

Premo, Innocent at Home

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Gerry Berreman and I were both among the throng who haunted the corridors and seminar rooms of Morrill Hall at Cornell University in the fall of 1956. Even though I had completed my graduate work before I had gone to India in 1954 (and before Gerry arrived at Cornell), I joined Gerry and others in Robin Murphy Williams' theory seminar after I returned from India, and remained at Cornell for two more years as a research associate. Both Gerry and I were bitten by the kinship bug (not in Professor Williams' theory seminar but through other auspices) in the form of George Peter Murdock's *Social Structure* (1949). This is a work devoted to careful definitions and to world-wide counts of various kinship customs and institutions and their correlations with one another.

Although they had a long run (at least from Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer* of 1940 and Fortes' pair on clanship and kinship among the Tallensi (Fortes 1945; 1949); one can go even further back into the 1920s and 1930s with A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Fred Eggan; or, I suppose, even back to the 1880s with Lewis Henry Morgan), kinship studies lost their centrality in social/cultural anthropology by the 1970s. But, of course, they never "died," and I think that some recent works have been much more human if less schematic—that is, less, or even 'anti'-, social structural—such as Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993), Michael Gilson's *Lords of the Lebanese Marches* (1996) and Steve Derne's *Culture in Action: Family Life, Emotion, and Male Dominance in Banaras, India* (1995).

In the 1950s and 1960s, we were trying to find and to learn the shapes and limits of institutions, their patterns if you like, while newer generations, like those writers I just mentioned, are trying to understand how these institutions are lived. Abu-Lughod saw her concern with the ways patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, polygyny, and patrilineality were experienced by members of one Bedouin family as "writing against culture." Pierre Bourdieu wrote on Kabyle parallel-cousin marriage in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977:30-71) as though he thought that the earlier anthropologist unwittingly conflated all instances of parallel-cousin marriage; to this imagined gullible, uncurious fieldworker, all instances were the same. To the contrary, I think earlier anthropologists also were aware of the way institutions were lived—I think I was (see Kolenda 1987), and certainly Gerry Berreman was—but were seeking to define social structures, social institutions, and prescribed customs. Definitions grew out of and were based on careful comparisons of instances observed. After the chore of definitions had been more or less done, it was possible to return to

specific people's experience of an institution or prescribed custom, including the way they resist or strategize with respect to it.

Foucault echoes Durkheim in his view of kinship as a form of subjectivation. There are undoubtedly thousands, probably millions, of our countrymen who know first hand the subjectivation of parenthood, marriage, or adult children's obligations to aged parents; they really do not need an assist from some social science concept.

In *Ethics of Kinship* (2001), James Faubion explains that a kinship term relates a person to another person or other persons, usually permanently, and often a kinship term comes with "scripts or notebooks attached." Imposed upon a subject,

Ethics emerges as a possibility within it insofar as the given techniques of subjection still leave room for the reflexive practice of freedom, for the deployment and exercise of techniques of self-transformation. [Faubion 2001:12-13]

Faubion notes:

A system of subjectivation, after all, kinship can devolve into sheer oppression, and an oppression all the more severe when (as is virtually always the case) it is imbricated with class, or caste, or race, or nationality....Among its many other attributes, the body of kinship very often delimits the arena in which the self garners its primary legitimation; it is often a court of both first and last appeal in the trials of self-validation....Like all systems of subjectivation, kinship limits the possibilities of the self and of its relations to others. It also produces such possibilities. [Faubion 2001:16-17]

The kinship term or position I shall be concerned with in this paper is that of the junior brother in the levirate.

Let me see if I can lure you into empathy for my old friend Premo. I should really say "our old friend," because my conversing with Premo in the mid-1950s was through the medium of my interpreter-cum-research-assistant, Usha Bhagat, and in 1984 and 1998, through my interpreter-cum-research-assistant, Indira Sapru. The companionship of Usha and later Indira was not only essential for my work but also immensely enjoyable. I am inspired to try to write about Premo from Gerry's well-loved friends, Sibba, the Blacksmith of Sirkanda, and Sibba's son, Kalmu (Berreman 1972:361, 379-394). Premo was subjectivated to the role of the younger brother who was given his dead older brother's wife to wed. What I shall be concerned with is his subjectivation and his search for freedom. But first, some background on the levirate.

The Levirate among the Untouchable Chuhras of Khalapur

Elsewhere, I have documented the widespread practice of widow remarriage and the levirate among middle and lower castes of Hindus in India (Kolenda 1982:198-199; Kolenda 1987:51). This contrasts with the prohibition on remarriage for widows in Hindu high castes generally, such as among Brahman, Rajput, and Merchant caste-communities.

Khalapur is on the Gangetic Plains in western Uttar Pradesh in northern India. Almost all the land in Khalapur is owned by the high dominant Hindu caste of Rajputs who make up almost half the village population. Besides a few Brahmans and Merchants (Banias), there were many artisan and servant castes, almost entirely Hindu, but a few Muslim. The untouchable Chuhras served the higher "touchable" castes of Khalapur by cleaning their cattle-yards, latrines, and lanes. Those of the West Colony of Khalapur numbered around 100 people at any one time when I first did fieldwork among them in the mid-1950s. There was flux in the population as married daughters came home, often with children, to visit, and daughters-in-law went out to their parental villages, and as men came home from working outside in the city or elsewhere, and some went out.

My understanding of the rules of the levirate the Chuhras practiced emerged from the examination of the marital histories of twenty-four Chuhra widows or Churhis—(Churhi is feminine of Chuhra). At the time I was in Khalapur,

Among the 27 adult Chuhris of the western colony who had married into the *basti*, 15 were still married to their first husband, 6 were in leviratic marriages, 2 were elderly widows and 3 were women who had been sold to men of the *basti*; one other widow had taken a lover who had paid her dead husband's family for her. [Kolenda 1987:54]

Almost universally in Hindu India, marriages are arranged by the elders of the young people to be married. This was true for the West Colony Chuhras. The elderly and older men of a localized patrilineage or *kunba* spent much time, especially in the cold months when there was little agricultural activity, visiting other Chuhra colonies in villages of the region, keeping an eye out for marriageable boys and girls.

In the mid-1950s, Churha grooms and brides were in their early teens at the time of the first wedding ceremonies. Residence after marriage was patrilocal—a couple lived at the groom's parents' or joint-family's house in his village, and the bride always came from a different village. Like most north Indian rural people, the Khalapur villagers practiced village exogamy. The fifteen Chuhris still married to their first husbands had all come from villages different from their husbands'.

The bride's people made a proposal of marriage to the hoped-for groom's people. Acceptance of the proposal was confirmed at an engagement party at the groom's house; all guests from the bride's side were male; the bride-to-be herself was not present. The couple did not meet before marriage, and, indeed, the bridegroom might not see the bride even during the wedding rites, because she would be swathed in head-coverings. The main wedding ceremonies took place at the bride's house, with the groom and his all-male party coming from his village. After the wedding, the groom took the bride and her trousseau—furniture, linens, clothing, food, and gifts—back to his village. Especially if the bride had not yet had her first menstruation, she might well not see her husband during her brief stay in the women's quarters of his home with his mother, sisters, and his brothers' wives and daughters. A brother or other man of her own family would come for her after a few days and take her home where she would stay for sometimes years until she was deemed old enough to begin married life. The groom and his male party would then be invited to come for a second set of ceremonies, and the bride would go back with the groom and his party for a second visit, usually of longer duration than her first. In the early years of marriage, a bride might spend as much time in her parental home as in her marital home. Once she had children, she came back to her parental village less often, and her visits were shorter. With children of her own belonging to her husband's patrilineage, she became a well-established member of her husband's family's household.

If a wife died, a man could take another wife. If he was an older man, especially one with a number of dependent children, he might be unable to attract a young virginal bride, and he might well have to buy a wife.

Buying a wife is not the same as giving brideprice. In a brideprice marriage such as those common in the hills to the north, a groom's people approached a potential bride's people and offered cash or kind in exchange for her. A brideprice marriage resulted from negotiations between the elders of two families, a respectable transaction. The buying of a wife, as by the fore-mentioned three West Colony Chuhra men who had bought wives, was a surreptitious transaction. The women sold were never virginal girls, but women who were widows or had disgraced themselves by having illicit affairs and/or whose own brothers or husbands' brothers decided to sell them. Such a woman was taken by deception a long way from either her natal or previous marital home and sold to a man needing a mate and often a mother for his young children.

Churhis dreaded being sold, because at least at first, the sold woman was totally disoriented in her new mate's village, and totally cut off from her own people. In my paper (Kolenda 1987), "Living the Levirate," I wrote about a Chuhri widow of the West Colony of Khalapur who struggled hard to keep from being sold.

The wife of the headman of the West Colony Chuhras and one of our best friends and informants was a bought wife who had been sold by her own brother after

she had been widowed and had returned to live in her natal village. She told us how terrified she had been upon being brought to Khalapur and sold to a strange man, but she adjusted and raised her husband's and his first wife's daughter. When we knew them, she and her husband were raising this daughter's daughter, aged about five. It was clear that her husband valued her and had deferred to her needs—including in his refusal many years earlier to take his elder brother's widow as a second wife.

If a man died, his widow was to "sit with" his unmarried younger brother. If the younger brother was already married, all three—the widow, the younger brother, and the younger brother's wife—had a choice in the matter. All three had to agree that the widow should join the couple as a co-wife. One of the Hindi curse-words in this part of India was and is *sauk-rand* (co-wife/widow), meaning a co-wife who had previously been widowed. A man's wife seldom welcomed the addition of the widow-co-wife, nor did the widow usually relish filling that role.

A dead husband's real or full brother could not sell his leviratic wife. However, a dead husband's "cousin-brother" could sell his leviratic wife.

North Indians have a Hawaiian-type terminology for ego's natal kin of his or her own generation. The children of all one's parents' brothers and sisters, one calls "brother" (*bhai*) and "sister" (*bahan*), and a man would call his father's brothers, his father's sisters, his mother's brothers, and his mothers' sisters' sons "brother" or "bhai". If a widow could not marry her dead husband's full or real brother, she could marry one of his cousin-brothers. However, women feared being sold and only one of the widows we knew about agreed to marry a dead husband's cousin-brother.

This widow had married her dead husband's mother's brother's son; his first wife was blind. He was bi-locally resident. That is, the widow continued to live in the house she had shared with her first husband, and the new husband joined her there most of the time, though still visiting his mother and first wife in his own village. In this case, the co-wives did not share the same house, and the co-wife/widow did not fear that her leviratic husband would sell her because the leviratic husband did not belong to Khalapur, but was an outsider. If he had tried to sell her, the West Colony Churha men would have thrown him out of their village and would have protected her. She, of course, would never have considered moving to her leviratic husband's own village where she might have been saleable.

The distinction between the dead husband's real or full brother and his cousin-brothers was expressed by the Chuhras as a bride's having come to the entire male contingent of a family—not just to her husband but to his brothers and father as well "in *phas*." "Phas" refers to the high point in a Hindu marriage ceremony, the rounds the couple, the groom leading the bride, make around a holy fire. As long as a wife stayed with a member of the male contingent to which she had come in *phas*, she was considered to be pure.

It was only recently when I re-read Gerald Berreman's 1962 paper on *pahari* polyandry that I saw the continuity between the marriage practices of Berreman's Sirkanda villagers in the northern hills, the polyandry of the Jaunsar-Bawar villages not far from Sirkanda, and the father-brothers-husband contingent of the Churhas to whom a bride came "in pheras." According to these plains untouchables, only an impure woman would be sold, and a widow who "sits with" her dead husband's full brother is still pure.

In his paper, Berreman takes up the issue of why some villagers in Jaunsar-Bawar, not too distant from Sirkanda, practiced polyandry while the Sirkanda villagers did not; Berreman says they practiced "monandry"—that is, a woman had only one husband. His conclusion is that the two forms of marriage, the Jaunsar-Bawar polyandry and the Sirkanda monandry, were really not so different. In the former, a woman was formally married to one brother, usually the eldest, but all the brothers were considered to be her husbands, and she shared her sexual favors with all of them. In the latter, only one man was considered to be a woman's husband, but, in fact, his brothers also had sexual access to her.

Berreman summarized his comparison as follows:

Polyandry and monandry in the Himalayan hills appear not to be polar types of marriage systems as has been implied in the literature and as was supposed at the initiation of this research. They are, in fact, relatively minor variations on a central theme, namely: that a wife brings common benefits to a group of brothers who have acquired her by common payment and who share other rights and property in common. The brothers are equivalent, and show their unity as a group, relative to the wife. In one case her reproductive capacity (i.e., the "title" to her offspring) is shared; in the other it is not. In both groups any one of a family of brothers may be the biological father of a particular offspring. In Jaunsar Bawar the role of social father is shared; in Garhwal it is exclusive. [Berreman 1962:69]

The unity of brothers is also found in the Chuhra idea that a bride has been married not only to a husband but also to his brothers. The difference between Sirkanda monandry and the Khalapur Churhas' monandry is that in Sirkanda the husband's brothers had the right of sexual access to their brother's wife even while he was alive, while among the Khalapur Churhas, a brother should have sexual access to his brother's wife only after the brother who was her official husband was dead.

It was sometimes mentioned to us in Khalapur that even in high caste joint households, a man sometimes had sex with his brother's wife or a man with his son's wife, but this was not considered to be proper. The strict rules of *purdah* practiced in

Khalapur prohibited a woman from speaking to men older than her husband in her husband's village, and she was to cover her face if an older male was in her vicinity. Such avoidance rules in Khalapur seemed to be designed to prevent interest in Sirkanda-style fraternal sex from developing. However, if a Khalapur woman became pregnant by her husband's brother or father, it was unlikely to be known widely, even within her husband's joint-family, and the child would be considered to be her husband's. After all, the main task for an in-married woman was to produce sons for the patrilineage. The Jaunsar-Bawar polyandrous villages, Sirkanda in the hills to the north, and the West Colony of Khalapur, could be strung along a continuum of unity of brothers. In Jaunsar-Bawar, brothers shared a wife and the brothers were all considered her husbands. In Sirkanda, the brothers shared a wife, but only one brother was known as her husband. In the West Colony of Khalapur where the Churhas practiced a prescribed levirate, a woman married only one man but she was viewed as having come in marriage to the brothers and father of her husband as well, even though the latter did not have the right of sexual access to her until after the husband's death when an unmarried brother was expected to take her as a mate.

Premo, the Younger Brother in a Leviratic Mating

If you were going to type-cast Premo for a movie, it might be as a steppe or desert warrior of a bygone era, preferably medieval. He would, of course, have to wear something more sturdy over the saddle than his thin too-much-worn dhoti, a kind of grown man's diaper. Maybe jodhpurs or whatever those south Indian warriors wore, those warriors who are worshiped as local gods, depicted in large terracotta statues, standing in clusters on the edge of villages, sturdy with large mustaches and blazing eyes, statues popular now in American museums as staples of Crafts of India exhibits. For Premo was sturdy, handsome, if not mustached, and of medium height—not tall, but then not short.

He could have learned to play the warrior part for the movie; he certainly had the looks, and mime was his natural milieu. But his off-screen nature was too cheerful and fun-loving to be a natural as a baronial one-man barrage. And he was too young when I first knew him to be the leader of a warrior band, and, then again, he wasn't the leader-type. In my imagined movie, he would have been the leader's sidekick perhaps, always ready to make him laugh, but also ready to take cues, in turn, from the boss. For throughout his life he had a boyishness (I saw him last in 1998), and when I first knew him in 1954, he was just past being a boy, in his early twenties.

Actually, his idea of play-acting was to dress in a woman's full flying *lengha*, his head covered in a bewitching *odhna*, and to dance seductively nautch-fashion to the applause and hilarity of his basti neighbors. There was nothing effeminate, though, in his looks or everyday gestures.

What you probably would not have cast Premo for was as a down-trodden Untouchable. His costume was all right—the worn dhoti I mentioned, the stained shirt that beating on the rocks had not managed to make pristine, the somewhat holey sleeveless sweater. But he was not right, you might say, for the role life had cast him. He was too cheerful, too happy. He was not even a *paliacci*, smiling over hidden tears. He took life as he found it.

This is not to deny that some of the untouchable Churhas among whom Premo lived were insightful social critics, ready to be cast in a social problem movie, their venom striking right to the bull's eye. I think of Palu who did not belong to Khalapur—he was the leviratic husband living in his second wife's house in her dead husband's village that I mentioned above. Palu could give you a lecture right out of Oppressed Peoples 101; perhaps it was his marginal status that made him so much bolder than anyone else.

And there was the school teacher Meenu, who was in ninth grade when we first went almost daily to the Churha basti on the west side of Khalapur in the mid 1950's. A beautiful boy at 14, he had become a respected high school teacher himself when I returned in 1984. Why, he fulminated to us in 1984, was he made to live in an untouchable quarter; why were his mother, wife, and daughters required to work as village servants, cleaning latrines and cattle yards; why was he fed separately at his students' weddings when he was as well educated as anyone—whether Brahman or Rajput or whoever—in the whole village or area? Of the half dozen untouchable Churha boys from the west basti attending high school in the 1950's, Meenu was the only one who still lived there in the 1980s and 1990s. One might wonder why he had stayed.

If Premo was at the low end of a continuum of awareness of social injustice and Palu and Meenu were at the high end, then Ratiram was in the middle. He was generally accepted as the headman of the western Churha colony or basti, in the parental generation to Premo, Palu, and Meenu. I took him to be in his mid-fifties when we were there in the 1950s; he had already died by the time of my first return to Khalapur in 1964. He was called Munshi, because he was the most educated in his generation—four years of school. He both acted and looked like a fox—not red, of course, but rather white-haired. Like Premo, he loved to laugh, but in his case, it was laughter at awry remark and joke. He was famous for funny stories. Like many of the older men in the Churha basti, he had worked and lived in cities from time to time. The Churha men I knew had a preference for leaving their village sweeping work to their wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, and young sons, and going to cities of the area to work on the municipal garbage crews. They would stay for months or years and then return to the village. In the city, Ratiram had consorted with the political intellectuals of his community and when he returned to live in the village again, he voiced their explanations for Churha subordination. He alternated his funny stories with his caste lectures, so I put him in the middle of the social awareness continuum.

As I said, Premo was at the low end. He accepted life as he found it, or he had been put upon. You might say he had been sub-culturally or normatively put upon by his untouchability and the prescriptive levirate.

Premo's parents had had two sons and three daughters survive to adulthood. The eldest was a son, fourteen years older than Premo. Between the two sons were three daughters—one, four years older than Premo, followed by two daughters, two and four years younger than Premo. Premo was aged two when his brother married, and aged about nine when both this brother and their mother died.

[Premo] said he had attended a private school up to the fourth class. He said he could read a little in Hindi—such things as tickets and signs, and even a little in a book. He stopped school when his brother, Situ, died, and his mother died. There was too much work to be done for him to be spared for school. He had wanted to study. If he had been educated up to seventh or eighth class, he would like to have become an actor. In Khaji, where his [elder] sister is married, he dressed in a sari or shalwar and kurta and acted like a woman. If he had been educated, he would have read books about dramas and plays and learned songs and been better qualified. First, he would have danced alone. Then when he had acquired a reputation, he would have joined a troop, and after some time he would have had his own troop. "People who dress up in disguises earn a great deal of money," [Premo] said. No one from his basti had ever become an actor. [Feb. 5 1955; P's Ambition]

There was lots of work to do when out of the four workers in a joint family, two died. The two workers surviving were Premo's father and his brother's widow. And there were six small children to feed. Of the six, only Premo at age nine was big enough to work. His brother left a widow and three small children—two girls, aged five and three, and a baby boy. And there were also Premo's own two younger sisters, aged seven and three. At least Premo's father was still there to hold the family together—until he died just a few days before my arrival in Khalapur in October, 1954.

Premo's fate was sealed by his brother's death, for Premo inherited Situ's responsibilities. Premo's older sister, Shami, explained to us:

[Premo] was only two years old when Sita married his eldest brother, Situ. So Sita, [both Situ's and Premo's wife] is more like a mother to him than like a wife. Thirteen days after the elder brother's death [at a death memorial gathering of kin] Sita's parents came and gave money to Premo and said, "We give you our daughter." For six years after

that, Sita was a widow and lived apart. When [Premo] grew young, he began to have marital relations with her. [Nov. 21, 1954; B's Family]

It did not trouble the Sweepers that a grown woman might thus be wedded to a child. That is what happened to Sita and Premo—a nine-year-old boy married a 23-year-old mother of three.

When Premo's father died in October 1954, Premo inherited his father's debts, a total of Rs. 267, owed to seven different lenders (three landlords, two landlords' wives, one Sweeper man, and one Sweeper woman). Two loans related to his father's pig business. Three related to his younger sisters' weddings. One related to his father's own illness, and one related to Premo's severe illness some years ago when he had been disabled for four months. While Premo told us his symptoms (fever, swelling) and treatment (injections), when we reached this loan at the end of the list he did not explain. It was only later learned that we learned the cause of his illness.

The Chuhras shared with the Khalapur villagers generally a complex theory of disease, focusing on disease goddesses or "mothers"; the most powerful and most feared were, of course, the smallpox mothers. Specifically, the Chuhras' mothers were hero-spirits who could be called upon to converse with ghosts causing sickness. I call them hero-spirits because their stories tell that they had died in battle. *Bhagats* (literally, devotees) were the media through which both the hero-spirits and the ghosts spoke. When an ailment was especially difficult to diagnose as the work of one of the "mothers," the Chuhras hypothesized that it was caused by a ghost, and they turned to a bhagat to use his tutelary hero-spirit to speak to the offending ghost. The hero-spirit was called by the bhagat and a choir of Churha boys singing a song of invitation in the sick room near the ailing one. The conversation between the hero-spirit and the ghost was in two registers of the bhagat's voice. The hero-spirit would first demand an identity. Who was the ghost "sticking to" our child, woman, or man? Once the identity was forced out, the hero-spirit demanded that the ghost depart. The ghost would only agree if his appetites were promised fulfillment. He wanted luxurious food and drink. Once a bargain had been struck between the hero-spirit and the ghost, and especially, once the food and drink had been offered, the ghost unstuck itself from the ailing individual and the latter could return to normal.

My notes explain Premo's illness for which his father had incurred a debt:

The other day [Premo] had told us that five years ago he had been severely sick and that many *bhagats* had worked for a long time trying to cure him. We asked him what *bhuuts* [ghosts] had been sticking to him. He said he did not know. Today, we asked his younger sister, Kati, about this. She said that their older brother, Situ, had been working in Roorkee. On his way home from Roorkee, he

had gotten a bhuut stuck to him. Then he had come home and died. Later, Premo took his wife as his own. Then Situ's bhuut stuck to Premo and made him very ill. That bhuut said, "You have taken my wife." Through giving and promising things, Premo was finally cured. That bhuut did not stick to anyone else. Kati said, "Premo still has headaches and sore eyes. He is not very strong." Kati said she had never had any bhuuts stick to her, nor had they stuck to others in the family. [January 11, 1956; Premo's Illness]

When I arrived in 1954, Premo and Sita had two sons, aged six and eight. Since his illness caused by his brother's ghost, accusing him of having taken his wife, had occurred five years before, it would appear that Premo had already fathered two sons by Sita three years and again one year before the illness. When I speculated to Radhi, one of my best Churha friends and an inveterate gossip, that these boys were fathered by Premo's father, not by Premo, Radhi exclaimed, "How did you know?"

That all was not fully blissful between Premo and Sita is indicated on his side by Premo's asking me for an aphrodisiac, or, as he put it, "some medicine to make me feel desire for my wife," and, on her side, her gleeful remark when we were talking to some of the Sweeper women about bhuuts, "When I am a bhuut, I'll stick to Premo's new wife!"

So when I came on the scene in October 1954, Premo, aged 24, had just become the man of the family—responsible for three married sisters and two married step-daughters, as well as an unmarried step-son, aged 15, and his own two small sons, and, of course, his wife, in her forties, and blind in one eye. We tried to help by arranging for Sita to have cataract operations with a well trained doctor, even if we did not have any sure-fire aphrodisiacs handy for Premo.

Premo's sister, Shami, had come from Khaji, the village into which she was married, for their father's funeral in October, 1954. Shami's husband was one of several brothers and her husband did not get along with all his brothers. Shami grieved for her brother, Premo. "He is hardly more than a child himself and he has too much work to do," she said, and she and Premo schemed that Shami and her husband, a childless couple, should come to live in Khalapur and help Premo, Sita, and her son, Dharmu, with the work, but this plan was not effected. Sita did not want Shami and her husband there, and Shami felt embarrassed about having sexual relations in her parental village where she was meant to be a daughter, not a wife. Furthermore, Premo's house had only one room; Shami felt she was infringing on Premo and Sita's private life to stay there.

A man with five women married out of his family, *dhiyanis*, as they were called, was required to bring them gifts on three holidays a year and invite them home for visits, ideally every six months, but certainly for weddings, funerals, and birth

celebrations. In addition, of course, he must pay off his father's debts incurred in part for his sisters' and step-daughters' weddings. That Premo kept always in mind his obligations to the married sisters and daughters of his family is told in the shopping list he gave us for his trip to the Devi Fair in March, 1955. Premo not only took his own two small sons, a married sister, and a step-daughter, but also the 4-year-old granddaughter of the Churha headman, and his best friend, the school-boy Joshu, who only had three rupees to contribute to their venture. Out of the 16 rupees, 14 annas that Premo spent, about five rupees were spent on himself and Joshu—two rupees, five annas for cinema tickets, one rupee for a photograph of the two friends together, 14 annas for a walking stick for Joshu, and four annas for two pocket kerchiefs for each friend. One rupee and four annas were given to the temple. The other ten rupees were spent on merry-go-round tickets for the girls and children of the party, presents for Premo's younger married sister who was at the fair (cloth for her braids, a handkerchief, and soap), presents for his older married sister who was not at the fair (cloth for her braids, earrings, and sweets), presents for his married step-daughter who was not at the fair (cloth for her braids, soap, handkerchief, and wooden shoes), toys for Joshu's brothers and sisters back in his village, and sweets for Joshu and Premo's families and friends left at home.

Premo's conscientious fulfilling of his obligations is further documented in a note:

[Ratiram] said that [Premo] would be going to Sikri to get a young goat which he would sacrifice. This pilgrimage would be to the "mother" (*mai*). He would give goat, *prashad*, *pourras*, *kachoris* (various foods preparations). These he promised for [Inder] in the spring when he was sick. [Dec. 22, 1955; Blood Sacrifices]

Here Premo is fulfilling the promise he made to one of the disease "mothers" when his small son was sick months ago. "I will give you a goat, etc., if you will leave my son."

The problem Premo was wrestling with when we came was that of marrying off his younger step-daughter. Actually, both step-daughters had had a double wedding two years before, arranged and carried off by Premo's father. As I have already described, there were two wedding ceremonies among Hindus in this area of north India. The first, the *shadi*, took place when the bride and groom were quite young and effected an alliance between the two families and confirmed the couple as married.. The second wedding ceremony, the *chala*, took place after the bride had reached puberty at the age of 13 or 14.

What had happened with Shanti, Premo's younger step-daughter, was that her bridegroom had died between the *shadi* and *chala*. And, it seemed, he had no unmarried younger brother. Premo did not want his step-daughter to be given a second husband in the *shadi*-husband's village; as I explained earlier, such a second husband,

by Churha rules, would probably have had the right to sell Shanti. Some of the first bridegroom's male relatives had already come once asking for Shanti, and Premo had refused to send her. He then managed to arrange a marriage for Shanti elsewhere, keeping secret from the new bridegroom and his relatives the fact that Shanti had had a shadi before.

The Churhas of Premo's colony in Khalapur approved of his actions—after all, the girl was still a virgin—but Premo had reason to fear from his wife's family in her native village, because it had been a father's brother of Sita who had arranged the first marriage. Premo was worried that men from his wife's home village would come and pressure him to give Shanti to a cousin-brother of the first bridegroom's kindred. My fieldnotes tell the story:

We were asking [Premo] about the various villages he visited. He said he visited Joshu's in-laws when he had gone to get a broom in Saharanpur city. We kidded him that we knew that going to get a broom was a cover-up for doing other business. He asked if we meant arranging his daughter's marriage. Usha [my interpreter-assistant] said he had perhaps gone to file an application in Saharanpur. [Premo] began to whisper to us, telling us not to tell anyone else in the basti about it. He had gone supposedly to file an application with the Collector in Saharanpur to allow his daughter to be married in a village other than the one into which she had previously been married. ([Shanti] is a widow.) However, S., the *sarpanch* (village headman) here told him to file an application with him and that would be adequate. Premo did, but went to Saharanpur city, since he'd told the elders in the basti he would. When he had gone to Saharanpur, he had also gone to the village of his wife's brother, C. village. He told his *salas* (wife's brothers) there that he had filed an application in Saharanpur costing fifty rupees and that he had bribed the *sarpanch* here with another twenty rupees. He did this to frighten them, because they wanted [Shanti] to marry in the former village, G. village. The reason they favored this was because [Sita's] brother's wife was from G. village. They said they would witness for the G. people. "I said, 'All right, you *salas*, witness for them, but I work for the *sahibs*. In their car, my daughter will go to her in-laws'. I don't earn a great deal there, but I have a big say there.' I told them that to frighten them."

I didn't tell others in the basti about the marriage until the day I went to Muzaffarnagar to buy the things for it. While I was away, people told my family that the G. village people were coming with the police to take [Shanti] away. [Sita] was so worried. She said she would go gather her farmers [those who employed her as a sweeper] together to

help her, but [Shanti] said, “Don’t worry. I won’t go with them. I’ll die here rather than go with them. The K. village people [the new bridegroom’s kin] aren’t giving money for me. Rather my father is spending more money.”

Once before they [G. village people, Sita’s relatives] tried to get her to go with them. They said, “Your *mammi* [mother’s brother’s wife] needs your help.” But she said, “I’ll do what my mother and father tell me to do. If they tell me to jump in the well, I’ll do it, but I won’t go to G. village. Send two of your women here and there will still be work left over after they’ve taken work here.” [September 28, 1955; The False Application]

Although Premo possibly had planned for us to have a role in Shanti’s wedding, as it happened we were absent from Khalapur when Shanti’s new wedding took place—we were in a hill station, studying Hindustani. But Premo pulled it off. The *shadi* took place and Shanti went off with the new bridegroom for a brief visit with her new mother-in-law.

However, tragedy struck. In preparation for the wedding, Premo had bought Shanti new clothes and jewelry. These were stored in Premo’s house. In the heat of July, when Premo, Sita, and others slept outside at night, some robbers broke into their house and stole the trunks of wedding clothing and jewelry.

The theft was not discovered until the next morning. Premo had new dilemmas. If he reported the theft to the *pradhan* (village headman), from there it would be reported to the police [in the nearby town]. Then Premo would be pressed to name suspects. His fellow Churhas told him that he might be tortured until he named names. And Premo did not know who had stolen the trunks.

After three days, the Rajput landlord whose cattlesheds were near the Churha colony reported that the trunks had been found in a nearby field—just about empty. This Rajput, Babu Singh, was of the opinion that the theft had been an inside job—some Churha or other must at least have identified Premo’s house for the thieves. Otherwise, outsiders would not have known which house to rob.

Premo’s problems were compounded by the seeming unwillingness of the West Colony Churhas to stand behind him. As he told us, if the robbery had taken place while his father was alive, the other Churhas would have stood with him. They would have demanded a meeting of a village council to consider the theft and if there had not been satisfaction, they would have gone on strike and refused to work until there was some satisfactory resolution.

It is likely that the most popular hypothesis about the robbery was correct. The West colony was composed of two factions, and it was said that probably a member of the faction opposite to Premo's had identified the house for high caste Rajput teen-age boys who actually perpetrated the theft. Premo's own faction men may have felt it was too dangerous to take on both the opposite faction as well as some prominent Rajput families whose sons may have been the thieves.

Part of the lack of support for Premo may also have been because he worked for us. He was our project sweeper. We were a group of twenty to twenty-five researchers, spouses, administrative staff, and cooks. Except for our gardener and Premo, our sweeper, we were all outsiders, and some of us were foreigners. We foreigners had the reputation, as the Churhas told me, of being *paisawalas* [people with money] who had influence with the government. The villagers were afraid of us, although they did not fear us as much as they had feared the British before us, I was told. That Premo's position was well known to the villagers generally is suggested by the following fieldnote on a conversation that took place in my room at the Cornell project house in Khalapur.

[Ratiram] said "that one" had fever and needed some pills. Usha asked if he meant his wife, Kraceni. [Ratiram] said he did, but in India one never says the name of a spouse, and Usha should not have mentioned her name either. Premo, who had brought Ratiram some tea, said, "I always take my wife's name." [Ratiram] said, "Then I'll call a *panchayat* (council meeting)." Premo said, "I'll say, 'I'm not in the village anymore. I live at the sahibs.' When you took me to Ch village, there was a big rumor in the village that I had been taken to America. They ask me now when I came back. I just say, 'Recently.' Yesterday, some Jatiyas [untouchable shoemakers] came here. They said, 'Here is a boy that went to America.'"

Ratiram said, "People here are afraid of the sahib-lokhs, because they are *paisawalas* and have a say with the government. They stare at the sahib-lokh when they go out. But they used to be more scared during the British rule than now" (October 10, 1955; Bhangi-Chamar Panchayats). It is doubtful whether Premo ever had sexual relations with his leviratic wife. As suggested by his gift-giving to Joshu at the fair, Premo poured out his affection on Joshu, his younger high school attending friend. Then, after we all left Khalapur in 1956, Premo joined the army. He was in the army when I visited Khalapur briefly in 1967 and again in 1974, but when I came to stay for several months in 1984, Premo had returned to doing sweeping work at the old Cornell Project building, now a high school teachers' hostel [dormitory]. Premo's wife, Sita, was old, shriveled, and blind when we saw her in 1984, but she was living with her youngest son and his family, so she no longer had to do sweeping work, just some tending to a grandchild. She died in 1985. In 1997 on my next visit, Premo was staying with his older son and was not in good health. He had given his sweeping job

to his step-son, Dharmu. By 1998, he had recovered and he busied himself tending some water buffaloes he had.

Premo was a grandfather now with 25 grandchildren and at least 11 great-grandchildren. Among his grandsons, the two unemployed B.A.s busied themselves getting grass for the buffaloes. One with twelfth class graduation was a clerk in the Life Insurance Corporation in Chandigarh; another was in the pig business and lived in Khalapur; one with tenth class education was a sweeper in the Health Department in Chandigarh; one with eighth class education was a tailor in Khalapur. One granddaughter with a B.A. degree was working on her teacher's training degree in Saharanpur city. Two other grand-daughters with twelfth class education were married with children. These were the nine children of his step-son and of his own eldest son. The three sons and one daughter of his younger son were all uneducated and were sweepers. The children of his two step-daughters were also uneducated and sweepers. Shanti's husband died in 1995. His other step-daughter's husband was sick, so the step-daughter supported him.

The staff of the government-provided Primary Health Center in Khalapur preferred to live in the town five miles away rather than in the government-provided housing at the PHC. Since Premo's son was the sweeper at the PHC, and the only staff member who was willing to live in the village, he got the best house—the several roomed dwelling built for the doctor. The houses for the PHC staff, all empty except for the doctor's house occupied by Premo and his son and his family, were near the buildings of the Primary Health Center, all built on an open pasture on the edge of the village. There was plenty of fresh air and space, and Premo's son's wife did the cooking. Premo had finally lucked out.

Conclusion

In the West Colony of Chuhras, there was another child-groom, Suresh, a younger brother who at an early age was given to wed his dead elder brother's widow, who was ten or more years older than himself. While Premo's protest against this choice of mate for his first marriage had taken the form of a serious illness lasting four months or more when he had grown to maturity, Suresh, who was able to get much more schooling than Premo (eight or ten years as opposed to Premo's four) seemed to protest by going to work outside in various cities. At one time, he was the ticket-taker and accountant at the Race Course Cinema in Delhi, we were told. When he returned to the village, he began to gamble and as a result went deeply into debt. We seldom saw Suresh; his leviratic wife seldom saw him either. He had to keep himself scarce lest his debtors did him in. He had, however, fathered a son by his wife, who was the pride and joy of Suresh's parents until the child died at the age of two.

In comparison to Suresh, at the time we knew them both, Premo was a model father and step-father. Like Suresh, however, he, too, left the village—to join the army

for more than twenty years. I wonder if he just exchanged one form of subjectivation for another. At least at the end of his life, he finally had comfort, if not freedom.

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