M. Herdock, *India's Industrialists* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1986). [Back.](#)

Note 36: Salvi, "Sati: A Disturbing Revival," 1981. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Lok Sabha Debates. Seventh Series. Vol IX. No. 10. 1 December 1980. 337-338. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Ikbal Kaul, "The Origin of Sati," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 18 January 1981, 28-29. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Praful Bidwai, "Disgraceful Sati Episode: High Social Price of State Interaction," *Times of India*, 28 September 1987, Editorial page. [Back.](#)

Note 40: Patit Paban Misra, "Why Anti-Marwari Agitation in Orissa?" *Mainstream*, 1 November 1980: 6, 9. [Back.](#)

Note 41: *Raviwar* 1981:7. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Temple authorities assured me that the temple was open to all religions and castes, and was regularly visited by Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and all other castes and creeds. Despite these claims to multiculturalism, during my three-day visit to the temple I observed only Marwari families, who mostly came from Calcutta and Bombay. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Jhunjhunwala. *Memorandum and Rules and Regulations of Shree Rani Satiji Mandir*, 2-3. [Back.](#)

Note 44: *Aajkal* (Bengali), 1987, 13. [Back.](#)

Note 45: Barun Das Gupta, "Sati Controversy in Calcutta," *Mainstream*, 9 December 1987, 22-23. [Back.](#)

Note 46: V.P. Sharan, "Roop was a devotee of Rani Sati," *Statesman* (Calcutta), 14 October 1987.[Back.](#)

Note 47: "State bans 'Sati' Processions," *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* (Calcutta), 15 November 1987.[Back.](#)

Note 48: The Kashi Vishwanath Seva Samiti is a Marwari voluntary organization that distributes free drinking water around the city whenever there is a special need. The distribution of drinking water is said to be part of the Marwari community's heritage of desert life, where the distribution of water was a humanitarian act of great importance.[Back.](#)

Note 49: Shishir Gupta, "Aaj bhi *sati* pratha ka samarthan kyon? Yeh hamari dharmik swatantra par hastskep hey. Satipujan gulami ka pratik hey" ["Why is there still advocacy of the *sati*-custom even today? This is an interference in our religious freedom. *Satipuja* is a symbol of Slavery"], *Raviwar*, 25 January 1981, 12-17.[Back.](#)

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