

CARING WOMEN : GENDER, POWER, AND RITUAL  
IN GUJARATI HOUSEHOLDS IN EAST LONDON

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## ABSTRACT

This is an ethnographic study which examines the way in which some Gujarati women living in east London create auspiciousness and care for the ritual, spiritual, social and moral well-being of their natal and conjugal households. Fieldwork was conducted in four local women's groups and in Hindu Gujarati households in the north and central areas of the London borough of Newham between July 1983 and September 1984. Additional data come from tape-recorded interviews and observations between Gujarati women and obstetricians at the local maternity hospital.

Informants of both sexes acknowledged that it is women who are the agents with knowledge of many of the domestic rituals which are performed and that it is largely women who organize them. Both sexes also see women as responsible for transmitting this religious and Gujarati ritual knowledge to the next generation. This responsibility is spoken of as the *dharma* (duty) of women and of mothers in particular. The study addresses the question of how gender defines cultural constructions of responsibility. It considers ways in which notions of *dharma* (duty) and *seva* (service) inform ideas of femininity and masculinity, and suggests that gender inequalities are created through interpretations of cultural notions of *sharam* (shame), *ijjat* (honour) and *man* (respect). Within this framework, it examines the way in which informants create, negotiate and resist cultural categories. In their active responses, they both challenge and collude in dominant structures and discourses.

This dissertation aims to contribute to research on the hitherto largely neglected arena of domestic religious life among Hindus in Britain. Specifically, it aims to contribute to studies of the role of Hindu Gujarati women in caring for households and families and maintaining and transforming their culture in this country.

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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION AND FIELDWORK

### 1.1) Introduction

This ethnographic study addresses several issues which centre on the lives of some Gujaratis living in the east London borough of Newham. While data on which the research is based derive mainly from women, where available, male perspectives and voices are also included. A major aim of the study is to contribute to the hitherto largely neglected domestic religious arena among Hindu Gujaratis in England. In particular, it examines the way in which different categories of women create auspiciousness and care for the ritual, spiritual, social, and moral well-being of their natal and conjugal households. Implicit in this is an examination of relations of gender among my informants, of notions of femininity and masculinity, and relations of power. A subsidiary theme, which recurs throughout the dissertation, is the way in which my informants integrate biomedical health care and knowledge into cultural perceptions of illness and misfortune which are contextualized within the complex moral web of household and family relations. Before I examine some of these themes in more detail, I discuss the development of the research, the ways in which it has changed, and why.

### 1.2) Changing Perspectives and Problems Encountered

This dissertation has been a long time in the writing and has undergone several transformations in the process. The focus has shifted from that which was originally envisaged, partly because of difficulties I encountered during fieldwork, and partly because the data collected led in a different direction and, eventually, a change in my own perceptions and perspectives. The origins of the research lie in the inter-disciplinary collaboration of the initiators of this study - my first supervisor at SOAS, Richard Burghart, and Jane Jackson, the District Community Physician at Newham Health Authority - as well as my own background as a community nurse and anthropologist. My initial research proposal envisaged an investigation of two inter-related issues among Gujarati Hindus in the east London borough of Newham. First, to document salient features of Gujarati perceptions of

health, illness, and treatment, focusing especially on child and maternal health and illness; and second, to identify problems encountered by Gujaratis in utilizing local facilities of the National Health Service (NHS), looking in particular at the process of communication between Gujarati patients and biomedical practitioners. These aims have only been partially realized for several reasons.

Communication in the encounter between Gujaratis (and other South Asians) and biomedical practitioners working in the local Health Authority, was identified as a 'problem' by health administrators, voluntary groups concerned with health care - such as the Community Health Council - and by many organizers and leaders of South Asian organizations. I was especially concerned to examine not only the medical encounter, but to follow this up by interviewing each participant - Gujarati patient and doctor - to elicit their understanding of what had taken place. This proved to be the least successful aspect of my fieldwork and, with hindsight, it was a project which required a separate, or at least much longer period of research than I had allocated. It was also the most difficult aspect on which to gain data, in part because of the mistakes I made, but also because of the problems I experienced in setting it up. These are detailed in Appendix A. I had proposed that fifty consultations would be required for analysis, with six consultations from five different General Practitioners, and the remainder in antenatal and other out-patient departments. In the event, I gained the co-operation of only two GP surgeries where I obtained seventeen recorded interviews, and one consultant obstetrician at the antenatal out-patient clinic at the local maternity hospital. I recorded another seventeen consultations there between Gujarati women and the doctors.

I have only utilized a few of these tapes in this dissertation for several reasons. In the GP surgeries especially, the sound quality of some of the tapes is very poor. The scraping of furniture, movement away from the tape-recorder, and particularly during multiple consultations where several people were talking at the same time, parts of the conversation were rendered unintelligible. I was also

limited in what I was eventually able to achieve with the recordings in terms of interviewing the participants after the consultation (Appendix A). In the antenatal clinic, though, the wait between the various stages of the visit meant that I was able to talk generally to women about their pregnancy, their experiences at the clinic, and their perceived problems and difficulties in communication. I have drawn on these informal conversations and others with midwives, clerical staff and health visitors, as well as my own observations of the interactions and organization of the clinic, in discussions of the fertility, contraception, and the clinical management of pregnancy in this study, especially in Chapter Five.

A further reason for not using more of the data on the patient-doctor encounter is that the focus of the research itself has changed. This change occurred largely after fieldwork was completed and resulted from a re-examination of my data, and the belated realization that for some time I had been looking at it through the lens of my own cultural categories and perceptions. Despite an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a pre-fieldwork year spent, among other things, reading and writing about the cultural construction and diversity of notions of health and illness, the previous twelve years I spent working as a nurse, drawing largely on biomedical knowledge and concepts in caring for patients, proved to be a far more powerful socializing period than I gave credence to. Consciously or not, I now feel that during fieldwork I was actually looking for something 'out there' which I could identify as 'health' or 'illness', based on my knowledge and experience as a nurse. While this was not a completely wasted enterprise, some of the data I collected are no longer relevant to this particular study and will be published elsewhere. Fortunately, while I was waiting for these momentous revelations, my informants told me about their relationships with husbands, mothers-in-law, sisters, sons, brothers, daughters, neighbours, and friends. What emerged from this is that for my female informants, notions of health and well-being, illness and misfortune, are inseparable from notions of gender and power, sexuality and morality, and identity and culture in their daily lives in east London. Before I elaborate on these

issues, I look briefly at one further area of the research, namely the relationship between the time of fieldwork itself and the eventual presentation of the data.

### 1.3) Time and Memory in the Research Process

In his address as President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Adrian Mayer (1989:204) spoke of his return visit in 1983 to the village of Ramkheri where he had conducted fieldwork in 1954. He isolates four different kinds of revisits: first, many revisits which are not treated as such, for example, the four visits made by Evans-Pritchard to the Nuer over seven years; second, revisits for long-term research, such as Foster's annual visits over seventeen years; third, periodic sweeps of the society to identify change and continuity; and finally, the revisit as a 'one-off' affair. My 'revisits' to Newham fit none of these categories. Indeed, it is difficult for me to isolate the time when fieldwork actually finished. Although I moved back to north London in September 1984, I was still recording consultations in the antenatal clinic in November of that year. The four to five times a week visits to my 'fieldwork' family dropped to weekly, then fortnightly, until over the years we now see each other every few months. I have lived for the past seven years only four miles from where I conducted fieldwork. For several years, I continued to occasionally drop into one or two of the women's groups, attend rituals or festivals and catch up on the 'news'. Apart from some rituals, I stopped taking the kind of comprehensive notes which I had done previously, but sometimes jotted down information about informants - if family members married, gave birth, started work or retired, became ill and so on. This 'trickling off' of fieldwork presents several difficulties in terms of 'writing-up' the data.

Where, for example, does the 'ethnographic present' end and the 'ethnographic past' begin? Gellner (1969:303), quoted in Mayer (1989:204), visited the Berber six times in seven years and uses the present tense to cover the period from 1954-61. I have not taken such an approach in this dissertation, primarily because of a very personal

feeling that I am writing about the past, however recent some events I have recorded. I can only explain this in terms of a time when I thought of myself as an anthropologist working as a nurse, to a gradual change - so difficult to define - when I considered myself a nurse attempting to finish an anthropological dissertation.

The second difficulty is the time span between beginning fieldwork and completing writing. Raymond Firth (1985:42) has observed that 'interpretation is not holistic'. Time is often an important factor. 'What we call "events" are not neatly tailored to fit the time frame of the anthropologist's period in the field' (ibid). I agree. But what to do when more and more bits of an event keep seeping out over several years? Where does one finish a description of it? There are occasions, which I note in the text, when I write about events with a knowledgeable hindsight provided by my uninterrupted 'revisits'. I am in possession of more information, more bits and fragments. I must say that I have not used this in any systematic way. I have used my own discretion as to its relevance and interest, bearing in mind the limitation of space.

The final point I want to make concerns the subject of Mayer's (1989) Address - that of 'anthropological memories'. He refers to, among others, Bartlett's (1932) work on memory - a book, incidently, recommended to me by my first supervisor, Richard Burghart, perhaps with some prescience of the time it would take me to 'complete' - and Proust. As Mayer (*op cit*:210) points out, Bartlett's 'schema' entails 'developing patterns from the past, shaped by certain crucial events which may not necessarily be the most recent ones'. Sometimes the memory reproduces the schema in the specific order of its elements, but sometimes 'it reshapes the past according to present interests and dispositions' (Mayer 1989:210). I am not, I am certain, the only researcher who went to the field with several central concerns, and finished up writing about different issues and interests which arose from that research. The thing about writing about the past from the present is that memory plays a part in this. As Mayer (ibid:207) observes, as well as 'factual' notes, anthropologists 'also, surely,

to varying degrees [use] the memory they have of the context, the implications, the reactions that lie behind the notes'. He is particularly concerned with the Proustian notion of 'pure memory', and graphically describes an instance which occurred while raking and burning leaves in London (ibid:215). This was not a perception, nor an image, but a feeling of Ramkheri in his mind. I have no one 'pure memory' of fieldwork but, like Mayer, it is a sense of smell which triggers 'feelings' as much as memories. Often when I cook basmati rice I am transported back to the kitchen of my 'fieldwork family', even though I may have left it but a few weeks before. Sometimes, the smell of that rice brings memories of other women, other kitchens, steam on the windows, talk, laughter, and children crying, in very specific contexts. Consequently, I have tried to use these memories as Mayer suggests, to inform 'the structure or the approach which writing up may take' (ibid:216), and to illuminate the ethnographic past.

#### 1.4) Themes and Outline of the Study

There are several themes which recur throughout this dissertation while more specific issues are raised in individual chapters. In this section, I shall elaborate on two of the main themes and indicate where various aspects relating to them are discussed. The first centres on the neglected arena of domestic religion among Hindus in Britain. The second concerns gender relations, notions of femininity, and relations of power among my informants.

##### Domestic Religion

Recently, Penny Logan (1988a) isolated three documented trends in Hinduism in Britain which, while also significant in India itself, take on particular forms and meanings in this country. The first she identifies as 'the trend toward exclusivity', most clearly represented in sectarian movements. In Britain, the most popular are the several branches of the Swaminarayan movement (Pocock 1976; Barot 1980 & 1987; Williams 1984), with others including the Pushtimarga, the Anya Samaj, and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) (Knott

1986; Carey 1987a; Michaelson 1987). The second trend is toward what Knott (1987) has characterized, in her study of the Leeds Hindu Temple, as 'standardization'. Features of Hinduism are consciously selected to appeal to the greatest number, thereby playing down differences between the diverse regional traditions of Hinduism. This trend is most apparent in the context of the temple, some of which, unlike India, are called simply 'The Hindu Temple'. The third trend Logan identifies focuses on movements which are Hindu in origin but which claim to transcend Hinduism, such as the Ramakrishna Mission (Carey 1987b), and The Community of the Many Names of God (D. Taylor 1987a). As Logan (1988a:5) points out, these variants of Hinduism share formal, recognizable organizational structures which often emanate from the two 'privileged spokesmen' (Burghart 1987:9) of Hinduism - Brahmins and male ascetics. Burghart (ibid:231) locates a third category of spokesmen in Britain - the Hindu laity - whose influence is again discernable in the temple.

This focus on the public expression of Hinduism in Britain, however, omits the great majority of my informants, and probably other Hindus (cf. Logan 1988a), who neither belong to a particular sect, nor worship regularly, nor even often, at the temple. This is not something peculiar to Hindus in Britain. As Fuller (1988:50) points out, in India itself '[m]uch Hindu religious practice takes place in the home, or in the fields or on the riverbanks; some Hindus hardly ever visit the temples at all and many certainly engage in as much religious activity outside temples as in them'. Evidence of domestic religious worship among Hindus in South Asia itself is sometimes patchy but emerges from numerous ethnographies (Babb 1973, 1975; Stevenson 1971 [1920]; Pocock 1973; Wadley 1975; Fruzzetti 1981, 1982; L. Bennett 1983; Thompson 1983, 1984; Raheja 1988; Jeffery, Jeffery & Lyon 1989). A few studies focus primarily on this arena (Logan 1980; Beech 1982; McGee 1991; Harlan 1992). While the anthropological literature on Hinduism in Britain is expanding, with few exceptions (Michaelson 1987; Logan 1988a & 1988b), however, there is a paucity of ethnographic description and analysis of domestic religious worship among Hindus in this country. Vertovec (1992) recently cites

Michaelson's (1987) point that among Lohanas - a Gujarati trading caste - a focus on temple attendance would be uninformative and misleading. Rather, the home is the focus of much religious activity. However, Vertovec implies that this is a caste-based orientation and one example of the multiform devotional orientations of Hindus in this country. My data, though, show that this situation is not caste-based but pertains to the vast majority of my informants. A major contribution of this study then, is an examination of the neglected arena of domestic religious worship among Hindu Gujarati informants in east London. I shall now discuss several of the more salient issues which arise from this examination.

In a recent article, Sered (1988) notes that anthropologists and historians have used the term 'domestic religion', to refer to a relatively minor subset of religious observances. Terms such as 'folk', 'popular', 'local', 'practical', 'little tradition' or 'customary' imply that this is in some way 'subordinate or marginal' (ibid:517). It is perhaps unsurprising that she also notes that domestic religion is an important, although not exclusive arena for women.<sup>(2)</sup> While in the context of the temple, the 'privileged spokesmen' of the Hindu laity are presumably male, in the domestic realm among my informants, this role is most certainly female. What emerged early on in my fieldwork, and what was confirmed through observation and inquiry, was the acknowledgement by both sexes that it is women who are the agents with knowledge (*jnan*) of many of the domestic rituals which are performed, and that it is largely women who organize them. My data support Logan's (1988a:30) observation that it is the specificity of this Gujarati regional religious knowledge and ritual practice which informants see as an essential and differentiating aspect of their culture (Chapters Two, Four and Six). Both female and male informants perceive that as agents of this religious knowledge, women are responsible for transmitting this to the next generation. Informants spoke of this responsibility as the *dharma* of women, and of mothers especially. It is their moral duty to teach and pass on this knowledge to their children.

A further area of difference among my informants are the particular ritual practices associated with the *kul devi*, or lineage goddess, of the patriline. Unlike the analysis of life cycle rites among Bengali Hindus carried out by Inden and Nicholas (1977), for example, where one of the most important sources of variation is caste, among Gujarati informants this source of variation lies with an affiliation to a particular patriline. The specific ritual and other practices of each patriline maintains a patrilineal identity, or 'family tradition'. Knowledge of these rites and practices are handed down through in-marrying women, from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law (Chapter Four). This relationship is thus of primary importance to the continuation of patrilineal 'family tradition' and identity, and is discussed at numerous points in the study. As Harlan (1992) observes of Rajput women in Rajasthan, though, a married woman may actively resist incorporation into the traditions of her conjugal home (ibid:12). This is explored in relation to my own informants in Chapter Four.

A particular theme of this dissertation, then, is the role of women in domestic religious worship. Far from being a particular subset of rituals, Sered (1988) further argues that domestic religion is 'a spiritual theme that pervades and organises the religious lives of many human beings' (ibid:516). I follow her definition of this as 'the arena in which the ultimate concerns of life, suffering and death are *personalised*' (italics in original) (ibid). It shares 'symbols, beliefs, a ritual framework and a sacred history with the non-domestic religion of the same wider tradition' (ibid). The intersection of the domestic and non-domestic is noted at various points in this dissertation (especially Chapter Five). Domestic religious worship among my informants is primarily concerned with nurturing and promoting well-being, and with creating auspiciousness in relationships of care. Auspiciousness, well-being, and care are multivocal terms. What is auspicious - and inauspicious - can refer to events, especially astrological events, persons, or objects (cf. Raheja 1988:37-8). The day, for example, is divided into one and a half hour periods which, depending on astrological influences, may be

auspicious or inauspicious. A married woman whose husband is alive is considered to be 'lucky' or 'fortunate'. Many of the articles used in rituals are said to be good omens which create auspiciousness. Auspiciousness contributes to well-being but is not its sole referent. Care is another linked term which has implications of protection (*rakhavi*), solicitude and concern (*chinta*), and compassion (*dya*). Care is also implied in the term *seva* (service) which, ideally, connotes selfless service without expectation of reward or return (cf. Mayer 1981:165). Notions of auspiciousness, well-being, and care, are probably best understood in terms of Wittgenstein's (1958) concept of 'family resemblances', which describe categories that have elements in common but which are not defined in terms of one single element.

This study examines the way in which different categories of women nurture well-being and create auspiciousness for different categories of persons in relationships of care. This necessarily entails looking at these categories of women and the relationships in which they are involved. For several years now, the distinction made in north India between in-marrying (affinal) women, and natal (consanguineal) women, has been the subject of anthropological inquiry from various perspectives. Recent ethnographic and theoretical analyses of north Indian women, for example, have raised questions about a number of assumptions concerning the movement of women at marriage, and their role in creating and maintaining kin relations. Studies of women in rural areas of north India have challenged the notion that with movement at marriage to their husband's village, women have little or no contact with their natal households. For several years after marriage especially, women constantly move back and forward between natal and conjugal households, providing a flexible workforce, conveying new ideas and technology, and even acting as marriage brokers (Das 1976; Jacobson 1977 & 1982; Sharma 1980 & 1981). Sharma (1980:150) made the point early on, that this constant movement shows the important role which women play in 'their structural position as the connecting links between groups of agnatically related men'. I expand on this in relation to my own urban informants (Chapters Two, Three and Four), where I also examine the

way in which ideas about close and distant kin are manipulated and used situationally.

Data from my informants also suggest, however, that married women have a continuing role in the ritual and religious life of their natal households (cf. Harlan 1992). Several studies have shown, for example, that with the movement between natal and conjugal households, women are engaged in the organization of prestations and gift exchanges, in both ritual and secular contexts (Sharma 1980; L. Bennett 1983; Raheja 1988; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989).<sup>3</sup> It is when we examine these contexts among my informants - particularly at life cycle rites - that one category of woman especially emerges as pre-eminent, namely the husband's married sister (*nanad*).<sup>4</sup> In her recent analysis of the contexts of giving and receiving *dan* in a north Indian village, Raheja (1988) notes the linguistic and ritual separation between women as affines and women as consanguines. The married *nanad* (HZ), as a recipient of *dan* in some ritual contexts, removes inauspiciousness from her brother's household. In this role, she is considered to be 'other', as belonging to her husband's patriline. On the other hand, the *nanad* (HZ) also participates in gift exchanges where she is considered 'our own', as belonging to her natal patriline. This is especially the case during life cycle rites when she receives gifts (*neg*) in return for ritual services, a point on which Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989) elaborate in their study of childbearing in rural north India.

It is the role of the married *nanad* which is highlighted in this study. As an affinal woman in her conjugal household, a woman as a wife and mother enacts rituals to care for and protect husband and children, and create auspiciousness for themselves and the household. But we shall see that the husband's married sister is also a crucial source of auspiciousness and well-being in her brother's household. In her discussion of the social and symbolic roles of Brahman-Chetri women in Nepal, Lynn Bennett (1983) suggests that in Hindu ritual two sets of values are apparent. These 'opposed but complementary' (ibid: viii) values also order kin relations and are based on different

values and perspectives of women. The 'patrifocal mode' (ibid) stresses duty and obedience based on a ranking system of 'male superiority and respect for age' (ibid). In the alternative structure of 'filiafocal' relations, 'the sacredness of consanguineal women is stressed. Here, the patrifocal hierarchy is reversed: female ranks over male and youth over age' (ibid). As an unmarried sister and daughter (a virgin), a woman may be worshiped as a manifestation of the Goddess (see also Allen 1976; Hershman 1977; Gray 1982), but as a wife, a woman is never honoured in this way. Among my informants, however, it is not so much youth which is honoured in consanguineal women, but their married state.<sup>(5)</sup> It is with her own marriage that a woman becomes a major ritual officiant in all important life-cycle rites in her brother's household (Chapter Five). The role of the married *nanad* in creating auspiciousness and well-being in her brother's household, and its implications from the perspective of different actors, is explored in the Conclusion to this study.

### Relations of Gender and Power

The above observations lead to a consideration of why it is women who perform rituals to protect and nurture husbands, children, brothers, households, and patriline. This takes us into a discussion of gender relations and relations of power in the household and kin group, and the cultural notions which underpin them - themes which recur throughout the study. Feminists have long been concerned with issues of power and subordination and there now exists a considerable body of work which has, from many theoretical perspectives, added to our understanding as well as bringing fresh insights. It is not my intention to detail the history of these developments (see, for example, Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Dubisch (ed) 1986; Moore 1988; Sanday and Goodenough (eds) 1990). Something does need to be said, however, about my own approach in the context of recent theoretical developments, and in the context of the lives of my informants. Strathern (1987) has recently challenged Ortner and Whitehead's (1981:16) assertion that gender differentiation inevitably implies a hierarchy in which men are valued more than women. Strathern points to

'the bias of analyses which suppose that gender relations are ultimately a matter of one sex appropriating the powers of another' (ibid:289). Nonetheless, ideologies of male dominance, and 'experienced inequalities of everyday life' (Strathern:ibid) among women - including my female informants - do exist, and do constrain the choices of women in many societies. Such inequalities, I suggest, are not simply a product of the observer's bias but, among my informants at least, are made known to them by men and other women.

This is not to say that the women I came to know were passive victims of the dominant (cf. Caplan 1988:12; Palriwala 1990:40-1). One of the issues which feminists have wrestled with is the way in which women, in societies where there is an ideology and practice of male dominance, can exercise considerable power. In her article on the 'appearance' and 'reality' of prestige and power in a Greek village, Friedl (1967) pointed out early on that the manifestations of male prestige and power in the public sphere, masks the important power women exercise in the domestic sphere. This observation in turn, however, raised questions about the nature of power itself and the legitimacy of according greater power to the public, male domain (which I shall discuss again shortly). Along with other studies in the seventies (Lamphere 1974; Sanday 1974; Rogers 1975), this work, though, did begin to view women as social actors with some degree at least, of economic and political power in everyday life. Much of my earlier reading on South Asian women captured some of the constraints within which they operate but, with few exceptions (Jeffery 1979; Sharma 1980; L. Bennett 1983) gave little weight to the way in which individual women strategize and negotiate within these constraints. Recent analyses have focused much more on this (Collier and Rosaldo 1981; Ortner 1984; Strathern 1987; Dube & Palriwala (eds) 1990). Ortner (1984:144), for instance, notes the interest on 'practice, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance', and 'the doer of all that doing: agent, actor, person, self, individual, subject'. Strathern (1987:23) uses the term 'agency' as a means of looking at the way in which actors impinge on and depend on one another. As Moore (1988:41) rightly observes, this 'necessarily

involves some consideration of choice, strategy, moral worth and social value as they relate to the actions of individual actors'.

With this in mind, when I came to look again at my own data, Kandiyoti's (1988) discussion of 'patriarchal bargains' struck me as being a useful way of examining relationships, both among women themselves, and between women and men. While I am aware of the debate in feminism surrounding the term 'patriarchy',<sup>6</sup> Kandiyoti's notion of women strategizing and making 'bargains' 'within a set of concrete constraints' (ibid:275) - which can 'exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity' (ibid) - has the merit of dealing with the choices individual women make, while at the same time locating those choices within a wider structural framework. By examining strategies and coping mechanisms which women employ within the specific bargains they make, Kandiyoti notes that it is possible to 'reveal how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities (ibid:285). This allows the possibility of collusion with, and resistance to, dominant structures, as well as the possibility of transformation in gender relations. In this study, I follow Foucault's (1981:94) argument that 'power is exercised from innumerable points in the inter-play of nonegalitarian and mobile relations'. Returning to the question at the beginning of this section, in this study, I attempt to show the way in which my female informants operate within a set of constraints and possibilities to achieve well-being and auspiciousness, and to successfully care for themselves and others. This necessarily entails looking at areas of dispute and negotiation, and at notions of personal and impersonal misfortune which threaten well-being and, thus, the failure to achieve this. Without examining why some woman may fail in this, we cannot understand what successful care entails (Chapter Seven).

One can then ask what are some of the 'concrete constraints' within which female informants operate? Collier and Rosaldo (1981), in their examination of simple societies, argue for an analysis of gender relations which links productive relations and political processes

with the organization of marriage. While marriage patterns and organization *per se* were not a central focus of this study, one can note that in the hierarchical caste and kinship system of my informants, women marry out of their natal home and move with marriage to their husband's household; that wife-givers rank beneath wife-takers; that wealth, in the form of dowry, goes with the bride to her conjugal home; <sup>(7)</sup> and that after marriage, a woman has no jural rights to maintenance in her natal household. In Chapters Three and Four, I look at the implications for female informants of an ideology of patrilocality in terms of the relationships within their conjugal household (*sasara*) and their natal household (*pihar*). Data suggest that women's authority and power in the household are related to stages of their domestic cycle, and to their relationships with men in the 'bargains' they make to care for households and patriline in return for protection and social status.

Unlike rural north Indian women (Sharma 1980), and some other South Asian women in Britain (see, for example, Curren (1986) on Pathan women in Bradford), my female informants do not practice *purdah*. At various points in the study, however, I examine the way in which constructions of femininity are informed by cultural notions of shame (*sharam*), moral duty (*dharma*), and service (*seva*). These cultural ideas contribute to powerful stereotypes of femininity which have important implications for women, not least in terms of their role in production. The latter is one aspect of feminist scholarship which has created an enormous body of work - both in the West and cross-culturally<sup>(8)</sup> - where, for example, what it is that constitutes 'work', and what is 'produced', have been rigorously deconstructed. Sharma's research in both rural (1980) and urban (1986) north India, for example, has linked women's role in production not only to property and marriage transactions, but to the maintenance and enhancement of household status. In Chapter Three, I examine the way in which notions of femininity are linked to the sexual division of labour in the household - and to female responsibility for housework and child care - where *dharma* and *seva* are perceived as 'normal' or

'natural' attributes of women. In addition to this, I look at the way in which these impinge on women in paid work outside the household.

Bhachu (1988), in her study of Sikh women in west London and the Midlands, is also concerned with the relationship between an ideology of male dominance and women's role in production. Countering arguments that north Indian women lack autonomy in their lives (Sharma 1980; Standing 1985), she observes that the active relationship which Sikh women have with the labour market since migration has resulted in 'an increase in women's personal autonomy and decision-making powers' (ibid:76) in their ability to control and generate resources.<sup>(\*)</sup> A major reason for this has been a move away from the 'stronger patrilinearity' prior to migration, to an increasingly bilateral kinship structure and nuclear households (ibid:96-7). However, 'this is not to suggest that women have equality in the community, because they do not: men remain dominant' (ibid:78). My own (limited) data from female informants who have entered the waged economy in various positions, suggests a much more fragmented picture, with some having some control over their earnings, others who have little at all, and others who, for a variety of reasons which are discussed, never enter the waged-economy. Data also suggest that while younger women are increasingly wanting, and sometimes demanding, the establishment of a nuclear household at or soon after marriage, this does not appear to have undermined the ideology of patrilineality and patrilocality (cf. Werbner 1990:280 on British Pakistanis). However, when we come to notions of 'practical kinship' (Bourdieu 1977), patrilineal ideologies are often subsumed under notions of similarity and difference, and closeness and distance, which are used situationally by women and men to their own advantage (Chapters Two, Three, and Six). This, moreover, as was noted in the previous section and which will be discussed in the dissertation, has important implications for different categories of women in terms of their ritual roles in conjugal, as well as natal households.

In addition to ideology and production, feminists have also focused on reproduction. Within anthropology, one of the earlier

theoretical expositions of female subordination, or 'sexual asymmetry', was set out by Michelle Rosaldo (1974). She argued that the association of women with the private, family-oriented domestic sphere as opposed to the public, more powerful sphere of men, was a near-universal model of gender relations. This ovarian article, along with Ortner's (1974:67-87) contribution in the same collection on the nature/culture debate - in which she argued that the 'secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals' (ibid:67) - has since provided an analytic framework for the examination of gender relations in numerous studies. Both Rosaldo and Ortner link women's association with the domestic domain to their reproductive role as mothers. Motherhood and mothering are 'natural' biological functions of women who, through mother-child groups, are linked with the domestic domain. In this hierarchical model, the public, male domain encompasses, and is given greater value than, the domestic domain.

The many criticisms<sup>(10)</sup> of this model have focused on a variety of ethnocentric assumptions, including the claim to near-universality, the 'naturalness' of motherhood, and the rigid division of social life into public and domestic domains. Strathern (1984:18) argues that the demeaning connotation of the domestic sphere, where women can be seen as less than proper persons, is a western cultural construct without universal validity. Harris and Young (1981:11) point out that substituting 'reproduction' and 'production' for women and men is also problematic, reproducing the artificial dichotomy of domestic/public. As Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989) note in their analysis of childbearing in north India, women are involved in both relations of production and reproduction, and the boundaries between the two cannot be captured separately (ibid:10) - a perspective with which I would agree. They use the term 'reproduction' (pace Edholm, Harris and Young 1977), to refer to those '[a]ctivities crucial for the day-by-day and intergenerational continuity of the social system - social reproduction, the reproduction of the labour force and biological reproduction'. Chapter Four looks at the way in which notions of *sharam* are particularly salient to understandings of female sexuality. This is continued in Chapter Five which focuses on perceptions of

procreation, fertility, motherhood, and the management of pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum. Chapter Six looks at the way in which notions of female sexuality are linked to categories of food which create relationships with the Gods and gender the female body.

MacCormack (1980:16) and Hirschon (1984:19), in their criticisms of the public/domestic debate, point to the ethnocentrism of assuming that the proper locus of power lies in the public arena with men. Hirschon (ibid) further observes that property is not necessarily material - specialized skills, ritual knowledge, as well as honour and reputation are 'socially valued resources'. These observations are particularly salient to my female informants. On the one hand, women's ritual knowledge and practice is not only acknowledged by men, it has important implications in terms of divine protection of the household and patriline. Through their rituals, women can acquire merit (*punaya*) with God for themselves and for others (Chapters Four and Six). On the other hand, women contribute in numerous ways to the status and honour of the household. Ortner and Whitehead (1981) see this sphere of 'prestige relations' as mediating between kinship and marriage organization, and gender ideology. The analysis of prestige structures are also salient to this study where it is suggested that gender inequalities are also created through interpretations of cultural notions of *man* (respect), *ijjat* (honour), and *sharam* (shame). These are several of the 'innumerable points' (Foucault 1981) from which relations of power are exercised by both women and men. Ortner and Whitehead, however, place these prestige structures in the male-dominated public sphere (ibid:19). The cultural construction of gender, they argue, must proceed by examining '(male) prestige relations' (ibid:20). Prestige structures, though, are not simply the preserve of men. They are also open to women, some of whom are able to acquire considerable influence and power within the household, neighbourhood, and wider Gujarati community.

Kandiyoti's notion of women strategizing to maximize 'life choices' is, I feel, also useful in that it allows the possibility for transformation in gender relations - not smoothly, but with complex

contradictions within specific cultural contexts. In observing that relations of power are 'strictly relational', Foucault (1981:95) goes on to note that 'their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance'. James Scott (1990) has recently considered ways in which subordinates resist total domination. He uses the term 'hidden transcript' to 'characterize discourse that takes place "offstage", beyond direct observation by powerholders' (ibid:4). This is in contrast to the 'public transcripts' of subordinates in the presence of the dominant. At various points in this dissertation, I note the 'hidden transcripts' of my female informants who resist in various ways domination by men, by older women, and neighbourhood gossips. These transcripts are revealing, not only in the discontent and dissent which they reveal, but also in the way in which they challenge dominant structures and ideologies. They show the way in which these are, as Lederman (1990:45) points out 'contested rather than shared', more 'an argument than a conversation'. That gender (and sexuality) is culturally constructed has been noted by many feminist writers (Ortner & Whitehead 1981:1; Strathern 1981; Du Boulay 1986:161; Caplan 1987a). The current agenda which writers (Schlegel 1990:23; Lindisfarne-Tapper 1992) are now addressing are the variants which exist within cultures as well as between them. As masculinity *per se* was not a focus of this research, my data are unfortunately not as adequate as I would wish and I can only suggest possible variants. However, I do try to show in this study that various notions of femininity also exist among my informants (Chapters Three, Six, and Seven). Younger women especially, challenge ideas of the 'naturalness' of many feminine attributes, as well as dominant structures which impinge on their lives.

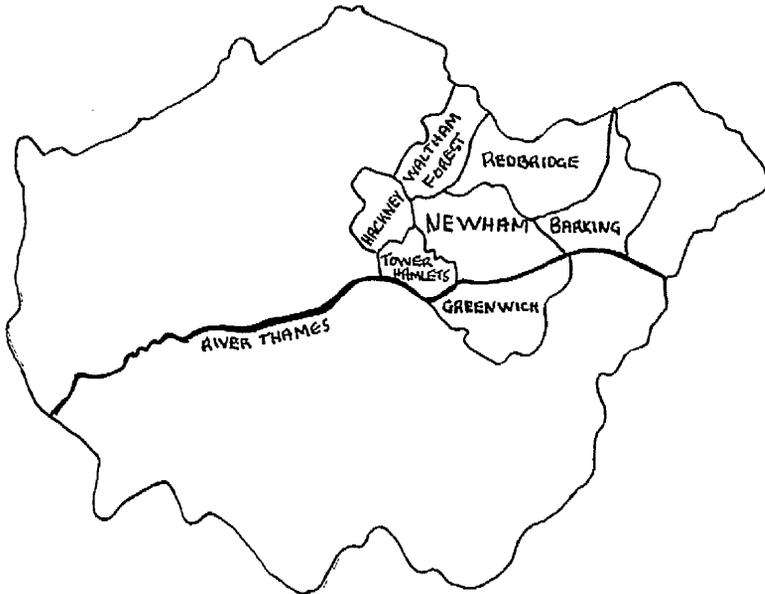
These two main themes recur throughout this dissertation. Individual chapters raise more specific issues and address several current debates within anthropology. To give a brief overview of the study. Chapter Two situates Gujaratis within the east London borough of Newham, and examines the 'self-imposed' and 'other-imposed' (Wallman 1978:204-5) perceptions of difference and identities among my informants. Chapter Three focuses on sociality within the household and neighbourhood, examining the ways in which women both co-operate

and compete with each other to maintain the status and reputation of the household. Chapter Four looks at the way in which cultural notions of *sharam* (shame) and *man* (respect), and *dharma* (duty) and *seva* (service), inform the social context of different categories of women in relation to their natal and conjugal households. Chapter Five focuses on the social and cultural notions which inform ideas of procreation, fertility, and motherhood. It explores in particular, the ritual and secular context in which my informants experience pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum. Chapter Six locates ideas of goodness, power, and purity in relation to food, gender, and well-being in three domains of discourse. Central to these ideas are the contextually different ways of categorizing goodness and power, and the implications of female purity in relation to Gujarati culture in Britain. Chapter Seven provides an overview of the study, noting the limitations of the research and suggestions for future areas of anthropological inquiry. It also expands on some of the general arguments raised to focus on the cosmology of women's well-being, the role of the married *nanad*, and to ask what successful caring may entail and the risks women take to achieve this.

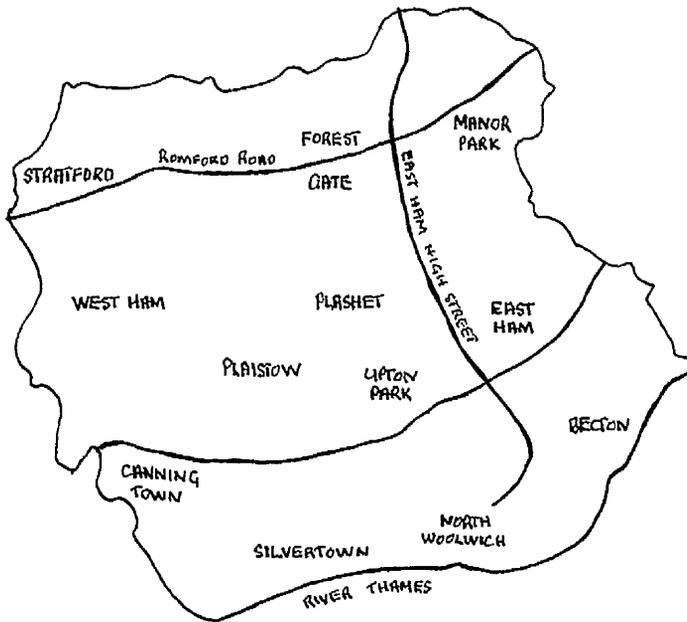
#### 1.5) Fieldwork: Starting Out

When I began my fieldwork in Newham (see Maps 1 & 2 overleaf) at the end of June 1983, there was little information on anthropologists working in their home areas, how they went about meeting the particular group of people they wanted to study, or the difficulties and set-backs they encountered. Despite my earlier reading, the image of fieldwork which remained with me was largely that of the anthropologist working in 'exotic' rural areas, or far-away cities which bustled with colourful activity. Informants seemed to be everywhere. The anthropologist took part in, or observed, rituals, political chicanery, or rice planting, as everyday occurrences, occasionally suffering and, as Fardon (1990:574) remarks 'getting sick in appropriately exotic ways whilst doing all this'. I saw the separation of myself from the social world I inhabited in London as an essential aspect of conducting 'proper' anthropological fieldwork. To

MAP 1: The Greater London Area with the Borough of Newham and Surrounding Boroughs



MAP 2: The Borough of Newham and its Suburbs



this end, I primed friends and acquaintances with the idea that I would be out of touch for at least a year - even though I would be living only a few miles away - and moved from where I lived in north London, to what for me was unknown territory to the east.

Newham seemed neither exotic nor bustling but, compared with other areas of London in which I had lived, the cultural diversity of the population was immediately striking. I had intended to find accommodation in the Forest Gate or Manor Park area of Newham with a view, if possible, to eventually renting a room in a Gujarati household. After several unsuccessful sorties to the area, however, I took a bedsitter in the neighbouring suburb of Ilford where I stayed until September 1984 - spare rooms in Gujarati homes being few and far between. One handicap in my choice of residence was the absence of a telephone which, initially and naively, I thought would enable me to remain cut off from friends in London and get on with my research. Considering that almost all my future informants subscribed to British Telecom, this proved rather short-sighted. A telephone is not only an essential piece of equipment in urban areas, but is quite literally an important instrument in conveying information. My second problem was transport at night. At first I ventured forth in the evenings to meetings, to the temple, to visit households, or to attend rituals, but after one unsavory incident when I was physically threatened at a deserted bus stop, I gave up staying out late unless I was assured of a lift home afterwards. I know I missed functions, rituals, and the opportunity of participating more fully in some households when the men came home from work, but I balanced this against my own safety. Finally, there were times when I first moved to east London when I despaired of ever meeting enough Gujaratis to make the research plausible. The spatial separation involved in urban fieldwork means that informants rarely live next door or even in the next street. As Foster and Kemper (1980:89) rightly point out 'only a few people the urban anthropologist meets in the course of a day are potential informants'. On a bad day one might add, none are. I was fortunate, though, to be given a useful guide to various organizations in the

borough and, armed with this, I gradually made contact initially with men, and then with several women's groups.

I began by contacting organizations which were either specifically Gujarati, or which had a high proportion of Gujarati members. My aim was to eventually establish a network of informants with whom I could interact on a group as well as a household and individual basis. Initially, these contacts were mainly with men who were leaders of community voluntary groups, <sup>(11)</sup> a local councillor and, by telephone only, with the president of two caste groups. On the separate occasions I had lengthy conversations with two of these men - the councillor and a voluntary group leader. After a discussion of my proposed research, both suggested alterations in my emphasis, and 're-directed' me to what they felt were the essential issues to be addressed - anti-racist provisions and practices, improved housing conditions and availability, translators in hospitals and clinics, and better access to health care information and treatment through wider publicity in Asian languages. These issues were - and still are - high on the local political agenda. They also asked to see copies of the questionnaires I intended to use, and questioned me closely on the 'scientific' basis of anthropological research methods which, despite my efforts, they found sadly wanting. My attempts to recruit any of these men, and by extension their households, as potential informants, also failed. My questions concerning health practices in the home were invariably referred to wives or mothers - or more precisely, to women other than their own family members and relatives. On several occasions, though, they suggested women's groups which might be useful starting points and this information, together with my list of organizations, lead me eventually to the four women's groups with which I was involved during fieldwork.

#### 1.6) Women's Groups

a.) The Ladies Club at Upton Park (hereafter LC) is part of a much larger English language scheme run by the Newham Community Renewal Programme <sup>(12)</sup> in five centres around the borough. The co-ordinator of

the scheme, a thirty-five year old Gujarati woman married with two children, arrived from her birthplace in Uganda in 1972. During fieldwork there were fifty-six women on the register, fifty-three of whom were Gujarati. Not all were regular attenders by any means - this varied from about ten to twenty-five with more at special events, social outings, or festival celebrations. The women were from around forty to seventy years of age and from a variety of castes, including Brahman, Mochi, Suthar, Mistry, Darji and Leva Patel. <sup>(13)</sup> All the women were married or widowed, all had children and many had grandchildren who sometimes accompanied them to the meetings. The majority were from East Africa and now lived in Upton Park, Forest Gate, Plashet and Plaistow (see Map 2, p28). While they had varying degrees of English, some of the older women had none at all and conversation at the club was mostly in Gujarati.

The group met one afternoon a week in a large and rather draughty hall. Meetings usually began with devotional songs (*bhajans*), included some English language tuition, always a great deal of conversation and sometimes a guest speaker. The latter included talks on the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, fire prevention in the house, road safety, the use of the ambulance service, legal aid and immigration status of South Asian women, public sector housing in Newham and racial discrimination and complaints procedures. I went on several of the numerous social outings which were organized: to St. Paul's Cathedral, a meal in a Gujarati restaurant in the West End, a journey to Berkshire where the previous English teacher now lived, to Epping Forest, to the main psychiatric hospital in the area, a visit to the newly-opened south Indian Murugan temple, and so on. Sometimes these visits took place at the weekend when many other women, who were not regular attenders or even members, took part. These were often younger women with small children. It was on one such outing that I met one of my main informants, Nita, a divorcee with two young children. From the co-ordinator's point of view, these activities and outings were not simply social events, but were means by which women could acquire knowledge of the local and wider society in which they lived. Most women, though, saw the club primarily as a social forum where the

company of other Gujarati women could be found, and where news and information on all manner of topics could be obtained and exchanged. At festival times during the Hindu year, they organized their own celebrations, setting up shrines in the hall, providing decorations and consecrated food (*prasad*) which was later distributed. Some biographical details of my main informants from this group are in Appendix B.

b.) There was some overlap between groups and several women who attended this club also met at the second centre in Upton Park (hereafter UP), which housed the Asian Senior Citizen Welfare Association (ASCWA). These women, and details of my main informants from UP, are in Appendix C. The ASCWA was a drop-in centre which gave advice on housing, welfare benefits, racism, legal aid, and so on, and which had strong connections with local councillors and the three sitting Labour Members of Parliament. The women's group here also met one afternoon a week. It was initially run by a Gujarati-speaking Marathi whose husband was a local councillor. When she left soon after I began fieldwork, she handed over the organization to Jayshree (Appendix C), a young woman who had arrived from Gujarat in 1979. This was not a universally popular appointment and, along with other factors, some of which are discussed in Chapter Three, contributed to considerable dissent within the group. Although the majority of women came from East Africa, and while most were over forty years of age, there were several, including Jayshree, in their thirties and several who had come directly from India. The activities were similar to the Ladies Club but without the English language tuition which was held separately. The regular attenders of ten to fifteen women increased considerably when special events were held. At a celebration of Shivaratri - referred to as the birthday of Lord Shiva - for example, some sixty women and children attended, including many from LC. The group also invited guest speakers, many of whom came from the same organizations as those speaking at the Ladies Club. What made this group distinctive, however, were the contacts through the Asian Senior Citizens Welfare Association, with local Labour councillors and

Members of Parliament, several of whom presented themselves as guest speakers.

c.) The third group differed from the other two in that it was not a women's group as such, but a formally organized English language tuition centre based in East Ham (hereafter EL). Details of my main informants from this group are found in Appendix D. The classes were organized and taught by a Gujarati woman who arrived in Britain from Kenya in 1972. She was helped by two part-time teachers, one English and the other Polish. The centre ran morning and afternoon classes each week day. While the main purpose was English language tuition, it did have an active social element. Again, the aim of the organizer was to increase women's knowledge and experience of the local and wider society. I accompanied the group on many of the educational and social visits which were organized - including a day trip to France - but could rarely organize my time to take part in the swimming, badminton and squash which was on offer. In terms of the English language lessons, I concentrated mainly on the morning sessions which invariably included more Gujarati women than the advanced classes in the afternoon. Initially, I attended each morning session for about four weeks to become acquainted with the women. Later, I was more selective and usually attended toward the end of the class and over the lunch break, when I had the opportunity to talk with women in a group or follow them up individually.

I did not tape-record conversations either at the women's groups or classes or in the home. Rather, I wrote down as much as possible as soon as possible with the help of notes taken at the time. My spoken language was limited to a vocabulary primarily concerned with pregnancy and childbirth, and health and illness. I was not very fluent and found that I could understand more than I could speak. Often when I ran into difficulties, I would get women to write things down in Gujarati - which all but a few elderly women could do - or other women, if present, would translate for me. On many occasions, when my Gujarati was less competent than their English, the

conversation was carried out in English interspersed with Gujarati words and phrases.

There were sixty-six women on the register at EL, twenty-three of whom were Hindu Gujaratis, two Muslim Gujaratis, thirty-one Pakistanis, six Sikhs, one Russian, one Indonesian, one Italian and one Turkish woman. Details about my main informants from this group are in Appendix D. Towards the end of my fieldwork, three women from UP also joined the centre. There were three grades of classes: fourteen beginners for those with little or no English, the largest intermediate group of around forty women, and an advanced class of about ten. My main informants were from the first group. Ages ranged from eighteen to around sixty years of age. The majority of older Gujarati women came from East Africa, but it was at this centre that I met most of the younger Gujarati women who had come directly from Gujarat. Towards the end of my fieldwork, three women from the UP centre joined this English Language class (Appendix D).

The classes were mixed as far as cultural background was concerned and while a formal programme of language tuition took place, there was always considerable discussion in the classes which arose from the topic at hand and from people's own experience. During fieldwork, an additional class on pregnancy and childbirth was organized for two morning sessions per week during the second term. These classes involved the use of health education material, several visits to the centre by a midwife from the local maternity hospital, and a reciprocal visit to the hospital by the women in the class. The sessions were not confined to young women and my attendance at each class provided valuable data from women, both individually and in groups, on many aspects of pregnancy and childbirth - including rituals - as well as notions of female sexuality and gender relations.

d.) The final group, the Multi-Cultural Mother and Toddler group (hereafter MF), began shortly after I started fieldwork. Details of my main informants from this group can be found in Appendix E. The language co-ordinator at the Renewal Centre and the area organizer of

the Pre-school Playgroup Association helped to establish the group which was run by young Gujarati woman from Kenya. This was a mixed group of Gujarati, Sikh and Pakistani women with the occasional north Indian, Tamil or Sri Lankan. Around eight to fifteen women attended with their young children and at times they were joined by older women, some of whom I knew from the other organizations. The purpose of the group was primarily to provide a social centre for women with young children. An occasional guest speaker was arranged, but the meetings consisted largely of conversations among the women while the children played with toys provided.

In all these groups and classes, news and information was gained and exchanged on a whole range of topics, including health care. At the meetings, I sometimes had the opportunity to initiate group discussion with sets of questions posed to those present, but more often discussion arose from the flow of everyday conversation where I interjected with questions. During the meetings, I was also able to talk with individual women but invariably, others joined in. There were some women whose faces I knew and who contributed information during such discussions, but of whom I knew little in terms of their households, origins, caste or class backgrounds. One difficulty in using these meetings for group discussion, was the problem of 'sticking to a topic'. I mean by this that there were times when conversations were interrupted by the comings and goings of others, by the business of the meeting, and by the disinterest of some women in what was being talked about. The thread was lost and not recaptured. However, group discussions not only provided checks on information from individual women, but were in themselves revealing in their areas of consensus and disagreement.

With these and other women I met, I explained the purpose and object of my research but none inquired about my methods of data collection or asked for questionnaires or survey samples. They wanted to know if I was married, why I had come to England, where my parents, brothers and family lived and so on. I was offered access to group discussions, social outings, rituals and so on where I might be called

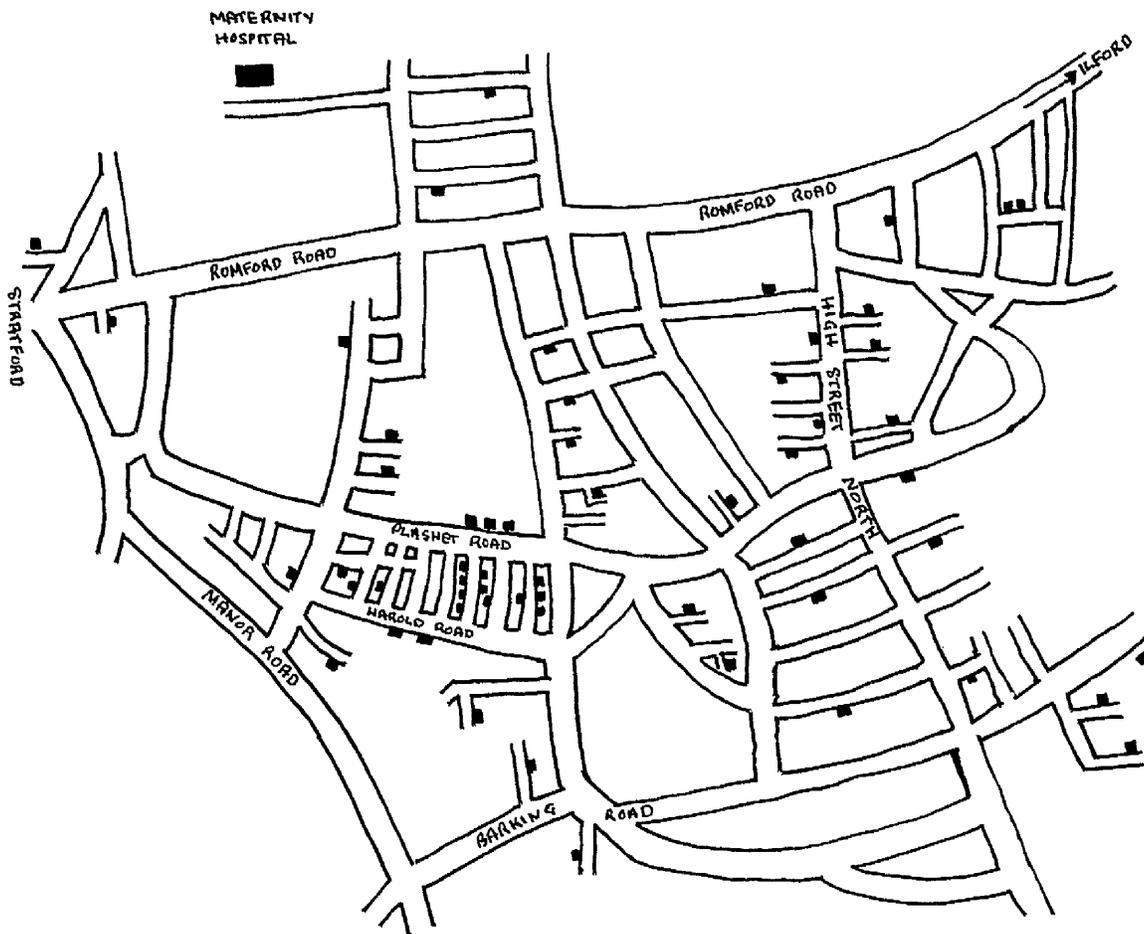
upon for advice, or an opinion on an illness in my role as a nurse, for help as a friend, or to act as a commentator or interpreter of 'English culture' as I asked people to do of their own. After I had been attending the groups for six or eight weeks, most seemed to accept the fact that I was simply 'there'. Some of the women I came to know well understood the essentials of the research and offered continuing support and often invaluable advice. But in later conversations with many women, it appeared that I was seen either as an unemployed nurse who would eventually go back to a 'proper job' in hospital, or a rather lonely Australian woman who happened to be 'interested in Gujaratis'.

#### 1.7) Networks and Other Informants

Initially, it was from these women's groups that I was able to follow up individuals and interview them in their homes. Some agreed to this quite readily and I began to develop closer relationships with them and members of their family. With others it took a much longer time, and with others it never happened. I never did overcome my own sense of what was 'proper' in terms of inviting myself into other people's homes and lives, and probably missed opportunities others would have taken. Not all the women I eventually met belonged to women's groups or English classes. Some were suggested to me as possibly 'good' (that is, appropriate) people to meet by other women I had come to know, and others formed part of networks beyond the women's groups themselves. The connections in these networks were predominantly caste, friendship and neighbourhood ties. I expand on this in Chapter Three.

One important household, which became my 'fieldwork family', was introduced to me through a mutual friend. This household consisted of **Hemkurva**, a 31 year-old Vaniya housewife, born in Tanzania who came to England from Malawi in 1976, her husband, **Dilip**, a businessman, her mother-in-law, **Prabha**, and her three daughters, **Shobana** aged 9, **Tara**, aged 6, and **Mira** born in 1983. Dilip's FZD was **Ruxmani**. Hemkurva's neighbourhood provided another set of contacts, and it was through her that I met her neighbour, **Bharti**. **Bharti** was a 26 year-old **Soni** who

MAP 3 SIMPLIFIED MAP SHOWING RESIDENTIAL LOCATION OF INFORMANTS



came from her birthplace in Kenya in 1970. Prior to her marriage to Girdhalal, a businessman, Bharti had done secretarial work but was not employed outside the home during fieldwork. She and Girdhalal lived in their own home with her mother-in-law, Dukshma. Bharti had one son in 1985 and another in 1988. These households had no direct contact with the women I met through the different organizations I attended in that they belonged to none of them. At one point during fieldwork, however, Hemkurva joined an English language class at her daughter's school. The teacher was known to Bhanu at EL and on one occasion the two groups, including Hemkurva and myself, met up on an outing to Kew Gardens. Details of these main informants, and the connections between them, are in Appendix F. Table I in Appendix F outlines my main informants from groups and other networks. Map 3 (previous page) shows the residential location of main informants, as well as women I knew casually. I must stress, however, that I did not by any means visit all these households.

#### 1.8) Households

In recent years, the reappraisal of the household as a unit of study and a focus on hitherto neglected aspects of domestic life and sociality, have been at the centre of considerable feminist research (Sharma 1986:2-10; Moore 1988:54-64). Much of this work has focused on relations of gender, the division of labour, and aspects of authority and power within the domestic sphere. From a different perspective, the household and its extended network of contacts - the family-friendship or 'therapy management group' (Janzen 1978:124, 1987) - has been shown to be the primary arena of relationships in which the majority of illness episodes are decided upon, diagnosed and treated, both in the west (Zola 1973; Stimson and Webb 1975:29) and in other cultures (Kleinman 1980:310). Collecting data on household and family relationships among Gujaratis therefore, was an important aspect of the research. But gathering what I would call quality data and establishing relationships with all members of the household proved to be difficult, and in this I was only partly successful for a number of reasons.

Access to all members of the household and the amount of time one can spend with a family - one's own time and the time allotted or felt appropriate by informants - was a continual problem. In some cases, I came to know the women of the household quite well but had minimal and sometimes no contact with the men. I knew these men then, only through their wives, mothers, or sisters. Developing close relationships with people in their own homes also requires time and trust. So while I was able to gain data on household composition, length of residence, country of origin, and so on from many women, the quality of data on relationships in the household in particular, varied considerably from those I came to know well and visited frequently, to others where contact was sporadic or a one-off encounter, and not always in their home at all but at meetings or ritual gatherings. I am grateful to all the women I met for their time and patience, but especially to my closest informants for their friendship, and for sharing what were sometimes sensitive and intimate confidences. I have tried to respect their trust and have consequently altered the names of all informants. I have also taken the liberty, when discussing what I felt, and still feel to be personally sensitive information imparted to me, of making slight changes in the text to protect informants, without, I hope, jeopardizing the integrity of the data.

The household provided information from individual women as well as the interactions between women and between women and men. But it was also a focus of group discussion and much ritual activity, and it was often in this context that I met a woman's friends and neighbours - not all of whom were Gujarati. At various points in the study, especially Chapters Three and Four, I have utilized some of the information gained from non-Gujarati women in these contexts, as well as from those I met at the English language centre noted in the previous section. These small, informal gatherings of women were extremely productive in terms of data collection. Observing children crying, hungry, falling over or fighting, and the reaction of those present, was all 'grist to the mill'. But I also found myself extremely frustrated at times when this interrupted, as it so often

seemed to do, questions and threads of conversations which were not recaptured.

The majority of my informants were women, and I have described the households here from the perspective of my informant in the household - who was not necessarily the senior woman - rather than the traditional category of 'male head of household'. Membership of households has been 'frozen' at the time of my fieldwork but I am aware that some have since altered in composition. I also want to stress that the households listed here only represent those on which I have data. There were other women who sometimes took part in group discussions, or whom I met casually, but their households are not included as I lack detailed information on their household composition. My informants have themselves adopted sociological categories to describe their households, and tend to refer to those which include relatives other than husband, wife and unmarried children as 'joint' or 'extended'. In keeping with this simple categorization, I have utilized Sharma's (1986:48-9) threefold classification of household types. Sub-nuclear refers to those households which do not include a married couple, nuclear corresponds to a household of a married couple and their children, and joint (or 'complex' in Sharma's terminology) 'comprises more than one married couple or which consists of a nuclear family plus other adult relatives of either husband or wife' (ibid:49).

Of the fifty households on which I have data (Table 2 overleaf), the one sub-nuclear household consisted of a divorced woman and her two children. Of the nineteen nuclear households, three contained an elderly wife and husband only as their children had since married and moved to separate establishments. Two of these were owner-occupiers and one couple lived in a council flat. Of the fifteen households with more than one married couple, nine contained a wife, husband plus one married son, daughter-in-law and their children, one consisted of a wife, husband and their two married sons and daughters-in-law (no children), two contained a wife, husband, unmarried children plus one married son, daughter-in-law and their children, and three consisted

Table 2 Classification of Households

Sub-Nuclear	1
Nuclear	19
Joint	30
<hr/>	
Total	50
<hr/>	

Table 3 Composition of Joint Households

Nuclear plus	
widowed mother-in-law/father-in-law	6
father-in-law separated from his wife	1
married son(s), their wives and children	15
married daughter, son-in-law and their children	1
married son, daughter-in-law and their children plus husband's brother's son, wife and their children	1
husband's brother's married son and wife	1
married son, daughter-in-law, unmarried daughter and widowed father-in-law	1
Widow and her children plus brother and his wife and children	2
Widow and her children plus 'friends' - wife, husband and child (same caste)	1
Unmarried woman plus brother and sister-in-law	1
<hr/>	
Total	30
<hr/>	

Table 4 Households by Caste

Leva (Kathiawadi/Charotti/Surti) Patel	12
Brahman	10
Lohana	6
Vaniya	6
Darji	4
Mistry	3
Cutchi Leva Patel	3
Suthar	2
Mochi	2
Soni	1
Kadva Patel	1
<hr/>	
Total	50
<hr/>	

of a wife, husband, unmarried children plus two married sons, daughters-in-law and their children. Following Sharma, Table 3 shows the arrangements of joint households, while Table 4 gives a breakdown of households in terms of caste.

Sharma's classification corresponds broadly to three types of situations in which a woman can find herself (ibid:50): as the sole wage earner and person responsible for domestic arrangements, as the organizer of domestic arrangements and sometimes contributing to household income, and as a member of a larger team where responsibilities for domestic work and income generation can be divided in different ways. In terms of wage employment, the only woman I knew in the first category was divorced with two young children. She supplemented her welfare benefits with a variety of 'odd jobs' until her youngest child began school and she commenced work full-time in a travel agency. In the second category, of my informants in nuclear households, eight women worked full- or part-time. In two cases, however, it was the daughters of the households who were wage employed (Table 5 overleaf). While helping in the household, they were not the 'organizer of domestic arrangements' in the way their mothers were. In the final category, of my informants in joint households, only three women were wage employed. In ten joint households, women other than my main informant were in paid work (in one household, two women other than my main informant were working). If we compare this with nuclear households, a considerably higher number in the latter were in wage employment. I am reluctant to draw any conclusions from this, however, for while I am sure of my data on nuclear households, I know this to be incomplete in some of the joint households. In other words, more women in joint households may be wage employed than the figures suggest.

This is not a statistical sample of Gujarati households in Newham and makes no claims to represent the composition of such households. Rather, through the series of relationships I established with Gujarati women, I have collected data which would enable me to examine women's relationships and responsibilities in different kinds of

Table 5 Wage Employment of Women

Total Number of Main Informants in Nuclear Households 19

Main Informants in Nuclear Households in Wage Employment

Piece-worker at home (p/t)	1
Factory worker (p/t)	1
Factory worker (f/t)	1
Childcarer (p/t)	1
Teacher (f/t)	2
Radiographer (f/t)	1
Nutritionist (f/t)	1

Daughters of Main Informant in Wage Employment

Computer programmer (f/t)/ Pharmacist (f/t)	2
Factory worker (f/t)	1

---

Total 12

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Total Number of Main Informants in Joint Households 30

Main Informants in Joint Households in Wage Employment

Clerical worker (f/t)	2
Speech Therapist (f/t)	1

Other Women in Joint Households in Wage Employment

Factory worker (f/t)	6
Clerical worker (f/t)	2
Teacher (f/t)	1
Pharmacist (f/t)	1
Secretary (f/t)	1

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Total 14

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domestic situations, at different times in the developmental cycle of domestic groups, and at different phases in the migration process. As we shall see in Chapter Three, for instance, a very different picture emerges between the configuration of networks of newly-arrived brides and their long-stay counter-parts. Similarly, the many roles a woman fulfils and her responsibilities and influence in the domestic group, change over her lifetime, from an unmarried daughter, to a new bride, a young mother, a mother of school-age children, to their eventual marriage and the arrival of grandchildren. These stages have implications for women not only in terms of their position and influence in the domestic group, but also, as we shall see in this study, in their relationships and responsibilities for its members, both socially and ritually.

CHAPTER TWO

GUJARATIS IN EAST LONDON : INTERACTION AND IDENTITIES

## 2. ) Introduction

The East End of London is associated in some people's minds with the sociological studies of family and kinship in Bethnal Green (Young and Willmott 1957; Willmott and Young 1971), and in others with the television soap opera 'East Enders'. The area designated as the London Borough of Newham is situated further to the east of these more famous sites, imaginary or otherwise. Traditionally, the inner city area of the East End, particularly around the old docklands, has been a place of temporary and sometimes permanent settlement for newly arrived immigrants and refugees to Britain since the time of the Huguenots and before. Newham, by way of contrast to these historically older sites, is relatively 'new' in terms of residential development and migrant settlement. Several synagogues and cemeteries as well as faded shop signs are reminders of a once larger Eastern European Jewish community, many members of which have since moved to other, often more prosperous areas of London and its surrounds. Today's more recent arrivals are largely of Caribbean and South Asian origins.

In this chapter, I look briefly at the area of Newham itself and the culturally diverse composition of its population, concentrating in particular on the South Asians living in the borough. The bulk of the chapter is then taken up with a discussion of the relationships which exist among Gujaratis themselves. It examines their histories of migration, religious worship, caste membership, patrilineal affiliation, household relations, and socio-economic status. Several themes are introduced which relate to health, well-being and care which recur throughout the study: the perception of difference between England on the one hand, and East Africa and/or India on the other; patrilineal affiliation and the notion of family tradition; and gender relations among Gujarati informants in east London. Of central importance is the acknowledged role of women in domestic religious worship, of their knowledge and practice of rituals which nurture and protect health and well-being, and which create auspiciousness for themselves and for others in specific relationships of care.

We shall see that individuals have come to live in this part of London with widely diverse migration histories, personal experiences and perspectives. Some have lived here for twenty-five years and more, are conversant with the English language and with the wider society in which they live. Others arrived only a year or two prior to my fieldwork and were living in and learning about a society of which they had, a short time previously, no experience. The people in this study are all Hindus and while some belong to a particular sectarian movement, most are highly eclectic in their worship. Whether from East Africa or India, however, they are linked to their village of origin in Gujarat through their ancestors. They belong to a wide variety of caste groups, some larger than others in this part of London but with none forming a particular residential cluster. In some families the majority of the members of the patriline now reside in Britain while for others, they are dispersed in India, East Africa, and elsewhere. Their economic and educational backgrounds are also varied. This, then, is not a homogeneous group of people with common life experiences but an aggregate of people who call themselves Gujarati. Finally, I look briefly at interaction among Gujaratis, at their identities as perceived by themselves and imposed by others, and their perception of Gujarati culture.

## 2.1) The Socio-Cultural Milieu

This study focuses on a group of people who refer to themselves as Gujarati and examines, among other things, differences which exist among them, the perception of their own difference in relation to others in the area whose cultural origins lie in South Asia, and in relation to the English. In the following section I focus mainly on the South Asian population in Newham; firstly, to indicate the diversity of this population both within Britain itself and within the borough; secondly to note that unlike some other areas of London, such as the neighbouring borough of Tower Hamlets which has a high concentration of Bengali-speakers, Newham has three relatively large populations who trace their origins to South Asia; and finally, to indicate other South Asians in the area with whom Gujaratis may

interact. The term English is used in the study rather than British because my informants spoke of 'England', 'English people' and 'English culture' and compared themselves in various ways - which will be discussed at relevant points - with 'the English'. The term is used in the very loose sense in which my informants use it to refer, as one woman remarked, to 'white people who come from England'.

In casual conversations with local government and social service employees, leaders of voluntary organizations, health administrators, nurses and doctors, Newham was often described as a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and/or multi-cultural area. These terms - which are sometimes used inter-changeably - have passed into popular English language usage over the past twenty or so years. In contemporary social and political argument, they are also highly sensitive terms which, put simply and depending on one's perspective, connote a 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing; an expansion of existing diversity, or a 'problem' to be overcome or confronted. In both popular and official discourse, when these terms are used, I agree with Sandra Wallman (1978:201) that what is being talked about is 'the perception of difference - or perhaps the perception of significant difference'. In the following section, I draw heavily on demographic and other material produced by the Local Authority in Newham extracted primarily from census data. According to this official perspective, my Gujarati informants are classified as members of a confusingly defined 'ethnic minority group'. One publication entitled *Newham's Ethnic Communities*, notes that 'the terms used in this report when differences of culture, religion, or language as well as racial origin are being considered relate to ethnic groups' (p2). The statistics presented are done so largely in terms of five ethnic groups - European, West Indian, African, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, and Other. Another section of the report deals with 'ethnic minority communities' defined on the basis of their religion, of which five are identified: Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and West Indian Pentecostal. In a similar vein, Allan McNaught (1987), a former health service administrator, in a small book entitled *Health Action and Ethnic Minorities*, notes that the term 'ethnic minority' is 'used to identify people whose origins lie

outside the United Kingdom. More specifically, it is used for people of African, Afro-Caribbean or Asian origin' (ibid:2).

Apart from the obvious point that these definitions deny ethnicity to a sizeable portion of the population, in focusing on this confusion it is not my intention, nor is it the objective of this study, to enter into a discussion of ethnicity, however defined. Rather, my purpose is to note the subjective nature of so-called objective criteria of classification. The term 'ethnic minority' has become a kind of shorthand to identify people other than 'us' if 'it suits the purpose of the context in which we interact' (Wallman ibid:204). This recognition of difference is a two-sided affair whereby those so identified may use this or another term to identify themselves in relation to others. It is the situational and subjective nature of this classificatory process which is relevant here and which Wallman (ibid:204) highlights:

the difference between two aggregates of people will be *objective* to the extent that an outsider can list items that mark it, but it is inevitably *subjective* to the extent that none of these markers has any necessary or precise significance outside the perception of the actors. The perception of *significant* objective difference is a product of the person perceiving and of the context in which he perceives (italics in original).

What I hope will become apparent in this discussion of Gujarati identities is that this is the case whether the perception of difference is 'self-imposed or other-imposed' (ibid:204-205).

## 2.2) Background to Newham

The borough of Newham (see Maps 1 and 2 p28) was formed as a result of the re-organization of local government in 1965 from the older London County Council boroughs of West and East Ham, in which among other things the apparatus of local government operates and which forms a District Health Authority (DHA) within the National Health Service (NHS) in Britain. (1) Newham is, then, an artificially created area which some of my Gujarati informants did not know by name, function or form. Rather, their point of reference in terms of residential location was the suburb in which they lived - Forest Gate, Upton Park,



Manor Park and so on. For a few elderly female informants, their reference point extended only to the name of the street on which they lived. Rajmani, a woman of sixty-five or seventy, created considerable hilarity when she arrived late one afternoon at a women's meeting I regularly attended. She explained that her son had taken her to the temple in a neighbouring suburb that morning but when she left to come to the meeting, she took the wrong bus. After a time she realized she was lost and would have to take another bus home. Her English was negligible and she was unable to communicate with passers-by until, eventually, she plucked up courage and asked a Sikh to help her. At this point, her memory failed her to the extent that she could not even remember the name of the street on which she lived. Her predicament was resolved when she found her phone number in her purse and the by now exasperated Sikh telephoned her home for help. Rajmani recounted her story wiping away tears of laughter with her sari while other women interjected and confirmed similar experiences of their own. While some of my elderly female informants went in groups of threes and fours to attend (usually) religious functions in other parts of London, others like Rajmani were literally lost outside their own neighbourhood locality. The borough of Newham or the suburb in which they lived had little meaning for them either as a residential reference or a social entity.

Apart from the northern border, Newham is bounded almost entirely by rivers; the Lea in the west and the Roding in the east are little more than creeks as they terminate their course in the Thames to the south. What was largely a rural and agrarian area, began to change from the mid-to-late-nineteenth century onwards with the development of the Royal Dock complex along the Thames and the growth of associated manufacturing industries, such as chemicals, ship building, iron works, and railway and rail engineering.<sup>(2)</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, the towns of North Woolwich, Canning Town and Silvertown grew up in the marshlands to the south of West Ham to accommodate workers employed in the wake of this industrial and commercial expansion. Seamen's missions were also established in the dockland area to provide accommodation during shore leave for the many sailors who

worked on trading vessels, some of whom were of South Asian origin. The Lascar Mission for Indian Seamen, for example, was opened in Canning Town in 1896 for these transitory visitors who traded fabrics and trinkets with the local population. In the north, central and eastern areas, the large country estates which dated from Tudor and Stuart times were sold for housing development in what is now Manor Park, Forest Gate, Upton Park, Plashet and East Ham. Improved road and rail transport to central London made it possible for workers to commute daily to London from the outer suburban areas and contributed to the growth of this area from 1880 onwards.

The physical distinction between the south of Newham, which developed primarily in response to industrial expansion, and the northern and central areas, to some extent remains today. The docklands suffered considerable damage during the London Blitz and today, the docks, and much of the associated industry and commerce, have moved further down towards the mouth of the Thames to Tilbury which was built to accommodate the modern container vessels. One of the successful industries, and one which provides employment for large numbers of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the area, is the Ford car factory just outside the borough at Dagenham. More recently, the London Dockland Development Corporation (LDDC), which was founded by the government in 1981 as a non-elected body, has taken over control of planning, housing and industrial development in the southern third of the borough, with the elected council retaining responsibility for education and community facilities. While it was envisaged that this would bring considerable change to the area in future years, the continuing economic recession of the late eighties, and the collapse of several of the major development schemes, seem to have rendered this problematic.

Most of my fieldwork was conducted in the northern and central regions of the borough. Here, there remain many streets of terraced houses in varying states of repair, with small front gardens and occasional basement flats. On the main roads these are interspersed with blocks of council flats and offices. Part of the busy North

Circular outer London link road runs through the borough along East Ham High Street, while the Romford Road in the north carries traffic out toward the more middle class suburbs of Redbridge and Essex.

Newham, with a population of almost 210,000 people, is largely a working class area. The majority of men and women in full time employment work in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs with only 1% in white collar managerial employment.<sup>(23)</sup> In 1983 the borough had an unemployment rate of 17%. While only 1% of the men were employed on a part-time basis, this figure rises to 25% among women. More than 42% of households rent their accommodation from the local council or from public sector housing associations, while another 42% are owner-occupiers. This latter figure contrasts sharply with the 74% owner-occupation among South Asians in the borough, a factor noted in other studies (Tams-Lyche 1980b:292; Hahlo 1980:300) which point to the increased social status this brings and the decreased likelihood of racial discrimination in the rented sector. I discuss this in relation to my informants in section 2.13 of this chapter. In both local and national politics, the area is a Labour Party stronghold, a tradition dating back to Keir Hardie, the first Labour Member of Parliament in Britain who was elected to West Ham South in 1892. The process of 'gentrification', which has taken place in some of London's inner boroughs, has largely left Newham unscathed, although with a rise in property prices and the LDDC programme, the ubiquitous 'skips' - large containers for the collection of waste and rubble - began to appear more frequently toward the end of fieldwork. There are no cinemas in the borough, few 'up-market' boutiques or bookshops, and any 'antique' shops tend to sell second-hand furniture and display notices that 'DHSS estimates are accepted' - a reference to an allowance made by the Department of Health and Social Security to individuals and families on social security.

### 2.3) Diversity and Difference

In the ten years between 1971 and 1981 the overall population of Newham declined by 10% - a reflection of the general demographic

decline in the inner city (Hall 1981) - but the number of residents who were born in the New Commonwealth<sup>4</sup> and Pakistan has increased by 81% during this time. The breakdown of the population, based on the birthplace of the head of the household, is shown in Table 6 (over leaf). From this it can be seen that 27% of residents are from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan. Taken together, the Africans and Caribbeans make up some 9% of residents. South Asians total some 16%<sup>5</sup>, and Map 4 shows the distribution of this population within the borough.

The South Asian population is extremely disparate in terms of areas of origin, with the largest groupings coming from India (c 19,000), Pakistan (c 7,000) and East Africa (c 5,200). A more detailed breakdown of the South Asian population can be found in a recent (1984) survey based on the 1981 Electoral Register.<sup>6</sup> According to this survey, the most populous group is categorized as 'Hindu Gujarati', followed by Muslims, predominantly from Pakistan, and Sikhs. Smaller numbers of Hindus are from South India (6.9%), North and Central India (5.7%) and West Bengal (0.7%).<sup>7</sup> The survey identified some 6,300 Gujarati Hindus who represent 30.4% of the South Asian electorate. On its own it is as large as the total Muslim community. Within the borough, 56% of Gujaratis live in the central wards of Upton, Plashet, St. Stephens, Monega, and Kensington, with the remainder bordering on those central wards in Forest gate, Park, Plaistow, Castle, and Central, with only a few scattered in other wards (see Map 4, p55). This population, then, is well concentrated in the central part of Newham and it is to this group that I now turn.

#### 2.4) Gujaratis in Newham

In the course of a discussion which centred on language and communication between health workers and South Asian patients at the local maternity hospital, a doctor summed up his perception of Gujaratis by noting that they 'are more westernized than the others. They speak English and are more integrated and really, there isn't a problem with them'. The perception of South Asians in general, and

**TABLE 6: The Number and Percentage of Newham's and Greater London's Residents by the Birthplace of their Head of Household**

Birthplace of Head of Household	Newham		Greater London	
	Number of people	Percentage of residents	Number of people	Percentage of residents
UNITED KINGDOM	142,877	69	4,837,904	75
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	5,611	3	300,621	5
NEW COMMONWEALTH & PAKISTAN	55,334	27	945,148	15
East Africa	5,224	3	90,690	1
Africa Remainder	2,458	1	53,655	1
Caribbean	15,736	8	306,792	5
Bangladesh	739	*	28,888	*
India	19,809	10	223,664	3
Pakistan	7,047	3	52,192	1
Far East	1,642	1	55,106	1
Remainder	2,679	1	134,161	2
OTHER EUROPE	1,805	1	206,857	3
REST OF THE WORLD	2,348	1	202,112	3
<b>TOTAL/AVERAGE</b>	<b>207,975</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,492,642</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 1981 Census, Special Tabulations DT1286

Reprinted from **Newham Digest of Census Statistics,**

**Second Supplement: Newham's Ethnic Minority Communities**

Percentages have been rounded

\* = less than 0.5

MAP 4: Distribution of Newham's Residents born in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or the East African New Commonwealth

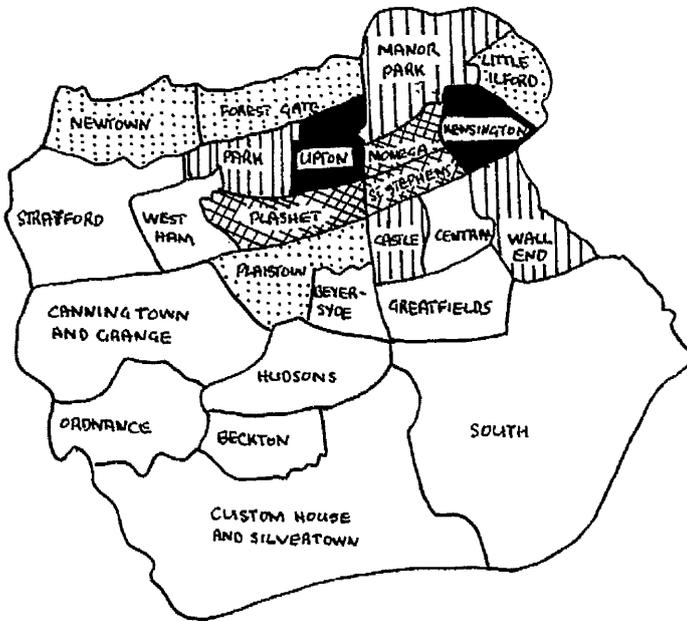
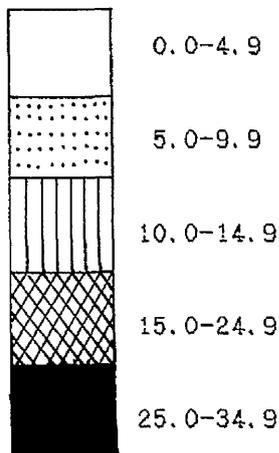


TABLE 7: Percentage of Residents born in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or the East African New Commonwealth



Reprinted from Newham Digest of Census Statistics, Second Supplement: Newham's Ethnic Minority Communities.

Gujaratis in particular, by health workers in Newham is examined at various relevant points in the study. The issue addressed here focuses on relations among Gujaratis themselves, and their perception of their identity within the society in which they live.

## 2.5) Migration and Place

The history of Gujarati migration to Britain from India, and from East Africa in particular, is by now well documented in the literature (Tandon and Raphael 1978; Michaelson 1979 & 1983; Barot 1980; Tams-Lyche 1980a).<sup>(8)</sup> Briefly, prior to 1962 there were few Gujaratis in Britain with Sikhs making up the largest group of what was a small South Asian population (R. Ballard 1972-3:29). From 1962-66 larger numbers of Gujaratis arrived from India, and to a lesser extent from East Africa, to work in the textile and other industries as well as the service sector. The bulk of East African Gujarati settlement began in the late sixties, partly as a result of the programme of 'Africanization' in some of the East African states, with the Arusha Declaration in Tanzania and a similar proclamation in Kenya. Non-citizens were prevented from engaging in business without a special licence in countries where the majority of Gujaratis were in business or trade of some kind, but were not citizens of those states. A further factor was the passing of the 1968 British Immigration Act which introduced, among other things, a grandparental clause as a condition of free entry into Britain and this, together with discussions in Britain at this time as to whether or not the government would honour South Asian entry as British citizens, created considerable uncertainty among South Asians as a whole in East Africa as to their future in either country (Lyon 1972-3:8; Tandon and Raphael 1978:6; Michaelson 1979:351). A voucher system was introduced which limited the number of British passport holders admitted each year. In 1972, Idi Amin expelled the South Asians from Uganda, the great majority of whom were Gujarati East Africans. More recently, further doubts have again arisen concerning citizenship with the passing of the British Nationality Act 1981 which came into effect in 1982.<sup>(9)</sup>

The majority of Gujaratis living in Newham are from the East African states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, with a smaller number from Malawi. <sup>(10)</sup> The remainder come directly from India. <sup>(11)</sup> One of my informants, Surbhi Patel (Appendix D) was a newly married 20 year-old who arrived in England only three months before I first met her in 1983 at the English language centre in East Ham. She was born in a village outside Rajkot where her father has a small farm. Her oldest brother has a business in Rajkot and her other brother worked on the farm. Her younger sister was still at school. None of her natal family were in the UK. Her marriage had been arranged when her future husband went to Rajkot to visit relatives. He was born in Uganda and came to England in 1972 with his parents, brother, and three sisters. Surbhi and her husband lived with his parents and his older brother and his wife in a terraced house which was bought several years earlier by Surbhi's father-in-law. Surbhi's husband was employed as an assistant in a shoe shop but they were looking to buy or lease a small business, such as a newsagency, with its own accommodation.

In sharp contrast, Hitesh Joshi and his wife Dina (Appendix B) had lived in England for some twenty-five years. I met Hitesh through one of the women's groups which had links with the Gujarati Welfare Association - an organization I shall discuss later in the chapter - of which he was a committee member. He was born in Ahmedabad and went as a young man to what was then Tanganyika. Hitesh returned to Gujarat for his marriage and he and Dina, who was also born in Ahmedabad, went back to Tanzania and thence to England, initially to Crawley in Sussex. In those days, he explained, there were few Gujaratis in this country and he had to travel each week to the few specialist shops in central London to buy provisions of Gujarati food, whereas now all of these necessities are on his doorstep in Newham. Hitesh and Dina have their own terraced house where they live with their only child, a daughter, and her husband and their two children. Hitesh is now retired from his job as a clerk. Every few years, he and his wife return to Ahmedabad to visit relatives and occasionally travel to Rwanda where two of his brothers live.

Some families can trace a considerable history of migration within India prior to a move to East Africa. Prabha Doshi's father was born about 1881 in Kutiyana in Kathiawad and moved to Jamnagar where Prabha was born in 1927. Prabha's husband's father was born in Mandvi in Cutch in 1884 and moved to Sind where her husband Navin was born, although the family had come originally from Jamnagar. Navin left Gujarat as a young man to go to Kenya where his sister had settled after her marriage. He stayed for about two years before returning to Jamnagar for his marriage to Prabha when she was twenty years old. They returned to East Africa but this time to Malawi where they stayed for the next thirty years. It was here that their four children were born, only two of whom are still alive - a daughter who is married and living in Jamnagar, and their son Dilip. They arrived in England in 1976 with Dilip, who was by then married with a young daughter. Prabha was widowed shortly after their arrival. Many of the older women I came to know during fieldwork were, like Prabha, born and married in Gujarat before moving to East Africa, often to join husbands already living there. Their children were born in these countries and they, like Dilip, arrived in England as young parents themselves. Others, like Bharti, a 26 year-old who arrived from Uganda when she was twelve, have now spent the greater part of their lives here.

One of my enduring impressions of fieldwork in east London is of women such as Prabha - anonymous faces to passers-by but whose personal histories were replete with upheavals and movements across continents, climatic zones and political systems. These were not cloistered, secluded women. They were neither sheltered from, uninterested in nor unaware of the larger political, social and economic world around them. Some, and especially those who left Uganda at the height of the expulsions, endured great hardship, fear and even terror for themselves and their loved ones. They have experienced life on three continents in many 'multicultural' contexts - England simply being the latest in the sequence to date. Indeed, during my fieldwork, Reshma (Appendix C) moved on again, this time to America. It often seemed to me - especially when they laughed together and at themselves about their departures from East Africa and their early life in

England - that these experiences had engendered a certain sagacity, not only toward the possibly transient nature of their domicile in this country, but to the kinds of accommodations needed to live and celebrate their lives here.

Not all who left East Africa came directly to England. Rekha Pandya (Appendix B) is one such example. Both she and her husband, Arvind, were school teachers in Uganda. In 1972 they had three children, a daughter then aged eleven, a son of eight and another a few months old. Their third son, aged nine during fieldwork, was born in Gujarat. Arvind said that when they saw the 'trouble' coming in Uganda, they sent their daughter back to Gujarat in 1971 to stay with one of his brothers. The ten year-old girl travelled on her own carrying a sign with her name on it to enable her uncle to identify her at the airport in Bombay. When the 'trouble' erupted in 1972, they were unable to come to England, for although Rekha had a British passport, Arvind did not. Instead, they managed to book a passage on a steamer from Mombassa to Bombay. On the train journey from Kampala to Mombassa, the £50 they were allowed to take with them had all been taken away. The steamer was three days late in reaching port and with no money, they had no food. Her youngest child at this time was only a few months old. Rekha said that she left her hair uncombed, ripped her clothes, put black colouring under her eyes and pretended to have gone 'mad'. Arvind stood beside her and the children begging passers-by for money to buy food. It was, she said, a frightening time. They have a house in Ahmedabad but wanted to come to England 'for the children', although it was ten years before they achieved this.

In other situations, East African Gujaratis, and women in particular, were occasionally sent back to Gujarat to complete their education, or part of it, either returning when they had married and then coming to England, or marrying in Gujarat before arriving in this country. For other women who were either born in Gujarat and went with their parents to East Africa, or who were born in East Africa itself, marriage could entail yet another move to another East African state. Hemkurva Doshi, Dilip's wife, was born in Dar-es-Salaam. She is the

youngest of nine children. The oldest, her brother, lives in east London, two sisters live in Leicester, one in Tanzania and the remainder in Gujarat. Hemkurva left Dar-es-Salaam when she was quite young, about eight years old, to live with one of her father's brothers and his family. Following her marriage to Dilip when she was twenty-one, she stayed with his parents in Jamnagar for about a month in the house they own there. Dilip's parents stayed on for longer while Hemkurva travelled back on her own to East Africa, but this time to Dilip's home in Malawi. Elinor Kelly's (1990:251) term 'transcontinental families' is, I feel, an apt description of many of my own informants and their families.

Migration to Britain, then, has not always been a relatively straight forward process, either directly from India or from an East African state. Indeed, for some, it has involved several sets of journeys within and between three continents. It is, moreover, not only men who have criss-crossed oceans and continents but women too, sometimes on their own, have made such journeys. The perceptions and experiences of life in England for a woman in her fifties, such as Prabha, can be quite different from that of a younger woman, such as Bharti, who has spent much of her life here. Different too from one such as Surbhi who has spent the greater part of her life in a village in Gujarat, and different again from other women who have seen their children and sometimes their grandchildren born in England. We shall see that the different life experiences and perceptions of these women are salient in discussions concerning kin relations and network configurations, education levels, employment opportunities, attitudes to and expectations of pregnancy and childbirth, and interactions with the English.

The migration history of an individual can entail several sets of referents to different places, regions or countries. These can be used in different contexts to differentiate between, say, 'Indians' who came directly from Gujarat, and 'Africans' who spent a period of time in East Africa (Tambs-Lyche 1975:350-1; Michaelson 1983:30-32), or

between those from different regions such as 'Kathiawadis' and 'Cutchis', between villages, or the ancestral origin of a patriline. Moreover, what is appropriate behaviour in this place, England, may differ between Gujaratis in England and the English themselves. For example, my informants perceive the behaviour of English women following the birth of a child to differ from that which is appropriate for themselves as Gujarati women. One young pregnant woman, for instance, remarked on the fact that her English neighbour was out hanging up the washing only a week after the birth of her child. This, she said, was 'normal' behaviour for English women but, as we shall see in Chapter Five, such behaviour is perceived by my informants as inappropriate for themselves. What is appropriate for Gujaratis in England may also differ from Gujaratis in East Africa or India. In Chapter Six, this is discussed in relation to the food which is perceived to be appropriate to the English climate. Whether from Gujarat or from East Africa, whether men or women, informants comment on the climatic similarity of East Africa and India and contrast the unhurried, seasonal rhythm of these countries with the clock-watching rush of urban England.<sup>(12)</sup> As we shall see, these contrasts, reinforced in narratives and communicated to young people who were born in England, or who came as young children, recur as a theme in many life experiences, from the food one eats, the illnesses one contracts, to the experience of childbirth and the practice of one's religion.

## 2.6) Hindus and Hinduism

The arrival of large numbers of Hindus in Britain in the late sixties and early seventies, the establishment of religious centres, and the continuation and growth of sectarian movements, has led many Hindus as well as outside observers to reflect on, and to question, the organization of their religious life and the practice and perpetuation of Hinduism in Britain (Pocock 1976; Burghart 1987:1-14, 224-251). Much research among Hindus in Britain, however, focuses on the more public expressions of worship and religious organization (Jackson 1981:61-85; Knott 1987:134-156; Vertovec 1992), and sectarian

movements (Pocock 1976; Barot 1980; Carey 1982-3, 1987a & 1987b; Knott 1986; D. Taylor 1987a & 1987b). This study addresses the hitherto largely neglected area of domestic religious worship and in particular, the role of women in nurturing and caring for their families through the rituals they perform.

For a few older women such as Rajmani, an elderly devotee of Shri Nathaji, going to the temple several times a week and sometimes spending a whole day there, was not unusual. For the great majority of my informants, however, temple attendance was sporadic and infrequent and often limited to the celebration of festivals and certain life-cycle events. A small number went to the Radhe Krishna temple at Stratford or to the Hare Krishna Temple near Watford outside London, <sup>(13)</sup> but the majority, when they went at all, attended the Shri Nathaji Sanathan Mandir at nearby Leytonstone in east London. It has two sections, each with its own cooking facilities and priest. The larger section is given over to the central figures of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman, with images of Ambajimata, and Shiva and Parvati on either side. The smaller section in a separate area of the temple is reserved for the devotees of Shri Nathaji and here, the single image of the deity dominates.

Sectarian membership was not high among my informants and few were initiated into any particular sect. Of the numerous Hindu sects which exist in this country, two movements predominate among those who claimed membership. One is the Vaishnavite Pushtimarga sect of Vallabhacharya (Pocock 1973:94-121; Barz 1976; P. Bennett 1983) into which Rajmani had been initiated. Referred to as Pushtis by others, sect members take Shri Nathaji as the divine embodiment of Lord Krishna who is worshipped in his incarnation as a child. Devotees must be initiated by a guru and, among other things, follow a strict dietary regime which excludes garlic, onions and food classified as red - for example, tomatoes, carrots, red lentils and water melon (P. Bennett 1983:228). Many Gujaratis have pictures of Shri Nathaji in their household shrine and in their homes, but few of my informants were initiated into the sect.

The other main sect is one or another of the branches of the Swaminarayan movement in Britain. This is a reformist movement which had its origins in Gujarat around the turn of the nineteenth century with its founder, Swami Sahajanand, and his followers establishing temples in many parts of Gujarat (Barot 1972-3, 1980, 1987; Pocock 1973:122-157, 1976; Williams 1984). The movement grew rapidly in Gujarat and among Gujaratis in East Africa and Britain and, according to Williams 'the Swaminarayan religion is at present the largest and perhaps the fastest growing' (ibid:187) of all Hindu religious groups. The movement has several divisions which are centred either at Ahmedabad in north Gujarat, or Vadatal in the south. The Swaminarayan Hindu Mission in Newham, which is an association of some twenty to twenty-five families who meet in each others homes, is part of the Akshar Purushottam Sansthan from south Gujarat (Pocock 1976). Several of my informants from the Cutchi Leva Patel caste belong to the Siddanta Sajivan Mandal which originates in Ahmedabad (Barot 1980).

Neither the temple nor sectarian membership, though, provides the primary locus for religious practice among the great majority of my informants. It is rather the domestic sphere which is the centre of much religious and ritual activity, as indeed it is in India (cf. P.Logan 1980, 1988a). Everyday worship centres on the household shrine (*ghar mandir*) which in most homes is located on a shelf or cupboard, although, where space and money permit, a few have designated a whole room or part of it to the *mandir*. Some spend only a short time in worship in the morning and/or evening while others, in particular older members of the household, may spend an hour or more in prayer and readings from holy books. The variety of images of deities and gurus in the household shrine reflects the eclectic nature of religious practice among many of my informants. They can include images of Krishna, Rama, Hanuman, Sita, Ambajimata - a form of the goddess - as well as sectarian images such as Shri Nathaji and favoured gurus, including the Gujarati saint, Jalaram. Even some people who are sect members include a variety of images in their shrine.

As we shall see in this study, everyday worship is only one aspect of the numerous ritual activities associated with the domestic sphere. Two major themes emerge from this material which bear directly on aspects of household well-being and auspiciousness, and are discussed throughout the study. First, when I asked men, and indeed Brahman priests, for details of domestic rituals, I was constantly referred to their wives or mothers for this information. What emerged early on in my fieldwork, and what was confirmed through observation and inquiry, was the acknowledgement by both sexes that it is women who are the agents with knowledge (*jnan*) of many of the domestic rituals which are performed, and it is largely women who organize them. Both sexes also perceive that as agents of this knowledge, women are responsible (*javabadar*) for transmitting this to the next generation. Informants spoke of this responsibility as the *dharma* of women and of mothers especially; their moral duty to teach and pass on their knowledge to their children.

Second, domestic rituals are personally-oriented, primarily concerned with the health, well-being, and protection of family and household members. In this study, the domestic religious realm refers to what Sereed (1988:516) defines as 'the arena in which the ultimate concerns of life, suffering and death are *personalised*' (italics in original). This realm of religious practice shares 'symbols, beliefs, a ritual framework and a sacred history with the non-domestic religion of the same wider tradition' (ibid). Thus my informants are not unaware nor unconcerned with what is termed the 'transcendental' aspects of religious life - the fate of one's soul in this life and the next (*karma*), and the path to final emancipation from the cycle of rebirths (*moksha*). Along with others such as Tamils, Punjabis, and Bengalis, they may participate in and/or perceive themselves as part of a religion called Hinduism - Sanatan Dharma 'a single *dharma* which unifies all aspects of Hindu experience' (L. Bennett 1983:35), in 'the ever present moral order of the universe' (Burghart 1987:227). But among my informants, their domestic ritual practices are informed and interpreted in the light of family traditions and regional practices, which often do not require Brahman priests nor rely on Brahmanical

knowledge. In her discussion of domestic Hinduism among Gujaratis in east London, Penny Logan (1988a:29) observes not only the pre-eminence of women in transmitting religious knowledge to the next generation, but also the particular Gujarati form of this knowledge (ibid:27). My own data strongly support this observation, for it is the particular regional form of worship which my informants see as an essential and differentiating aspect of their culture which women, as agents of this knowledge, are entrusted to transmit to the next generation.

## 2.7.) Caste and Caste Relations

More than thirty years ago, Pocock (1957:290) argued that caste as a system per se had ceased to exist in India but that equally, caste still existed. The change involved a shift from hereditary occupation and hierarchical organization to that of individual castes, a change from 'a religious to a secular political universe' (ibid:298). In East Africa, although South Asians were recognizably separate from other communities, and were classed together by outsiders as 'like', they were an internally divided community. This division was based on a recognition of what Pocock calls 'difference'. With caste groups from widely disparate areas of origin in Gujarat, there could be no preservation of the local hierarchy. 'In this situation', notes Pocock, 'they can be said to exist by virtue of their difference' (ibid:296). This difference (*bhed*) lies with the 'distinctive quality' (ibid:294) of each sub-caste, or *jati*, wherein members of different *jati* are conceived of as members of different species or genus. In East Africa, this recognition of difference is systematic 'because castes exist and are like each other in being different' (ibid:298). Shah (1982) points out that this recognition of difference, or what he terms 'division' or 'separation' (ibid:28), is also evident in urban areas of Gujarat. In addition to this process of division, there has been a gradual decline in the principle of hierarchy 'particularly of ritual hierarchy expressed in purity and pollution' (ibid:29). This is especially evident where the 'concern for observance of rules of commensality has greatly declined not only in urban but also in rural areas' (ibid:29-30). We shall see, especially in Chapter Six, that my

data support these observations among Gujarati informants in East London. The term *jati* translates as *gnati* in Gujarati, or either *nat*, or *jat*, or both these terms (Barot 1974:62-3), and it is in this sense that I use the term caste in this study. My data concur with Michaelson's (1979:352) observation that while Gujaratis in East Africa and Britain deny the existence of caste (*varna*), they do not deny that they belong to a particular *gnati*.

According to Bharati (1967:302), the largest and economically strongest communities in East Africa were the Gujarati and Cutchi Hindus and Jains. <sup>14</sup> Knott and Toon (1982:21) estimated ten years ago that there were approximately 302,000 Hindus of South Asian origin in Britain, 70% of whom were Gujarati. Accurate figures for members of the population of South Asian origin are not available, but such approximations make it clear that Gujarati Hindus and Jains do not form the 'largest' section of this population in Britain. <sup>15</sup> Among Hindus in East Africa, the largest castes were the two sections of the Patels - the Kadva from western Gujarat and the Leva from the central and eastern regions - as well as the Lohanas, and the Visa Oshwal Jains from the Jamnagar area of Saurashtra. The Vaniya, or merchant caste, made up approximately five per cent of the Hindu Gujarati community with another one per cent of Brahmans, mainly from the Audich section. There were also several smaller castes of craftsmen such as Suthar (carpenters), Darji (tailors) and Mochi (shoemakers).

In Newham, there are representatives from the large Gujarati trading castes in Britain - the Lohana, the Leva Patel and the Oshwal Jains - as well as some Vaniya, Brahmans - mainly Audich and Shri Gaur - Cutchi Leva Patel, Kadva Patel and Surti Patel who were traditionally farmers, Mistry and Suthar (carpenters), Soni (goldsmiths), Mochi (shoemakers), Darji (tailors), Luhar (blacksmiths), Prajapati and Kumbhar (potters). The way in which these castes are organized, their links with East Africa and India, and their marriage practices vary from one group to another. <sup>16</sup> In answer to my queries as to the caste of a third person, if it was known at all, apart from general categories such as Brahman, or Mochi, or

Vaniya, knowledge of other castes and even other divisions within one's own caste was fairly minimal. To outsiders, the very large Patel group are simply 'Patels', undifferentiated and often stereotyped for their expensive marriages. Patels differentiate among themselves in terms of their area of origin in Gujarat - Surti Patel, Kathiawadi Patel, Charotti Patel, Cutchi Patel - or in terms of the two divisions of Patel, the Kadva and Leva.<sup>17</sup> The Leva Patel from the Kaira district, of whom Pocock and others have written (Pocock 1972 & 1973; Tambs-Lyche 1975, 1980a & 1980b; Michaelson 1979 & 1983), often refer to themselves as Charotti Patel, or simply Leva Patel, rather than the more commonly known textual reference of Patidar.<sup>18</sup> As Pocock observes of East African castes (1957:296-7), differences exist within and between castes in terms of the stereotypical characteristics attributed to a caste group by others.

While distinctions are made between 'high' and 'low' castes (Michaelson 1979:351, 1983:43), who is 'high' and who is 'low' depends on the perspective of the person making the judgement. Charotti Patels, for instance, may regard themselves as 'high' but may be seen by a Vaniya as 'low' and little more than an upstart farmer. In terms of such distinctions within one's own caste, an Audich Brahman informant told me that 'at the top' were Nagar Brahmans, followed by Audich 'and then the rest'. A Shri Gaur Brahman informant, on the other hand, also conceded that Nagars were 'at the top' but placed Shri Gaur next, followed by 'the others'. In contrast, Vaniya informants did not distinguish divisions in their own caste in terms of 'high' and 'low' at all.

Most castes at the level of *gnati* have caste associations, if not in Newham then in other areas of London or in other cities in Britain. An exception to this, as Michaelson (1979:354) notes, is the Patidar caste where rivalry between particular villages and marriage circles precludes unified action on a caste basis. The degree of involvement with these associations varies considerably, from those who take an active administrative and organizational role in the association, to those who attend with varying frequency the social and religious

functions and activities which are held, to those who simply place their name on the caste association lists and otherwise have little contact with it. Some do not even bother with this. An Audich Brahman woman married to a solicitor explained:

All you ever meet there are Brahmans and I want to mix with other people. All the things they have are for Brahmans, like at *norta*.<sup>(19)</sup> It's the same for the other castes too. The Brahmans have something, the Lohanas and the Suthars and that but I would rather mix. I don't want to be with Brahmans all the time.

For some people, the caste association provides an arena for maintaining contact and social interaction with caste mates, and for those actively involved in the organization or leadership, a degree of prestige and status within the caste.<sup>(20)</sup> But not all want to, nor indeed do, participate in a situation where the mainstay of one's social interaction outside the family and kinship group lies with fellow caste members. In other situations, relationships with friends and neighbours, who are not necessarily from the same caste nor always of the same regional group, play a major part in everyday social life. It will be noted in the next chapter, for instance, that many friendships among women exist on an inter-caste basis. Furthermore, those who refute the notion of caste exclusivity in social interaction come from middle and lower income households alike. It is within the household and with the individual rather than the caste as a whole, that decisions are made concerning the degree of involvement with caste associations, as well as contexts of social interaction with members of other castes.

## 2.8.) Caste and Marriage

One purpose where considerations of caste are important, and where caste associations with their lists of members are utilized even among those who take little part in its activities, is marriage. Bharati has observed that endogamy is 'the only criterion for caste among East African Asians' (1967:284), and thus '*jati* and endogamy are functional synonyms' (ibid:285). This raises the question, which I did not pursue during fieldwork, as to the extent to which marriage actually creates

caste homogeneity in that those people who marry are assumed to be of the same caste. In Britain, Michaelson's (1983:124) conclusions differ from Bharati in that along with endogamy, she identifies other features of caste among Gujaratis.<sup>(21)</sup> It is nonetheless the case that a tendency to endogamy remains a persistent feature of Gujarati castes in this country.

The rules of exogamy within each caste differ but are usually based on regional or named patronymic groups. For example, village exogamy within a regional marriage circle among the Charotti Patel (Pocock 1972); exogamous marriage between the numerous Lohana clans or *atak* ('surname') groups (Barot 1974:62-4), both patrilineal and matrilineal; exogamy of a named patronymic *gotra* and *atak* group among Audich Brahmans;<sup>(22)</sup> or regional exogamy between Surti and Kathiawadi Mochi where, in both cases, only the *sapinda* rule applies (Knott 1984:18). This rule excludes marriage to anyone descended from the same ancestor within five generations on either the paternal or maternal side for Mochi (Knott:ibid), while Vaniya and Brahman informants note that for them, this entails seven generations. To my knowledge, caste associations do not impose economic penalties, as they did in the past, on marriages which contravene caste rules, nor do they excommunicate the participants (cf. Kolenda 1982:189). As one Lohana informant explained, they do not 'have the powers to enforce laws' but rather, in the Lohana Union at least, 'conventions' are passed which 'they suggest people follow'.

Within these stated rules, however, there does seem to be room for manoeuvre. Vatuk (1972:94), for example, observed that in the city of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, there is considerable evidence of breach of *gotra* exogamy. This does not mean that there is a positive rejection of the rule but rather, if the rule impedes an otherwise ideal match 'a way is sometimes found to circumvent it' (ibid:95) - often with the connivance of a priest. Bhanu, an Audich Brahman informant, told me that in her caste marriage within the *gotra* is forbidden as it is considered a *bhai-ben* (brother-sister) relationship, wherein members of the same *gotra* are related by ties of

blood. A similar situation pertains among Lohana and Vaniya surname or *atak* groups. But at the wedding of her niece (BD), Bhanu, 'out of mischief' she said, asked the priest what would happen if a couple from the same *gotra* wanted to marry. He told her there were always 'loopholes'. He then suggested that the girl could be 'adopted' by another family member with a different *gotra* who would then offer her in marriage. The point here is not only that the rules of exogamy can be manipulated, but that the idea that members of the same *gotra* are all distant (*dur*) kin with common blood is often, as Vatuk (1972:96) remarks, 'purely formal'.

Inter-caste and some inter-cultural marriages do occur, but my informants expressed an ambivalence in their attitude which is shared by other South Asians in Britain (J. Taylor 1976:133-143; C. Ballard 1978:183-189, 1979:123-126). Many informants expressed the opinion that inter-caste marriages are increasing and becoming more acceptable, that on the whole they are in favour of such changes, and that in any case, in this country, in England, such things are no longer important or sometimes even relevant. They would probably agree with writers who suggest that what is important in these marriages, and indeed in any marriage, is the class status of the prospective spouses. Bhachu (1985:168), in her analysis of East African Sikhs in Britain, concludes that class rather than caste will become a more definitive feature of such relationships among spouses brought up in Britain. Streefkerk-Hubbeling (1979), in an examination of inter-caste marriages in the Bulsar area of Gujarat, suggests that social class in terms of education, income and occupational prestige, was an important factor in these marriages. In addition to this, an economic power base to which women contribute through their own earning capacity, gives the couple an 'economic independence [which] is of vital importance in this respect' (ibid:266). The threat or reality of withdrawal of economic support, or a share in the family's economic resources in the case of disapproved inter-caste unions, is of limited value as these married couples are not dependent upon their families for economic support. <23>

While it is increasingly the case among some young educated Gujaratis in Newham that they are no longer economically dependent on their parents, this was certainly not the case with many of my informants when their own marriages were arranged, nor will it always be so when they arrange the marriage of their own children. Even where a couple has the potential for economic independence, I think that the threat of disinheritance from the parental estate for a man, or the failure to provide a dowry for a girl in many cases - which is seen as her part of the parental estate - remains a powerful sanction for many to marry only with their parent's approval, however grudgingly this may be given. This applies, of course, whether the potential marriage is inter-caste or not.

Despite public pronouncements on the increasing acceptability of inter-caste marriages, as the time for the marriage of their own children draws near, the hopes of most parents for their children rest largely on a marriage within their caste in accordance with the accepted practices of that caste. Dimesh, aged thirty-six, and his wife Hasmita, aged thirty-five, are both Lohana, a traditional trading caste in Gujarat. I was discussing what they referred to as the 'problem of marriage' with them over dinner one evening. Dimesh expressed his ambivalent feelings in this way:

There's a lot more mixing of castes in marriage now and in the way people mix with other castes. Hasmita's cousin (MBD) got married two weeks ago to a Brahman but her uncle (MB) said he wouldn't go to the wedding and he didn't. These things are changing but some people like him don't believe in mixed marriages. I had him on the phone for twenty minutes talking about it and in the end I said to him "well, you know my views about mixed marriages, I don't disagree with them". I haven't got anything against them but I do believe in arranged marriages. I would want to have a say in who my sons married. It doesn't mean that they can't say that they don't want to marry a girl but you have to know about the family and arranged marriage is a good way of doing this. It will probably mean that they marry Lohana girls. I know this is a bit mixed up and really, I don't know why I'm like this. I've often thought about it but I just don't know why.

Hasmita agreed with these views and added:

Some young people don't bother with it now and they marry who they like but they have problems with the families afterwards. I'd like the boys to marry Lohana girls because they'd know what

to expect but if they don't, I suppose we'll just have to accept it.

There are several points here which need disentangling. First, in these statements, Dimesh and Hasmita share with others the extensively documented notion that marriage is not solely between two individuals, but entails the establishment of a series of relationships between two families (Pocock 1972; van der Veen 1972; Vatuk 1975; Fruzzetti 1982; Kolenda 1984). All my married informants said that theirs was an arranged marriage. When considering a prospective groom (as my data come from women I am uncertain of the boy's perspective, but see Caplan 1985:45 on urban Indian views), as well as his demeanour, looks, attitudes and his educational qualifications, his family background and status were noted to be of considerable importance when considering the suitability of a match. An arranged marriage, as Dimesh points out, is not only a 'good way of doing this', but more often than not, it also ensures a marriage within the caste.

Second, the term 'arranged marriage' needs to be treated with some circumspection. Bhanu's brother's daughter, for example, met her future husband when he went to Tanzania on holiday. Bhanu said that this was an arranged marriage, but she also described it as a 'love match' because the couple had already decided to marry before they approached their respective families. The marriage was then 'arranged' by the families who then went through the formal preliminaries to legitimize the process. In this case, from what Bhanu told me, there appeared to be few objections to the marriage with both families sharing characteristics of caste and class. Her niece's prospective husband was of the same caste but different *gotra* and while only twenty-three, had the potential for advancement in his job as an engineer. Her niece's educational qualifications were lower - she had attained 'O' level standard in Tanzania - and as Bhanu pointed out, from her perspective this was a 'good match'. Bhanu's brother had an established business in East Africa while she was a teacher and her husband a solicitor.

On the other hand, Hemkurva's sister's son Premesh, who lives in Bombay, met his prospective wife while they were both at college there. Although from the same caste, Hemkurva said that her sister and her husband objected to the marriage because the girl came from a poor family (Hemkurva's ZH owned a large factory in Bombay). In the face of her nephew's (ZS) intransigence, his parents finally 'arranged' the marriage which, as the video showed, was a huge affair at a large hotel in Bombay. Initially, Hemkurva often spoke of the marriage, of the demands made by her nephew's wife for help with her own family. She also spoke of the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law which she reported was 'very bad', with the younger woman accusing her mother-in-law of interfering and generally not showing proper respect (*man*) to the older woman. Since the daughter-in-law has given birth to a son, however, Hemkurva rarely mentions the topic and said, when I enquired, that the marriage had worked out very well and that Premesh's wife had settled into the family.

In urban India, Vatuk (1972:88), Caplan (1985:43), and Sharma (1986:166-7) refer to these as 'love marriages' but some, although not all of my informants, distinguished between a 'love match' and a 'love marriage'. The former can, as the examples above indicate, be 'arranged' and referred to in socially acceptable terms as an arranged marriage. The latter, though, is not looked upon with any great favour as it seemed to imply more stringent opposition from one or both families, and/or where the facade of an arranged marriage could not be achieved, for example, with inter-caste marriage. This was the case when Hemkurva's FBSS married a Brahman girl whom Hemkurva dismissed as proud (*abhimani*) and shameless (*besharam*). This discussion took place in the car one evening after Hemkurva, her husband, Dilip, and myself had met them at a meeting after which we had a restaurant meal. Dilip accused Hemkurva of being 'old-fashioned' and 'narrow-minded' but she would not be moved in her opinion. What she was expressing was a disapproval - shared by other male and female informants - of an implied sexual license of the girl prior to marriage. I say girl and not boy here because a sexual relationship for a boy before marriage,

whether implied or actual, does not carry the shameful connotations that it does for a girl.

One might assume from these examples that parents actually have little control over their children's choice of spouse. Certainly, compared with earlier rural accounts (for example, Mayer 1960), many of my informants, or at least their children, can exercise a choice in their marriage partners which their rural counterparts could not. While withdrawal of a share in the parental estate remains a powerful sanction to marry with parental consent, the financial independence of many of the better educated younger generation does give them some leverage in their choice of spouse. Young men and women now have varying but often considerable say in whom they will marry. Although I was told that in some cases both families ostracised couples who married without parental approval, I did not encounter such cases during fieldwork. I do not know if Hasmita's MBD eventually became reconciled with her father, but Hasmita and Dimesh at least, did not completely ostracise her. Despite Hemkurva's disapproval of her FBSS marriage, social disapproval was not translated into social ostracism. I think, though, that these factors need to be set within the context of the expectations of marriage and relationships in the household. Younger married women and the four unmarried female informants I questioned, did not reject the idea of an arranged marriage - if anything they expected and agreed with it (cf. Caplan 1985:42). Vilas, a 23 year-old clerk, for example, told me that she was now wanting to get married and had already 'seen' several boys, none of whom had proved 'suitable'. The decision to reject them was hers taken in consultation with her parents:

They'd never force me to marry someone I didn't want to. They're looking at some other possibilities now. I leave it to them because I trust them. I'd never do anything without their consent because I respect them too much.

While some older informants bemoaned what they saw as a lack of respect (*man*) among younger people, the idea of respect for one's parents' judgement and greater experience was still strongly expressed by these young unmarried women. Like Vilas, the other three informants

expected their parents to be actively engaged in finding them a 'good' husband when they wanted to marry. Although one girl laughed at the machinations of finding a boy and the hints that were dropped that 'time was getting on', like the others she expected her marriage would be both socially approved and appropriate. They did not foresee antagonism, disapproval or ruptured relationships. The intervention and approval of their parents was accepted as part of the responsibility of parents for their children. On their part, they had no wish to show disrespect for their parents nor to damage the reputation of the family. The point I am trying to make here is that the relationship of respect between parents and children is a relationship of power, where withdrawal of emotional and social approval on the part of parents itself acts as a sanction on children to marry in accordance with their parents' wishes. I shall expand on this aspect of respect as power in Chapters Three and Four in particular.

A final point concerns Hasmita's remark that if her sons married Lohana girls, they would know 'what to expect'. It was not the expectations of specific individuals to which she was referring, but rather the tacit assumptions on the part of both spouses based on a shared knowledge of the culture of the Lohana caste - its history, organization, marriage arrangements and rules and so on (cf. Vatuk 1972:92). In other words, she was talking of a specific Lohana identity which is different from that of other castes. The 'problems with the families' which can follow an inter-caste marriage, are those which arise from different practices, rules and dowry arrangements which exist between castes. Knott (1984:19), for example, points out that unlike the 'Patels', Mochis 'do little more than exchange tokens: jewellery goes with the bride...and the groom's family provide her with some new clothes and the much-valued 'Mangala-sutra' or marriage necklace'.

As noted previously, knowledge of other castes or even divisions within one's caste is fairly minimal. What is known are the customs, practices and history of one's own particular 'second order' division

(Shah 1982). I can best illustrate this with an incident which occurred several years after I had 'officially' completed fieldwork, when I was cross-checking some data on kinship terminology one afternoon with Hemkurva and her mother-in-law. When some of this did not agree, Hemkurva said well, this is what she does in her caste. 'I am Modh Vaniya and this is what we say'. Her three daughters were listening attentively to all of this, with her eldest daughter occasionally adding to the conversation. Her youngest daughter, who was then aged four, began chanting 'I'm Modh Vaniya, Modh Vaniya'. Her mother and grandmother laughed until she ran out the back door shouting this over and over, whereupon her mother unceremoniously pulled her back into the house. The point I am making refers back to Pocock's observation noted earlier - that castes, and divisions within castes, are based on a sense of difference (*bhed*), wherein those who are like each other share common identities. Perhaps this was what Dimesh was grappling with in trying to understand why he felt that marriage within the caste for his own sons was important - they would be marrying a girl who was like them.

## 2.9) Divorce

Before going on to look at patrilineal affiliation, it is perhaps appropriate here to briefly discuss divorce. As with inter-caste marriage, men and women told me that many more people were now divorcing, but they were less vocal in asserting that it was becoming more acceptable, particularly in so far as women were concerned. I number only one divorcee among my informants, but Nita's case was not, I think, atypical when taken together with other informants' comments and behaviour. I first met Nita not long after I began fieldwork when she was 31 years-old. We were on a women's group outing to Epping Forest and I was sauntering along and chatting with several women I had come to know. Nita appeared around a corner, urging her daughter's push-chair over the muddied footpath while shouting at her young son who was gleefully walking in puddles. Another informant, Mangala, had suggested Nita to me as a 'good' contact and Nita, it turned out, had been looking for me. Perhaps it was because she was unusually tall and

seemed to me striking in her appearance, perhaps it was the enthusiasm with which she greeted me, or her laughter and energy, but she struck me then and continued to do so, as an indomitable woman.

Nita came to England in 1976 from her birthplace in Kenya following an arranged marriage. Her ex-husband, she told me over numerous conversations, was not only a gambler but a heavy drinker who began to physically and verbally abuse her soon after their marriage. Many friends and relatives had advised her then to divorce him. When her first child, a son, was born he was seriously ill and over the next few years spent prolonged periods in hospital. Not long after her daughter was born, matters came to a head after a particularly severe beating when she sought the refuge of a social worker at the hospital. Once she began divorce proceedings, however, 'everyone disappeared. All those people who told me to take the divorce didn't acknowledge me anymore'. Her husband's family for a long time had no contact with her and, although her own parents and family supported her, most were still in Kenya. Her social circle shrank and now 'there are only a few Asian ladies who are my friends'. Apart from Mangala and a few others, most of these 'Asian ladies' were non-Gujarati. She had joined various single-parent groups but the majority of the members were Europeans. I was with her one day at a meeting organized by Mangala to discuss employment opportunities and training programmes for Asian women. Among those present was Hasmita. Later in her flat Nita said:

You know Hasmita don't you? We used to be friends in Kenya, we knew each other well from when we were childrens [sic]. You didn't know that did you? [I had known both women by this time for several months and Hasmita had never mentioned Nita to me]. Now she doesn't talk to me unless it's just being polite. It's because I took the divorce she is like this. This is what happens for us when we take the divorce, no-one will have anything to do with me. They think I'm after their husbands.

To put this in some kind of perspective in relation to a comparable situation for an English woman, prior to her separation from her husband, Nita said she rarely spent time on her own. She told me that she grew up in a 'happy, close' family in Kenya and when she came to England, her main contacts were with her husband's family. She

had helped her father in his business in Kenya but had never worked in England when she was married. Her English language at that time was not very good although she has struggled to improve this. She was also uncertain of her immigration status as she had a Kenyan passport and was fearful that if she left England to visit her family, she would not be allowed to return. The withdrawal of any kind of support from her husband's family had left her almost financially destitute early on, and she had to negotiate her way around the hitherto unknown territory of social welfare and support. She was also emotionally and socially ostracised from close contact with other Gujaratis whom she had known.

I think this one example at least, gives some indication of the way in which family and social disapproval can act as a powerful sanction against divorce. Two other women I knew well, told me that they had also contemplated divorce but decided against it, partly because of their children, and partly because of this kind of social disapproval. Hilary Standing (1991:157) also notes in her study conducted in Calcutta, that 'there is a great deal of pressure on married women to suffer in silence rather than end a marriage'. This pressure comes from an ideology in which divorce is 'shameful and ignominious' (ibid), and from the dismal alternatives a woman has, especially if she is poor. Nita, at least, had financial assistance from the State, some experience of bookkeeping in her father's business, and a personal resilience to improve her situation. But, as she pointed out, if she is to re-marry, as she hopes she will, she has to scrupulously guard what is left of her reputation for her own sake and that of her children.

## 2.10) The Patriline

At a usually smaller and more inclusive level than caste (*gnati*) membership and second level divisions - whether regional or named patronymic - is filiation to a particular patriline. Parry (1979:137) notes that in Kangra, north India, the *khandan* is a flexible term used to describe either a clan, a small-scale lineage, or any intermediate grouping of agnates. Thompson (1984:75) notes a similar flexibility,

pointing out that while the *khandan* is a descent group of three to four generations, its composition is 'largely determined by the individual's view of it'. The *kutumb*, on the other hand, is the 'extended family' where agnatic ties are recognized in some circumstances and uterine ones in others (pace Mayer 1960:170). Van der Veen (1972:109 n5) observes that among Anavil Brahmans in Gujarat, the *kutumb* is 'the patrilineage in the broadest sense'. Bennett (1983:131) remarks that in Brahman-Chetri society in Nepal, the *kul* can vary from a single household, to several households of three or four generations depth, to an ideal where the *kul* is so large that members can no longer trace exact relationships with each other.

I note these terms and the flexibility in their application because a similar situation pertains among my informants. The term *khandan* is used, but among my informants at least, less commonly so - the more usual term being *kutumb*. The *kutumb* can also be referred to as a *kul* (lineage) (cf. Pocock 1972:86). Its usage generally refers to a patriline traced from an ancestor some five to seven generations from the present head of household (cf. Parry 1979:132-133). In theory, all members of the *kul* worship the same *kul devi* (lineage goddess), and observe at least minimal birth and death pollution for each other (cf. L. Bennett 1983:19).<sup>(24)</sup> Informants point out, though, that in terms of birth and death pollution, while this should be the case, in practice the group is always smaller because links have either been forgotten and/or members of the *kul* are spread over several continents. In the latter case, unless it is a very close relative, I was told that people do not bother to observe death pollution. As one man put it in English 'who would know if you did or didn't? With all those people dying, you'd be forever impure'.

Although Mayer (1960:167) notes that in Malwa, the term *kul* is usually reserved to denote those who worship the clan goddess, my informants also use the term *kutumb* in the context of those who worship the same *kul devi* (lineage goddess). When informants speak of 'family tradition' (*ritini kutumb*), they are referring to the particular customs, personal interactions, and especially ritual

practices of those who share the same *kul devi*. I shall return to this shortly, but here one can note that this group includes wives but excludes married sisters and daughters for reasons which will become apparent. My data support Thompson's (1984:75) observations (*pace* Mayer) that the composition of the *kutumb* is largely determined by the individual's view of it, and that this varies according to context. In addition to the usage noted above, the *kutumb* is translated by many informants as the 'joint family' traced through the male line for three to four generations, or at least from the oldest living male member. One man said that this would be 'my father and his brother and their sons, that's the *kutumb*'. From a male perspective, this group of agnates is the core of the *kutumb* as a joint family. Members of this group may or may not hold property and/or financial assets in common.

But when men and women spoke of the joint family in terms of joint family living, this unit included unmarried sisters and daughters, as well as wives of sons or 'cousins' (FBS). Thus, for purposes of joint family living, married sisters and daughters are excluded from this unit. This is not the case, however, when the *kutumb* is considered as a ritual unit where, as we shall see, one of the major actors in all life cycle rites is a man's married sister. What this movement of women shows here, I think, is that different categories of women define the *kutumb* in different ways. In other words, these women are the key to kinship relations. I shall return to this point shortly.

When we move on from these contexts, the composition of the *kutumb* becomes more elastic. I think that Mayer's (1960:171) observation that the *kutumb* 'seems to be defined by social contacts' is relevant here. The category of kin expands in the context of social contact and co-operation to include both matrilineal and patrilineal kin. Another term used is *sagao* (relatives or family). Hemkurva told me that this included 'everybody, my sister-in-laws, my sisters, brothers, *ba* (her mother-in-law), Dilip, everybody in the family'. The family in this sense of the term is bilateral. But when considering 'practical kinship' (Eickelman 1989:154), several factors are relevant

in so far as who is included or excluded at any one particular context.

First, social nearness is a consideration. While genealogically close (*najik*, *nikat*) kin are important in tracing blood lines at marriage, socially close kin may be genealogically distant (*dur*). Spatial separation or nearness is one factor in this. As we have seen from the section on migration, not all one's natal kin - whether maternal or paternal - necessarily live in Britain. In some cases, they are spread across three continents, while for others, many members of the same *kutumb* live in this country. In the former situation, while contact with genealogically close kin - especially parents and siblings - in other parts of the world can be maintained through letters and phone calls, more intense interaction takes place with more genealogically distant kin by virtue of their residence in Britain, or with 'replacement' kin who may not otherwise assume the importance they do. For example, Dilip's 'real' sister is married and lives in Jamnagar. Although he - or more often his mother - maintains contact with phone calls, and while she continues to give gifts at important life cycle events - which will be discussed in Chapter Five in particular - it is his father's sister's daughter, his 'cousin sister', who lives nearby with whom close and frequent interaction takes place, and whom he regards as a 'sister' in all important life cycle rites which are celebrated. His wife refers to her HFZD as *nanad*, the reference term for HZ, and to her husband as *nanadoi*, the reference term for HZH. Dilip's children, in both reference and address, call their FFZD *phoiba*, the term for FZ, and her husband *phuva* for FZH. A similar situation would pertain where *nanad* refers to HMBD, HFBD and HMZD, *nanadoi* to the husband of any *nanad*, *phoiba* to FFBD, FMBD and FMZD, and *phuva* for any husband of *phoiba*. As Vatuk (1982:58-60) points out, variations in kinship terminology, among other things, can be used as behavioural strategies or tactics. Such tactics here enable Dilip to 'replace' a geographically distant 'real' sister, with a geographically and socially near classificatory sister who can participate as HZ and FZ on important ritual occasions. <25>

On the other hand, spatial closeness is not always a measure of social co-operation. Dilip's wife Hemkurva's only brother lives nearby but social contact between the two families is minimal as a result of a rift caused by the death of their mother. Two of Hemkurva's seven sisters live in Leicester, one in Tanzania, and the remainder in India. With the two sisters in Leicester there is considerable social contact, not only phone calls but visits and attendance at rituals. Hemkurva writes to all her sisters who live abroad, but it is her sister in Bombay with whom both she and Dilip maintain frequent contact through phone calls and the occasional visit from her sister and her husband. Her sister's husband, as noted earlier, is a wealthy businessman in Bombay. Hemkurva and I had numerous conversations about the merits or otherwise of our own sisters, or sister in my own case. What emerged from this was that the relationship with her sister in Bombay was not only an emotionally close one, but potentially advantageous when, for example, Dilip was establishing a business with export possibilities.

A further strand which can be added is that when Hemkurva's sister's son, Premesh, came from Bombay to stay for several months while on a course in London, he was included in our discussions at that time as being part of the *kutumb*, or joint family. This was important for another reason which centres on the fact that Dilip and Hemkurva have three daughters but no sons. Premesh, who has no 'real' sisters, is thus a classificatory brother to their daughters. The importance of this relationship will, I hope, become apparent in the next chapter, both in terms of a potential protective as well as ritual relationship between these 'brothers' and 'sisters'.

The final point I want to make here concerns the relative status and class position of kin members. This is not a simple correlation of closeness between those of similar class and status. As we can see from the example above, there are significant ranges of wealth and status within any one family, particularly in the bilateral sense. Rekha lived with her unemployed husband and their four children - the eldest two of whom worked in factories - in a crowded and damp rented

basement flat. She had three sisters and four brothers. One brother living nearby worked in a factory. The other three, along with her sisters, were in India. One brother, she told me, was 'mad' and lived with her widowed mother, one was a teacher and the eldest a doctor. Like Hemkurva, Rekha keep in touch with her siblings abroad through letters, and through the visits of friends and other contacts. It was her eldest brother, the doctor, however, of whom she talked most frequently. When she and her husband, Arvind, began to look for a husband for their only daughter, it was this brother they contacted to make enquires on their behalf in India. Rekha may have had a particularly close emotional relationship with this brother but, although she never told me this, I do not think it unreasonable to assume that his considerable wealth and status compared to that of her other siblings, would enhance their own rather poor circumstances to make a 'good' match for their daughter. The point I am making is that socially close ties with kin, whether genealogically close or distant, can be manipulated and perhaps even 'targeted' to one's own advantage in numerous ways, as these examples reveal. (26)

The flexibility with which the term *kutumb* is used applies to a lesser and more inclusive sense to the *kul devi*. In general, this refers to a goddess of a particular patriline, but can at times appear to refer to a clan goddess (cf. Pocock 1973:67). This is, perhaps, a reflection of the way in which these categories overlap in practice and from the perspective of the actors. My informants also refer to the *kul devi* as *bhavanima*, the goddess of the household, but they also point out that these are the same (cf. L. Bennett 1983:131). What can be said is that those who worship the same *kul devi* include a group of agnates - whatever the depth - and their wives. Michaelson (1983:255 n3) notes that among Lohanas, ancestral martyrs can be referred to as *kul devi* 'that is as male lineage gods', and in Newham I found this also occurs among other castes. Despite one's provenance and residence, however - whether Gujarat, East Africa, Britain or elsewhere - the authority of the *kul devi* lies in the ancestral village of origin in Gujarat. While many young Gujaratis, and sometimes their parents, have never visited India, and while others

have not returned for many years, the notion that the family goddess 'lives' there provides people with a spiritual link with their area of origin in Gujarat. Even some young children know the name of the village where the *kul devi* shrine is located, while women are often able to recite the location of their husband's as well as their own maternal and paternal shrines, providing a kind of geographical 'map' tracing their origins.

The *kul devi* not only looks after the prosperity, health and well-being of the patriline. The deity also informs and authenticates the specific life style or family tradition - the many different rites, customs, and conduct (*judi judi ritabhat*) - associated with a particular patriline. The myriad of different practices which is specified by each *kul devi* has been noted by South Asian anthropologists such as Dube (1955:116), Mayer (1960:186) and Michaelson (1983:182, 192). Bennett (1983:132) has observed that in Nepal:

for almost every generalization one can make about the worship of lineage gods there is some lineage group that does things differently... There is no unifying Sanskrit text laying down the standard of ritual orthodoxy.

The great range of behavioural variation which is found in inter-personal relations within the household also derives from the rules demanded by the *kul devi* of each family (cf Michaelson 1983:182). The ancestral authority of the deity informs not only the particular traditions in the family - the customs, behaviour, and worship - but also extends to the performance of the life cycle rites (*samskara*). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, but here one can note that, unlike Inden and Nicholas' (1977:36) analysis of life cycle rites among Bengali Hindus, where 'one of the most important sources of variation has been caste', among Gujaratis this source of variation lies with an affiliation to a particular patriline. For a woman, however, this affiliation changes at marriage to that of her husband, and involves her in a learning process and a change in practice and behaviour (cf. Fruzzetti 1982:9) to a greater or lesser degree from that which was observed in her natal home. Not all my informants were certain what happened in inter-caste unions, although

most felt that a woman would still change her affiliation to that of her husband. This was the case at least, with Hemkurva's FBSS whose Brahman wife changed to the family tradition of her Modh Vaniya husband. This change, and its implications for in-marriage women, especially the ritual implications, will be dealt with in the following chapters.

## 2.11) Women and Patriline

The affiliation of women in north India with two kinship groups and with two households has long been noted in the literature (Luschinsky 1963; Madan 1965:127-8; Jacobson 1974:115; Sharma 1978:221; Fruzzetti 1981:9 & 1982; Gray 1982:220-1; Vatuk 1982: 95; L. Bennett 1983; Thompson 1984:75). It is only relatively recently, however, that the implications of this dual affiliation has been explored in detail. As Sharma (1981:36) observes in a critique of Mandelbaum (1972), when discussing the wider aspects of kinship outside the household 'women almost disappear from the text'. The links between men and women outside the groups of agnatically related men - 'which must be sustained through the mediation of married sisters and daughters' (ibid, my emphasis) - were given secondary consideration. In focusing on the links between men, anthropologists had failed to examine the important relationships and links created by women.

This dual affiliation, from a male perspective, has been considered in terms of a distinction between two different kinds of women - between natal or consanguineal women (sisters and daughters), and conjugal or affinal women (wives, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and mothers) (Sharma 1978:135; Gray 1982:219-221). As virgins (sisters and daughters) in their natal home, women are revered and sometimes made the object of veneration as pure beings (Parry 1979:147; Allen 1982:5). As the purity and status of the caste and lineage is said to depend on the purity of its women, however, there is the concomitant concern with female virginity at marriage (Das 1976; Allen 1982), and male control of women's sexuality and reproductive power which is

transferred at marriage to her husband's family in the 'gift of the virgin' (*kanayadan*).

From a female perspective, an important distinction is made between two social contexts (Gray 1982) - a woman's natal home (*pihar*) and her conjugal home (*sasara*) - where they are 'conceived of and treated differently' (ibid:221). The warm and intimate relations they experience as a daughter and sister in their natal home, are contrasted with the expected antagonism they may experience as a wife, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law in their conjugal home. In their *sasara*, Gray (ibid: 218) suggests that in-marrying women are both 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. On the one hand, they are a source of wealth in terms of the material possessions, children and, one can add, well-being they bring to their husband's household, without which the male line could not continue (cf. Fruzzetti 1981:15). On the other hand, they pose a threat to the solidarity of the agnatic core of the joint family through the potential hostility of the sons they bear (cf. Sharma 1978: 226). As Parry (1979:177) observes, however, quarrels between in-marrying women are often used as a pretext for agnates to sustain the fiction of an ideal of brotherly solidarity.

Whichever perspective is taken, though, women always belong to both their own and their husband's patriline. Contextually, they have different relationships and responsibilities in each. I refer here to a point made earlier that it is precisely this dual affiliation which creates relations between kin groups. It is, moreover, this movement of women which sustains these relations. As Sharma (1981) observes in her critique, many of the earlier ethnographies of rural areas give no indication of the mediating and connecting role of women (ibid:36). With village exogamy, women marry away - sometimes quite far away but at least out of the immediate orbit of the village. But there is considerable evidence to suggest that the constant movement of women between villages and kin groups maintains relations in various ways. Both Sharma (1980:146-8 & 1981) and Das (1976:132), for instance, point out that women not only relay information about potential marriage partners, they may also act as marriage brokers, utilizing

information gained through 'feminal kin' (Sharma 1981:36) - kin traced through relationship with women. Doranne Jacobson (1977) observes that women's visits to their natal villages and the attendant movement of men who accompany them:

are also important in the diffusion of ideas and technology, both traditional and modern. Through exchange visits between them and their affines in other villages, residents of a village obtain information about rituals, notions of proper conduct, dress, house construction, agricultural techniques, and a host of features of life in those villages (ibid:282).

While it is also pointed out that a woman's visits and attachment to her natal village gradually decrease over the years, it is also apparent that this is connected to stages in a woman's own life cycle. Jacobson (1982:89) points out that for many years after marriage, village women are important members of their natal and conjugal households, 'part of a constant procession of women moving back and forth' between the two. Young married women 'divide their time about equally between the two places, while older women usually restrict visits to their natal homes to a few weeks a years' (ibid). What she points out, and what is also evident from Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon's (1989) study, is that younger women 'constitute a mobile labour force that can be deployed where the demand is greatest' (ibid). What is also apparent from these ethnographies of rural areas is that women return to their natal households to attend rituals or, in some cases, for the birth of a child. Stevenson's (1971 [1920]) early account of the religious life of Brahmans in Gujarat, for example, reveals the important role of the husband's sister at all major ritual events, and one can only assume that these women returned to their natal village on such occasions, probably accompanied by male kinsmen. This is born out in Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon's (1989) recent study in Uttar Pradesh, which highlights the role of the married *nanad* (HZ) at childbirth and postpartum (ibid:153-6), as well as the organization by women of ceremonial gifting (*len-den*, taking and giving) (ibid:26-7,141-143). I shall discuss this in relation to my informants, especially in Chapters Four and Five.

This is not to deny Vatuk's (1971:294) point that in urban South Asia there has been a blurring of the traditionally sharp lines of role differentiation between matrilineal and patrilineal kin. In the case of neo-local residence in urban areas, she observes (1972:42) that the emotional ties between parents and daughters, which are compartmentalized by traditional rules of residence and role definitions in rural areas, are actively expressed when a married daughter lives nearby. The periodic and gradually diminishing visits to her natal home, are replaced by frequent and reciprocal visits with her parents and siblings. Apart from the changes in relations between matrilineal and patrilineal kin, whether this emphasis on bilateral kin relations - noted in other cultures (Yanagisako 1977), in studies of urban India (Sharma 1986:161-3), among South Asians in Britain (R. Ballard 1982:197) and, as we shall see, among Gujaratis in east London - is a new phenomenon, or whether as more recent work seems to indicate, it has always existed, is a subject for further research. In Chapters Three and Four, I examine the implications of my female informant's kinship ties, focusing in particular on their role in women's networks, and on the extent to which they imply a change in a married woman's responsibilities for health care to include members of her natal household.

## 2.12) The Household

For the purpose of this study, the household (*ghar*) refers to 'the cohabiting, commensal group' (Caplan 1984:218), with the proviso that it is also a ritual unit. While members of the same *kutumb* worship the same *kul devi*, the primary responsibility for enacting life cycle and other rituals lies with the individual household (cf. Vatuk 1972:130) - and more specifically, as noted earlier, with the women of the household. With one exception, all members of the households on which I have data (see Table 3, p41) are connected by ties of kinship. The exception is a widow living with her two sons and a couple and their child of the same caste (Lohana), referred to as 'friends'. This young couple were recently arrived in England and were paying rent to Sarla, a widow, until such time as they found more permanent council

accommodation. Although on friendly terms, and although they sometimes ate together, the relationship was that of landlady and tenant. In this case, I take the household to refer to Sarla and her sons only.

Home ownership among South Asians is higher than average in the borough and this is reflected among my informants. Of the fifty households on which I have data, forty of these households were owner-occupied. This factor has been explained in other studies (Hahlo 1980:300; Tambes-Lyche 1980b) in terms of the decreased likelihood of racial discrimination in the rented sector, and the increased status ownership brings. My informants stressed the latter adding that home ownership was not only more secure, but was also a form of investment. Although some young women told me that their own younger sisters and friends were increasingly wanting, and in some cases demanding, a separate household at or soon after marriage (cf. Bhachu 1985:93-4), the majority of my informants were living, or had lived for several years after marriage, with their parents-in-law. As households expand and children marry, accommodation is resolved in a number of ways. One Brahman informant was in the process of purchasing a house a few doors away for his married son, his wife and two children. It was his intention that his brother's son and his wife and children would remain in the original house with himself and his wife, but that the two households would be able 'to live as a family and eat together'. This was the only such case I came across during fieldwork, as it was unusual for married children who remain in the area to maintain a single 'hearth' in this way.

More commonly, if there is more than one son, as younger male siblings marry, either they or the older married sons move out of the parental establishment and set up a separate home. Where affordable, this may be away from Newham toward the middle class suburbs further east in Redbridge, Ilford or Goodmayes, or in other more prosperous areas of London. Unmarried daughters usually remain with their parents. In the one case where an unmarried woman was living with her brother and his wife, both parents were still living in Gujarat. Alternatively, an older son may move with his parents to a new home

leaving a younger married son in the original house. The latter was the case with Dilip's 'cousin sister' (FZD) Ruxmani. When I first began fieldwork, she and her husband lived with their two married sons, the elder of which had two small boys while the younger son's wife was expecting a baby. Not long after the younger son's child - another boy - was born, Ruxmani and her husband moved from their by now extremely cramped three bedroomed terraced house in East Ham, to a new house in Edgware, leaving the younger son and his family in the original home. The choice of where the parents would go was, in this case, largely determined by the better relationship which existed between the older son and his wife and Ruxmani and her husband.

Whether or not such households continue to share an economic base, however, or whether this is an occasion for partition of the household in terms of its financial resources and property, depends on several factors. Members of the household may agree among themselves that such a move is necessary and the separation occurs with little acrimony. It may be decided that this is the time to divide the parental estate and in the above case, the younger son received the house in East Ham while the older son acquired the newer and larger home in Edgware. There was some bad feeling about the size, location and 'newness' of these houses, and much discussion in Hemkurva's kitchen with her *nansad* (HZ) as to the relative merits and wisdom of the partition. But in comparison with other cases and stories I heard of, it went ahead reasonably smoothly. On the other hand, although I have no examples from my fieldwork, one could assume that a separation of this kind does not always lead to a division of the parental estate, especially if the father is still reasonably robust and is not yet prepared to hand over financial control to his sons. Where considerable acrimony can and does occur, is when a married couple in a joint household want to move to a separate establishment, and either the parents and/or older brothers disapprove, and/or the out-moving son wants a share of the parental estate which is not forthcoming. Both these considerations pertained when Dimesh and Hasmita moved from Dimesh's parents' house, which they shared with his older brother and his wife and children. In this case, Dimesh and Hasmita were denied

any financial assistance to set up a separate household and moved, amid a great deal of hostility and acrimony, to live in a council flat.

The issue of household partition is a particularly complex one which I did not exhaustively examine during fieldwork. Parry's (1979: 150-194) discussion of household partition in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, and Sharma's (1980, especially sections of Chapter 6, pp 135 and 178-185) account of women, also in Himachal Pradesh, provide excellent coverage of the complexities of disputes within the household, and the specific constellation of circumstances and relationships which contribute to partition. One point I would make, though, refers to earlier comments on maintaining the fiction of agnatic solidarity at the time of partition. That women, and perhaps men, also recognize the female role as scapegoats in arguments over household partition, was brought home to me one evening at Hemkurva's house. I was asking her and Dilip and his mother how the parental estate is divided when, say, the father dies. Dilip said that this was not a problem because the sons simply divide everything up between them. As he was an only son with just one sister, it had obviously not been a source of difficulty for him. When I asked whether there was **never** any argument, as Dilip laughingly said 'no', Hemkurva and Prabha simultaneously and emphatically said 'always, always fighting'. Hemkurva continued that it is always women 'who get blamed for this, but it is them (pointing at Dilip) who do the fighting'. It may well be that in some cases women are the instigators of partition, or that relationships with their in-laws are part of the reason for it, but anthropologists are not alone in recognizing that they may also be the scapegoats to preserve a myth of brotherly solidarity.

### 2.13) Employment

Michaelson (1979: 353), among others, has remarked that the importance of trading occupations in the region of Gujarat has resulted in higher status accorded to the merchant, or Vaishya caste (*varna*) than elsewhere in India, often being placed second in the caste *varna*

system above Kshatriya. Tambs-Lyche (1980b:289) has termed this ethos of business and trade among Gujaratis as a 'merchant identity' which was further strengthened during the years in East Africa, with experiences there influencing not only those in local areas of Gujarat, but also those now living in Britain. Both Michaelson (1979:352) and Jackson (1981:64) also note that a further factor in occupation is the continuing belief in the right to engage in the traditional occupation of one's caste.

In Newham, some Soni own jewellery shops, Mistry and Suthar can be found in the building industry in various capacities, some Brahmans are teachers and priests as well as diversifying into the catering trade, and Vaniya - a traditional trading caste - can be found in businesses of various kinds. A depressed labour market and rising unemployment, which were current during my fieldwork, meant that it was not always possible to find employment in traditional occupations, or their modern equivalent. Even if it were possible, however, I think that the notion of continuity in traditional occupations, noted by some writers, has been somewhat overstated. Wider socio-economic considerations of waged employment in an urban capitalist economy, coupled with social class aspirations and job status, are increasingly overriding considerations of traditional caste occupations, particularly among the higher educated younger generation. Among Gujarati men in Newham - who were mainly relatives or friends of my female informants - some were indeed small traders of various sorts, with a few civil servants and professionals. But the majority were unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers, who often found employment at the Ford car factory in Dagenham, or at the Plessey factory in Ilford; or clerical workers at Post Offices, banks or building societies, for example, either locally or in other parts of the city.

Unlike the Sikh women of Bhachu's (1985:68) study in west London, not all the Gujarati women in Newham with whom I was involved were pressurized into finding paid employment. For some women, neither they nor their families aspired to paid urban employment, or to a concept

of a 'career' outside that which is entailed in the domestic sphere. Some of these women, despite numerous handicaps, have sought employment in England. Others, though, never enter the labour market for a variety of reasons: because they share with their husband the notion that it is his responsibility and duty to provide financially for the family, while theirs is to care for the home and children; because they see their domestic work as time consuming and hard enough without taking on additional employment; because they feel that they do not have the work skills, confidence or language ability to do so and in some cases, because they feel they are too old to acquire these; because the type of employment available to them - often in lower paid factory work - is not acceptable to themselves or their husband; and/or because they are not financially constrained to do so. While a few of these women belonged to households from middle income groups, where financial constraints at least are not an important factor in seeking paid work, others came from lower income households some of which have only one (male) breadwinner.

Apart from the reasons advanced above, Sharma (1986:131) has utilized Wallman's (1984:41) concept of household 'styles' to explain why, in households of similar class status and income levels in urban India, some women are discouraged from thinking of themselves as wage earners, while in others they are positively valued. Several women, who had never been employed outside the household and had no expectation of doing so, said, in addition to some of the reasons noted above, that 'we don't do it in our family' or 'it isn't our custom'. It is this concept of difference (*bhed*) in custom (*riti*), rather than household styles, which some informants use to explain their disinclination to take up paid employment. In this sense, custom creates further differentiation between households which may otherwise share class and status levels. It has certainly been the case traditionally, that additional status accrued to those households where women did not work outside the home. A further factor in this is that, unlike urban India, lower income households here exist within a welfare state which provides (relatively) free medical care and

education, as well as financial assistance and, in theory, access through local authorities to lower cost housing. Where it is not the custom in a woman's family for females to seek employment, these provisions may enhance the decision not to do so.

This argument, however, must be set within the context of changing attitudes towards female education, not just among Gujaratis in England, but within India itself. The emphasis given to girls as well as boys, has entailed a shift in attitude to one where girls are now brought up with the idea that, once schooling is complete, they will enter the employment market, preferably in high status and highly paid jobs or, at least, as a secretary or bank clerk (cf. Sharma 1986:130). Indeed, the daughters of those women who had never been in outside employment, were either in paid employment or were being educated with the idea that they would be.

Of the women I knew, or knew of, who were in paid employment, the majority worked in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs - usually in factories - or worked from home doing piece work for local employers. <sup>(27)</sup> One woman had worked in a shoe factory, another in a sweet factory while others were employed as packers or on assembly lines. A minority, all of whom were young women, worked as clerks or typists. Some also demonstrated considerable entrepreneurial skills in developing economic resources. One woman obtained a licence from the local council to start a small child minding centre at her house, while another devoted considerable time to selling 'tupperware' before establishing herself as a paid marriage broker. The majority of women seeking unskilled or semi-skilled employment have access to their husbands' network of contacts, as well as their own information resources through friends, kin, neighbours, casual acquaintances (cf. Saifullah Khan 1979:127), and voluntary organizations. None of the women I knew, though, bothered with state-run employment agencies and preferred to pursue their own networks to find employment.

For these women in lower income groups, work was often seen as an economic necessity in supplementing the household income including, in

several cases, contributing toward their daughter's dowry. While not all enjoyed their work, many derived considerable satisfaction from the company they found in the work situation, the financial reward it brought - however small - and the sense of contributing toward the economic betterment of the household. <sup>(2a)</sup> Paid employment enhanced their role in the management of financial affairs, giving them more say in how economic resources were distributed, especially in nuclear households. This increased sense of independence meant that some women continued working for these reasons as much as economic necessity. For other women - usually junior members of joint households - paid work brought no such independence as they were required to hand over their salary to their husband, or more commonly, to their mother-in-law (cf. Kapur 1970: 141, 152; Wilson 1978: 119). As one woman explained, she felt doubly frustrated when her mother-in-law demanded her pay-packet unopened each week, for not only was she 'treated like a child', but she saw nothing of what she had earned. Whether a woman can negotiate greater economic independence through her employment can depend not only on her own personality, but also on her relationship with her husband, the household into which she marries and her position in it.

Lack of employment skills, training, and competency in English, as well as a depressed employment market in east London, also meant that some women were unemployed through no choice of their own. Meetings which discussed training schemes and the availability of courses, such as clerical skills, and especially computing, were always well attended by all except elderly women. Information about part time jobs in particular, was eagerly sought-after by married women because it meant that they were able to maintain their household duties and the care of children.

The number of professional women I knew, or knew of, was small in comparison to the majority of those employed in paid work. Apart from three women in their late thirties and forties - a doctor (who was not employed during my fieldwork), a teacher and a language co-ordinator, who had gained their qualifications and education in India or East Africa - the remainder were young women who came to Britain from East

Africa as children and completed their education here. They were employed as a speech therapist, nutritionist, pharmacist, radiographer and accountant. A few other women who were unemployed outside the household and described themselves as 'housewives', had also gained qualifications or work experience in India or East Africa in jobs such as typing, clerical work and teaching. They had found it difficult, however, to convert their qualifications and skills into ones acceptable by British authorities or employers without further training, and were further hampered in this by their limited English language skills.

#### 2.14) Conclusion: Gujarati Identities and Culture

In the final section of this chapter, I bring together some aspects of Gujarati identity noted above by looking at the interaction which took place at a particular Divali<sup>(29)</sup> celebration organized by the Gujarati Welfare Association in Upton Park. It took place in one of several disused churches and halls which have been taken over by the Newham Community Renewal Programme, which provides a venue for a variety of organizations in the borough. About two hundred people from a membership of some three hundred filled the hall, the men sitting to the left of the speaker and the women to the right. The 'programme' was opened and a welcoming speech made by the president, an elderly Suthar who was succeeded by the secretary, a Kathiawadi Patel, who outlined the programme for the evening. The theme of Divali was initiated by a Brahman who told the story of Rama and Sita, of the goddess's abduction to Ceylon, and Rama's eventual victory over the giant, Ravana. The audience of old and young participated throughout with singing and refrains. The guest speaker for the evening was a local Labour councillor, originally from Maharashtra but resident for many years in Gujarat. He emphasized in his speech the importance of such events as an expression of the continuity of their culture in Britain. The remainder of the programme was provided by a group of young girls, aged from about five to thirteen, who performed some traditional dances to taped music under the direction of several older women. The display ended with some lively disco dancing to popular

Hindi film music, which was greeted with loud applause by the audience.

As people began moving about, greeting friends and acquaintances, chatting and exchanging news, the committee members set up tables of hot food. On such occasions, the food is often provided by one of the local Gujarati vegetarian restaurants or, as in this case, by a Kathiawadi Patel family who cooked in their home and transported it to wherever required. Public commensality here was complete. The few people who did not take food were several women observing a fast. <sup>(30)</sup>

The Welfare Association is open to all castes and members of any sect, the requirement for membership being the ability to speak Gujarati, which on the whole means that Gujarati is the mother tongue. It organizes social and cultural activities which range from large-scale celebrations such as this Divali festival, to smaller, weekly meetings and social outings, although it is not without a political aspect in providing a forum for local politicians, airing grievances and gathering influence. Caste associations, such as the East London and Essex Lohana Union and the Leva Cutch Patel Association, exist in the Newham area, as well as sectarian organizations, such as the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission. Some members of the Association belong to their own caste and/or sectarian organization, while others belong to none. Some of its members are white collar workers, while others are employed in factories. The majority are from East Africa but this does not exclude from membership those who have come directly from India.

In the context of the Welfare Associations, members perceive themselves to be homogeneous, to share a common identity in their language. Whatever else it is to be Gujarati remains here undefined. But as we have seen in this chapter, my informants perceive of themselves not one but many identities. Some are 'other imposed' differences, such as the doctor's comments earlier in the chapter which identified Gujaratis with 'westernization' and 'integration'. Others are 'self imposed' differences between areas of origin, castes and divisions within castes, patrilineal affiliation, ancestral

villages, established residents or relative newcomers, class and educational standards, 'modern' or 'traditional' (cf. Tambs-Lyche 1980a; Barot 1980; Bowen (ed) 1980; Knott 1982; Michaelson 1983; Robinson 1984; Burghart (ed) 1987). Which aspect or aspects of their identity is relevant in any one situation depends on the social context, for without specifying the particular context, such classifications have little meaning. Membership of social categories expand or contract according to members' own perception of difference or similarity which is relevant at the time. Identities are negotiated in different contexts which continually shift and overlap.

When talking with a westerner such as myself, or through their daily experience of life in urban Britain, Gujaratis not only reflect on their lives, but at times feel almost impelled to spell out 'cultural markers' which differentiate their 'culture' from the dominant society in which they live, and from other South Asians in Britain. Burghart (1987:242) has suggested, for example, that Hindus in Britain find functionally equivalent meanings in another culture to explain their culture to others. When comparing English culture to their own, whether directly or indirectly, my informants identified 'markers', some of which, from my own outside and academic perspective, were to me shared with other South Asians - respect for elders, an ideal of joint family life, the importance of kin and the duties and moral responsibilities toward them, and gender-related conduct and behaviour. Other 'markers' I saw, and informants themselves perceived, were specific to themselves - especially their language, <sup>(3)</sup> their food and their specific form of regional religious practice. When parents speak of 'passing on' their culture to their children, it is these latter 'markers' and the traditional values associated with them to which they refer.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIALITY : CO-OPERATION, COMPETITION, AND DIFFERENCE

### 3 ) Introduction

While the importance of kinship and social networks in the settlement of South Asians in Britain has long been recognized by anthropologists (R. Ballard & C. Ballard 1977:30-1; Saifullah Khan 1977:77; Anwar 1979: pp 51), not all early studies were sensitive to the role of women in creating these networks. As Saifullah Khan (1979:127) and Bhachu (1985:72) observe, women contribute valuable information essential in the urban environment - from finding employment, accommodation and child care, to locating potential marriage partners. In her study of women in urban north India, Sharma (1986:8-9, 154-5), building on Paponek's concept of 'family status production' (1979:775), argues that the construction and servicing of these 'information networks' is part of women's largely 'invisible' (ibid:168) work. Through this work, women contribute a valuable resource to the household which is utilized by all family members, and which sustains and enhances the status and reputation, as well as the welfare of the household itself.

The 'invisible' as well as the visible contribution women make to the welfare of the household through their relationships and networks, is also a theme of this chapter. However, Sharma's observations imply that women not only co-operate with each other to exchange information and assistance. My female informants also compete with each other to maximize status, reputation, and influence which in turn, contributes to the welfare and auspiciousness of their own particular household. In this chapter, I want to focus on several issues which arise from these observations through an examination of intra-household and inter-household relations among women, and between women and men. Co-operation and competition among my female informants is linked to their relationships, at various stages of their domestic cycle, with different categories of men, as well as to cultural notions of honour, respect and shame. Central to these issues are relationships of power which, following Foucault (1978:94), I take to be 'exercised from innumerable points'. Power relationships, he also points out (ibid:95), depend 'on a multiplicity of points of resistance', and in this and other chapters of the study, I explore some of the ways in

which my female informants both resist and collude in various forms of domination.

I begin with a discussion of household and marital relations, before going on to examine relationships among women in the local neighbourhood and beyond and the prestige structures available to them. These relationships have important implications for women's contribution to the well-being of the household, for their perceptions of themselves, of their identities, and their culture in Britain.

### 3.1) Household Relations : Generation and Gender

I had gone one late afternoon to meet Shanta (Appendix B), only to find her - not in a flap exactly for Shanta always seemed to me poised and unhurried - but visibly embarrassed at my arrival. She hastened to explain that half an hour earlier, her sister had phoned unexpectedly from Wembley (north London) to say that she and her husband would be over in an hour or so for a visit. Hence, she would not be able to take me to the temple as planned. She apologized over and over, and by way of explanation told me:

Our families are very important to us. If we have problems or troubles, we go to our families and ask for help and it is always given. When they come to visit, they are always given food first and then we eat. That's the way it is with us. Our families always come first.

In many different contexts, sentiments expressing the importance and primacy of kin relations were echoed by women and men alike. The self-ascribed identity of family solidarity and loyalty, is, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, identified by my informants as an important part of their culture which they seek to transmit to the next generation. But informants also acknowledge the jealousy (*adekhai*) and rivalry (*haripai*) which exists within and between households and bilateral families. When Shanta spoke of 'our families', she was referring to the family in the bilateral sense. I shall discuss this in relation to women in the next chapter. Here I want to focus on the joint family as a group of agnates, their wives and unmarried sisters and daughters, and especially on the household -

joint and nuclear - to examine the ways in which women co-operate with each other, and the factors which can divide them.

### 3.2) Women and Household Relations

While women bring their own particular personalities and life experiences to the relations they create in the household, structural factors such as age, stage in the domestic life cycle, household composition, migration history and level of education, impact in varying degrees on the relative authority and autonomy women have in these relationships. Within these constraints, women strategize and negotiate to maximize what Kandyoti (1988:274) refers to as 'life options'. The following section comprises a series of case studies interspersed with data from other informants. They are not intended to be exhaustive of the kinds of situations in which all my female informants lived, but rather, they illustrate the possibilities and limitations which household relations create for my informants.

As a newly wed, recently arrived in Britain, with few or no natal kin and few if any independent contacts, a woman may find that the extent of her social world is initially heavily dependent on, and constrained by, her conjugal kin. Sarka and Rahina were two such young women I met in Newham.

#### Sarka and Rahina

Sarka, a 23 year-old Mistry, had no natal kin in Britain, having arrived in 1982 as a bride from her village in Surat. Together with her husband, she lived in a terraced house with her parents-in-law and her husband's two brothers, one of whom was married with a young child. She was a quiet, softly-spoken woman in comparison with her more ebullient friend Rahina, an 18 year-old Darji girl who had married and come to England from her village in Junaghad in 1982, the youngest of five children who remained in Gujarat with her parents. Like Sarka, she lived in a large household with her husband, parents-in-law, her husband's unmarried brother and sister and one married

brother with a young son. The two women met at an English language class which they joined soon after their arrival. In both cases, it was their husband - with the approval of his mother - who suggested they attend the classes to learn English, and it was largely here that we had many discussions on numerous topics. Neither of these young women had ever worked outside the household in paid employment, and both were dependent on their conjugal household for their economic and social well-being. Sarka was five months pregnant and Rahina four months pregnant with their first child when I met them.

Both women described their households as 'traditional', a term they also applied to their own natal families. The terms 'traditional' and 'modern' were used extensively by informants in various contexts but especially when describing households and families. A 'traditional' family - here referring to the *kutumb* as a group of agnates, wives and unmarried daughters and sisters - is one which adheres to hierarchical relations between generations and gender, which is 'strict' in its attitude toward separation of the sexes, and which insists on 'correct' behaviour among family members, including those which obtain between a woman's natal and conjugal kin.<sup>11</sup> Neither woman veiled in front of their father-in-law (*sasaro*) or husband's elder brother (*jeth*), but they did defer to and remain distant from them. In fact, these two men were rarely spontaneously mentioned in the conversations I had with Sarka and Rahina.

With other informants, however, this was not the case. Mukhta (Appendix F) spoke of her widowed *sasaro*, who lived with her and her husband, with considerable affection, remarking on the help he gave in looking after the children, on the stories he told them of his early life which they so much enjoyed, and of the 'company' he gave her when she felt lonely in her tower-block flat. Similarly, Jasvanti (Appendix E) said she had a close relationship with her *sasaro* who, prior to his illness, looked after the children when she wanted to go out shopping or to meetings, and who also gave 'company'. Like Mukhta and her children, Jasvanti and her two daughters addressed their father-in-law and grandfather as *bapuji* or *bapu* (father). Unlike the situation in

Sarka and Rahina's household, in both the latter cases these elderly men had relinquished authority to their sons and were now dependent upon them.

For Sarka and Rahina, it was their mothers-in-law (*sasu*) who loomed large in their life and conversation, and to whose authority they were subject. The *sasu* in both these households was a figure of considerable authority. Both were *saubhagyavati* - auspicious women whose husbands were alive - both had grown-up sons and in both cases, the parental estate remained intact. Their *sasu* was very much the figure of female authority in the household who organized and oversaw the domestic workload between their two daughters-in-law (*bahu* or *vahu*). According to Sarka and Rahina, they also tried to restrict communication between themselves and their *jethani* (HeBW). For example, both their *jethani* had relatively recently given birth at the local maternity hospital. Whenever they asked about what went on there, what had happened to them at the hospital, what the doctors did and so on, if their *sasu* was present or overheard them talking, she put a stop to it by accusing them of being shameless and of having no respect (*man*) for her. Through their attendance at the English classes, though, these young women had access to the kind of information which their mothers -in-law had sought to control. Not that either of them could actually do much with it. One woman, who had recently had a baby at the local maternity hospital, told Rahina about the clothes and other things she would need to take to the hospital for the birth of her own child. When Rahina relayed this information to her mother-in-law and asked if she could start getting it ready, her mother-in-law, she told us, was very angry and dismissed her requests, telling her that her job was to have the baby - she would look after the rest. It was not for Rahina to start telling her what to do.

With their husband, conversation and displays of affection were largely confined to the privacy of their bedroom. Even here, Sarka remarked, her mother-in-law would eavesdrop and later demand explanations if she heard anything not to her liking. Rahina said that

when she first came to her *sasara* (conjugal home), her *sasu* had accused her of being shameless (*besharam*) when she started a conversation with her husband in her *sasu's* presence. I do not think that Sarka would have tempted fate in this way, for although both women were aware of their own and their husband's subordinate position in the household, Rahina was much more the rebel than her friend and chafed at the restrictions her *sasu* imposed on her. She wanted, she said, to enjoy herself now she was young but she would be old, maybe even thirty or more, before she would ever be 'free' to do the things she wanted.

As a junior *vahu*, these young women were also subject to the authority of their elder sister-in-law (*jethani* HeBW), although both said that this relationship was reasonably good. Their *jethani*, like themselves, had arrived as a new bride with no natal kin in Britain, and the (slightly) older women had been fairly supportive. But they did feel that the already-established relationship their *jethani* had with their *sasu*, placed them at something of a disadvantage for, as new-comers, they were now the most subordinate women in the household. I do not know if the relationship with their *jethani* continued to be reasonably amicable, or whether they still live in a large joint household. But being married to the co-parceners in the same estate, there is, as Sharma (1980:180) points out 'potentially a profound conflict of interest among them'. As noted in the previous chapter, whether this ripens into open tension and arguments, though, has a lot to do with the relationship between the brothers to whom they are married. Unlike Sarka, Rahina's husband's unmarried sister, who was three years her senior, also lived in the joint household and this relationship was, to say the least, tense. It was her sister-in-law, Rahina said, who criticised her and complained of her 'shameless' behaviour when she continued to go to English classes when she was pregnant. Rahina never told me this, but one could surmise that her husband's unmarried sister had a vested interest in ensuring that Rahina maintained the reputation and honour (*ijjat*) of the household, for gossip and inuendo could damage her own chances of a 'good' marriage.

Like Rahina, other women also recognized that, particularly where a woman's *nanad* (HZ) was herself unmarried and living in the parental home, the potential for jealousy between the two women was always present with each vying for the affection of the same man. When Bhanu's niece's (BD) wedding was fast approaching, she asked her aunt 'can't you find a husband for her [one of her prospective husband's unmarried sisters]? We aren't even married and she's already jealous of me'. When I went with Savita (Appendix E) one morning to visit a friend, she was telling me of her younger sister's recent marriage. I asked her whether her sister was living in a joint household with her husband's parents:

Yes, but we'll just have to wait and see. Before the wedding, the mother-in-law wants a good wife for her son and she tells everyone she's found a nice girl for him, but the trouble starts after they are married. They want a good wife for their son but they don't want to share their love with her. They don't want their son sharing his love with his wife. They want to keep it all to themselves and so they tell their son that his wife is no good. It's the same with the sisters. They don't want to share their brother with his wife and so they treat her badly. They're jealous of the wife and say terrible things about her.

Savita quite nicely sums up here some of the tensions and potential conflicts which exist between women in their relationship with husbands, brothers, and sons (cf. Parry 1979:174-6; Sharma 1980:169-173; Jeffery, Jeffery & Lyon 1989:30-31). Older women seek the protection of sons at the expense of the conjugal bond; sisters, as we shall see, hope for continued protection from brothers after marriage; and a wife depends on her husband - and later her own sons - for protection in her *sasara*. Kandiyoti (1988:274) refers to the process whereby women strategize within a set of concrete constraints 'to maximize security and optimize life options', as 'patriarchal bargains'. The bargains which women enter into, however, vary with their own household composition and their stage in the domestic cycle.

#### **Hasmita**

Hasmita, at thirty-five, had achieved what Rahina so much wanted - to live in a nuclear household. She had spent the first five years of her

marriage living in a joint household with her husband, Dimesh, his parents and her husband's older brother and his wife and children. Unlike Sarka and Rahina, she arrived with her sister from Kenya in 1972 when she was twenty-three and lived in her uncle's (FB's) 'liberal' household. But marriage into a 'very traditional' family, she told me, had meant a change from these relaxed relationships to 'strict' ones. While her husband was more 'modern' in outlook, it was her mother-in-law, a woman with a 'big personality', to whom she was answerable:

I had to do what my mother-in-law told me. I never went to mothers' groups or anything then. I had to tell her everything that I was doing and account for every movement. She didn't like me going out much and so I used to stay at home. I never went out like I do now.

Although Hasmita's husband is a younger son, she found in him an ally in her dislike of the strict observation of generational and gender hierarchy which was part of the family tradition of interpersonal relations.

Dimesh and I think about these things differently from them. We are more open about them than they are but his brother is like his parents, very strict and traditional. It was difficult. He teaches his son that he must do everything he tells him. He must always obey him, but we don't agree with that.

It was when they moved, amid considerable hostility, to a flat of their own with their two young sons, that Hasmita began again to create social contacts and activities outside the household and kin network with the encouragement and support of Dimesh. Yet, despite the disputes and constraints she experienced when living in a joint household, like many other women in similar circumstances, Hasmita maintains a relationship - if at times an uneasy one - with her mother-in-law. She seeks her advice, or acts on her not inconsiderable unsolicited advice, on matters relating to illness and treatment when, for example, the children are ill. During one conversation when Hasmita was telling me of yet another demand her mother-in-law had made of her, I asked why, if she found it so onerous, did she continue to visit? She was startled if not shocked by my question. 'But Meg, it's for respect. I couldn't not go. I just couldn't'.

The notion of respect (*man*) here is closely linked with ideas of household and joint family reputation and honour (*ijjat*), and with *sharam* - loosely translated as shame.<sup>(2)</sup> I can best describe these connections here by recounting an episode Hasmita told me about concerning her youngest son, Rajesh. At the time, Hasmita was teaching Gujarati and *garba* (dancing) classes, and had just started a club for mothers with young children. Rajesh was a continual source of worry as he suffered a series of colds, which culminated in a prolonged bout of bronchitis. Hasmita had tried a variety of home medicines - turmeric mixed into a paste and smeared on the face, for example, and aniseed leaves steeped in warm oil and massaged into the skin - and she and Dimesh had worn a path to their GP seeking treatment for Rajesh. When Hasmita's *sasu* returned from a trip to Gujarat and found her grandson ill, she roundly castigated Hasmita for being too 'free' - an English term which was used frequently by English-speaking informants, which, in some contexts has similar connotations to being shameless

(*besharam*):

She said to me "he wouldn't be like this if you didn't go here and there all the time". She says I don't stay at home enough and that's why he's sick - that I don't take care of him like a mother. I think I'll have to give up teaching on Saturdays. People talk all the time with us, they say this and that and it's bad for this family... She says I have no proper respect for her, that I don't listen to her and now she blames me because Rajesh is sick.

Even though Dimesh did not wholly support his mother's views on this, Hasmita, as a result of these accusations, stopped teaching the Gujarati classes but, 'to show I am independent' she continued with her club. Her mother-in-law in particular, employed several sanctions to force at least some compliance from her. With her 'free' behaviour and lack of respect for her *sasu*, she was accused of damaging the reputation and honour of the joint family - even though they no longer lived together. Linked with this was the second and central accusation, made primarily by her mother-in-law, that Hasmita 'caused' Rajesh's illness because as a mother, she put her own interests before the health and well-being of her children. This was not the only

occasion when Hasmita's *sasu* accused her of neglecting her two sons. While Hasmita no longer lived with her mother-in-law, and while her *sasu* had a husband and another son, these two grandsons were a weapon which the older woman used in the rivalry between the two women for the attention and affection of Dimesh. As we shall <sup>see</sup> in other examples, explanations of illness or personal misfortune among my informants need to be viewed within the context of household and bilateral family relationships.

There is also the implication that Hasmita's behaviour had become a subject of public 'talk'. The sanction of 'talk', or gossip, is an important one. Gossip, as James Scott (1990:142-3) observes, is 'a discourse about social rules that have been violated... A person's reputation can be damaged... only if the public among whom such tales circulate have shared standards'. Savita (Appendix E) told me, as part of our conversation above, that although she was now going to college, she had to be 'very careful' in her behaviour, to make sure that she still looked after her husband and children, and wasn't too 'free' 'otherwise people will talk'. At her sister's marriage a few days before 'that's the kind of thing everyone was talking about. Practically everyone I know was there and they all talk about these things and take the gossip back to relatives and friends'. Gossip as a sanction on behaviour recurred again and again in conversations with informants - who themselves rarely if ever gossiped, but 'everyone' else did.

### Bharti

The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in both the cases above, contrasts with that of Bharti, a twenty-six year-old, who arrived from her birthplace in Kenya when she was twelve. Bharti's 'modern' parents were both alive and lived in London with one of her three married brothers. She has four married sisters, the eldest of whom is forty-five and the youngest twenty-four. In addition to her parents and siblings, she has a large natal kin network in London and other parts of the country, as well as friends and former work

colleagues, with whom she has maintained contact since her marriage. Prior to the birth of her first child - a son - she and her husband, Girdhalal, often dined out at restaurants or with friends, went to the cinema, the theatre or other social events. Even after the birth of another boy, she maintains an active social life beyond the household. While her elderly widowed mother-in-law, Dukshma, could complain about her 'modern' behaviour and what she saw as a neglect of her household duties, this did not deter her daughter-in-law's extra-domestic activities. If anything, it was Dukshma who was disadvantaged in this situation where she had little control over a daughter-in-law, who was supported and encouraged by her son who shared in her 'modern' behaviour. Dukshma no longer had a husband to support her, either financially or socially, and she was dependent on the goodwill of her son and daughter-in-law for her own material well-being.

I was often told by men and women that, unlike the English, elderly people were never 'put into homes' and were always cared for in the joint family. One woman told me 'grandparents are an asset. They occupy themselves with the family and worship God. They are part of the extended family programme'. When Dukshma died several years after I left east London, as far as I know, and according at least to her neighbour, Hemkurva, Bharti was seen as a good daughter-in-law - she had cared for her when she was ill, had cleaned up after her and had cooked the food she liked best, even though her mother-in-law continued to complain about her modern ways and her lack of respect. Had Bharti not done so, and especially if her mother-in-law had been 'put into a home', I feel fairly certain that Bharti would have become an object of censure and gossip in the neighbourhood. Not, I hasten to add, that this had ever been mentioned as a possible course of action nor, to my knowledge, had it ever been contemplated by Bharti or her husband. However, what I am uncertain of is the extent to which such gossip would have influenced Bharti's behaviour. I had heard neighbours talk of her 'going out and about' in her car, of her different hair styles and English clothes, of the Montessori school which her son attended and so on, but this did not seem to bother her unduly. 'People always talk. If I listened to everything they said

about me I'd never do anything. I don't want to be like them. If Girdhalal doesn't mind [my doing these things], why should I bother what they say?'

Both women and men recognize the potential for conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, where the older woman seeks to hold on to her son's loyalty as a protection in old age, while the younger woman seeks ways to establish a relationship with her husband who is her primary protector, at least until she has children of her own (cf. Kandiyoti 1988). Not all women experience serious conflict in the relationship with their mother-in-law, though, nor indeed with other female conjugal kin, and not all older women are hell-bent on imposing their authority on rebellious or even compliant daughters-in-law. Nor do they all bemoan the behaviour of younger women, but recognize and incorporate the changed circumstances of their lives with considerable equanimity. They share housework and child care, as well as the social relationships and contacts they develop outside the household and kinship group. An intimacy and loyalty can develop between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law which belies stereotypical representations of this relationship, and provides both women with emotional and physical support. Much of this, I feel, has to do with the personalities of the two women themselves as well as their own position in relation to the men on whom they depend.

#### **Hemkurva**

Hemkurva and her mother-in-law, Prabha, have an extremely affectionate and harmonious relationship, where laughter and co-operation are the norm rather than the exception. I well remember one afternoon when Hemkurva was cooking the evening meal. She had put the ingredients into the pressure cooker and left it while she, Prabha, and myself were nattering in the kitchen as the children played and argued. Our musings were interrupted by a loud bang as the pressure cooker exploded shooting kidney beans, partially cooked onions and tomatoes over the ceiling and walls. After the initial momentary shocked silence, Prabha and Hemkurva rushed to the cooker, both laughing, just

laughing until, as usual, tears rolled down Prabha's face. 'Ba', Hemkurva said laughingly to me, 'has magic with this pressure cooker. She's the only one who can make it work'. Later, after we had cleaned the scattered debris, when I was sitting at the table with the children and Prabha was chopping up yet more onions at the kitchen divide, Hemkurva came up behind her and wrapped her arms around her mother-in-law's shoulders. 'Oh ba, ba', and then to me, 'ba is not my mother-in-law, she is my sister, aren't you ba?' Prabha, giggling to her audience of her granddaughters and myself said, 'Hemkurva, Hemkurva, bas, bas (enough, enough).

Given the kinds of potential structural tensions and conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law which I have mentioned, how can women achieve this level of confidence and co-operation with each other? At different stages in their domestic cycle, these two women are united in their reliance on Dilip, as son and husband, for financial and social protection and support. Dilip is Prabha's only son - her only other child, a daughter, is married and lives in Gujarat. From a pragmatic point of view, it would not be in her own interests as a widow, to alienate either her son or daughter-in-law for she has no other source of support. Hemkurva, for her part, has no sons and is alienated from her only brother. On the other hand, these are also reasons why the two women could be jealous and fearful of each other in their competition for the affection and protection of Dilip. None of my other female informants were quite so reliant on the support of a sole male figure as Hemkurva and Prabha. In other households of similar composition, either the older woman had other sons or the younger woman had brothers to call upon for support. My own, admittedly subjective feeling, is that much has to do with the personalities of the two women and especially, Prabha's attitude and sagacity. The stories she told me of her years in East Africa were sometimes joyful and funny, but they were also touched by feelings of isolation, and a determination almost to enjoy what she now has - the love of her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren, her house and garden, her kin network in England, and the practice of her religion. One could suggest, perhaps, that this relationship is also about the

expectations these two women have of life and their notions of personal well-being - which I shall return to in the conclusion to this study.

In detailing these different households, I have tried to highlight some of the ways in which women, at different stages in their domestic cycle, both co-operate and compete with each other in order to enhance their own 'life-options' within the constraints of their subordinant position and dependence on various categories of men. Where a woman has an established base of social relationships outside the conjugal household - including natal kin, friends, school and work colleagues - her potential access to information and knowledge of all kinds is greatly enhanced when compared with the situation of newly-arrived young brides such as Sarka and Rahina. But whether or not such access can be realized and acted upon, whether or not and to what extent relationships can be created or maintained after marriage, can depend on the family tradition of inter-personal relations, the relationships established with other female conjugal kin, and their stage in the domestic cycle. Furthermore, while information can contribute to the resources and welfare of the household, it can also be seen by some its of members as potentially threatening to their own basis of control.

### 3.3) Marital Relations

So far, I have only mentioned in passing a woman's relationship with her husband, but it is with marriage that a woman becomes *saubhagyavati* - an auspicious woman. When Shobana was nine and ten years old, her mother, Hemkurva, and her grandmother, Prabha, would tease her about getting married. 'When you get married you won't be able to do what you like'. Shobana would shake her head angrily. 'I'm not getting married. I'm not having the mens (sic) tell me what to do'. Now, at seventeen, she, like my other unmarried female informants, wants and expects to marry at sometime in the future. While young women, and I suspect young men, recognize the potential tensions in household relations, and while 'love marriages' are

themselves disapproved of (2.8), the notion of romantic love is not absent among these young women nor, I might add, among some of my older informants either. Hindi and Gujarati films - many of whose stories focus on the devoted wife and mother, and the perils of a woman alone or women who are not chaste - as well as western television programmes and films, contain a regular diet of romantic love. During fieldwork, the television series of Paul Scott's quartet of novels, 'The Jewel in the Crown', was shown around the same time as 'The Far Pavilions'. Among the women at LC, EL, and MT, and for Hemkurva and her household and neighbours, there was no contest as to the most popular. The romantic exploits and final resolution of love in the fantastically happy ending of the latter won hands down.

While young women may begin with these romantic notions, and older ones perhaps look back at what might have been, women are also fairly pragmatic as to what they want in a husband - mostly someone who is well-educated and with good prospects, who will take care of them and the children, who will take their part, and who is kind. Older and younger women did tell me of a more equitable relationship with their husband than that which they observed between their own parents, where they discuss and contribute to decisions which affect their lives. Few young women - the exceptions among my informants being Sarka and Rahina from very 'traditional' households - follow some of the older generation in refusing to call their husband by name (Parry 1979:148), and when I put it to them that their husband stands as a god in relation to them (Khare 1982:156), the suggestion was invariably greeted with laughter and sometimes, derision.

Love (*prem*), I was told by many women and by a few men I questioned, grows in a marriage. At EL one day, when I was talking with Bhanu, Yogini, Kanta, Sadhana, and Surbhi (Appendix D) about love, I asked the women if they loved their husband. Yogini, Kanta, and Sadhana - all middle-aged women - looked quite uncomfortable. The others seemed relieved when Yogini eventually said that this is just not the way they talk about their relationship with their husband. Surbhi, who was recently married, made no answer at all. Later, when I

was alone with Bhanu, she said 'we think differently from you about these things Meg. This is just understood between a husband and wife'. In her case, she explained, her husband understood that she looked after the house and the children, she organized and managed the household affairs, and that he respected her for her success in this. 'He doesn't say to other people, "oh, my wife is wonderful" or anything like that. He doesn't praise me to other people. But I know he respects me. This is just understood between us'. Several other women, on different occasions, told me that they show love and respect in everyday things, like preparing a favourite meal for their husband when he comes home from work, and ensuring his comfort. For their part, a husband may buy them some food which they especially like, or perhaps something for the house to make their work easier. One man told me 'I don't say to my wife "I love you, I love you, I love you" like English people do. I might wear something I know she likes, like this tie. I don't like it, but I wear it because she got it for me and I know she likes me to wear it'.

There were some exceptions to this. Hemkurva's FBSS, who had made a 'love marriage', was openly affectionate to his wife when I saw them together, holding her hand, putting his arm around her and kissing her on the cheek. Bhanu's niece (BD) and her husband behaved likewise when they returned for a visit after their honeymoon. According to Bhanu, this was not new. Even before they were married, they would sit on the sofa in her house 'kissing and cuddling' and one day, she saw a 'love bite' on her niece's neck. Bhanu surprised me in not being too concerned about this and was, in fact, quite indulgent 'providing things don't get out of hand'. Young people now, she told me, are very different from her generation and she did not see anything wrong in this behaviour so long as they did not do it 'too openly' and, of course, provided 'it doesn't go too far'. This view was at variance with the great majority of my older and some younger married women's attitudes. Unlike the majority of my female informants, Bhanu's own and her husband's salary would have placed them in a fairly high income bracket. She had a well-established career and did not plan to live with her son after he married. 'Hari and I have worked hard all

our life and we want some peace in our retirement'. Whereas many of my older informants were threatened by the idea of alienation from their sons and loss of support in old age, Bhanu had her own career and perhaps felt, at this stage at least, that her only son would ensure her well-being if her husband pre-deceased her.

On the other hand, there were women like Nita who had been severely beaten during her unhappy marriage. She told me she did not 'hate him' but she was, though, terribly angry with him not only for the pain and shame he caused her, but because he did not live up to her expectations of what a husband should be - namely a protector and provider. Savita also told me of the unhappy marriage her husband's sister had contracted:

Everytime we go there, they are all smiles and she is told to put on a new sari and her jewellery. When they are in public, they put on a face and she has to smile and behave normally. But at home they beat her and treat her very badly. When we go there they say she is lying. They even tell the children to say their mother is lying when she says she has been beaten. It's terrible. They are a bit frightened of us now but they still beat her.

Another woman told the horrific story of a neighbour - not Gujarati but Pakistani - whose husband had doused her with petrol and set fire to her. 'This can happen to Indian women, yes, even here. Our husbands may not burn us but some do beat their wives'.

Apart from Nita, Jaya (Appendix F) was the only other female informant who volunteered this information. At thirty-six and with three children, Jaya said that the twelve years of her marriage had not been happy, although she conceded that her husband was 'not a bad man'. It was, rather, that her husband's family had accused her father of not paying the full dowry promised before the wedding - something she vehemently denied - and in this her husband acquiesced. Without the support of her husband and with no natal kin in Britain, she often felt isolated and alone and, as she put it, had become 'bitter' at her husband's lack of support in the face of his family's hostility toward her. Jaya admitted that her own 'pride' was also an obstacle to better relations with her conjugal kin, but felt that the main blame lay with her husband in not fulfilling his 'correct' duty to support her as his

wife. In all probability this is not the whole story of this marriage and other women, in similar situations, might be more successful in negotiating potential areas of conflict. Another woman who also knew Jaya, told me that many of her problems 'are her own fault. She doesn't know when to step down'.

Knowing 'when to step' down, when to be passive, selfless and obedient, are strategies which women can utilize to maximize their own 'life-options'. Jaya's case, as well as examples from the previous section, serve to highlight an important aspect of the relationship between husband and wife. Where a woman has the support of her husband, whether in her own goals and aspirations, or in conflicts and disputes with household or other kin members, her sense of self-purpose and sometimes her ability to act, is considerably enhanced in the face of public or family hostility, even if her husband can do little to ameliorate the situation. But where women lack this support, the constraints they face are considerable and their options are limited.

And yet all women of my acquaintance, whatever their caste, class or family tradition, performed a ritual, called *jaya parvati vrat*, for five years after marriage to ensure the health and longevity of their husband, and to protect their own state as a *saubhagyavati*, an auspicious married woman. This lasts for five days during the month of *ashadha* (June-July) when women observe a fast excluding salt, rice and lentils from the diet.<sup>(3)</sup> Each morning, they read from the stories of Shiva and Parvati<sup>(4)</sup> and worship grain shoots which are grown for the ritual. On the final day of the fifth year, usually armed with a supply of Hindi and Gujarati videos, women observe a vigil (*jagarana*) throughout the whole of one night and the following day. On that afternoon, five women - or at least an uneven number of women - are invited to the house. These women must all be *saubhagyavati* and must not be menstruating or pregnant. The wife places a *chandalo* (red mark) on the forehead of each woman and washes their right big toe<sup>(5)</sup> in milk and water. They are given various articles (*shanagar*) which can include plastic bangles, the

auspicious betel nut, a small amount of money, a stainless steel bowl or plate and perhaps a 'blouse piece' - a small amount of cloth for a blouse. These items are all said to be auspicious (*shubha*) and are associated with a *saubhagyavati*. They are given to the women to thank them for participating in the ritual. The women then all partake in a meal - again to thank the women for coming - which marks the completion of the *vrat*.

Some of my informants who had performed *jaya parvati vrat* were no longer certain of the sequence of the ritual and I obtained several conflicting accounts. Hasmita told me that *jaya parvati vrat* was also called *jivrat*. Like other informants, she also told me of *divaso* which, she said, was also called *evrat*. *Divaso* is the last day of *ashadha* when women again observe a vigil - usually until midnight - and abstain from salt in the diet to ensure the health and longevity of their husband. I was told by some women including Hemkurva, Prabha, Nita, Bhanu and Surbhi, that this continues for five years after marriage. Others, including Laxmi, Ujam, Sachana and Yogini told me that women can perform this ritual throughout their married life. Gopalan (1978: 113) reports that in Gujarat, *evrat* commences on the full moon in the month of *ashadha* and continues on the same day every month throughout the year. Women pray to the goddess *Evrat Jivrat* for the long life of their husband. This accords more with what my informants called *punam*, the full moon day, which is an *aluna*, or saltless fast and which, I was told, was also to ensure the health of one's husband. The point of all these rituals, however, in whatever form they are undertaken, is to protect and nurture the longevity of one's husband and thus ensure one's own auspicious state as a *saubhagyavati*.

#### 3.4) Women and Paid Employment

At LC one afternoon, I was asking Ujam (Appendix B), and seven other elderly women present, some questions about the joint family and family tradition, when the women themselves 'got off the track' and started discussing among themselves the dire consequences of what was

happening among the younger generation. Ujam had the public support, at least, of all the women when she turned to me and said:

It's good to have the whole family living together in the same house. We eat together, and in India, we all used to sleep together in the same room. A joint family is good. The women stay at home and look after the house. They do the cooking and they clean the house and they look after the children. They give them love and are close to them. Men go out to work and bring home the money. But now the children go out and live in houses by themselves, away from the parents, and the women go out to work. We can't all live together in England. It isn't healthy all crammed up together. But we are losing our culture, our way of life. It's difficult to pass this down to the young ones.

There are several points to note here in relation to women in paid employment. First, Ujam and Laxmi (Appendix B), and another woman present, both had daughters-in-law who worked outside the home. Other older women at UP and EL, who expressed similar sentiments to those above, also had daughters-in-law or daughters in waged employment. Their main grumble was that with young people now living in nuclear households, there were no longer older women in the household to care for the children. This also meant that they had less control over their sons and daughters-in-law, although as we saw in the case of Hasmita (3.2), it is precisely their public grumbles which can act as sanctions on younger women. When it came down to financial practicalities, though, these women were well aware of the contribution women can make to the economic betterment of the household. Some also spoke with considerable pride of a daughter or daughter-in-law who was a secretary, a bank clerk or a teacher. We saw in the previous chapter that not all women work or want to work in paid employment. But there is often tacit admiration, and some envy, for women who have a job with status and a good salary from those who are not wage-employed. Rahina was one such woman whose 'traditional' household had itself no family tradition of women working outside the home. She spoke longingly of being able to earn her own money to give her some of the 'freedom' she so craved.

The second point concerns the complementary division of labour in the household, which Ujam described and other men and women talked

about, which entails female responsibility (*javabadari*) for the domestic space, for its members, for cooking, housework and childcare. This is seen an essential part of a woman's duty (*dharma*) as a wife and mother. Another term used is *seva* (service), but as Vatuk (1990:71) points out, without the demeaning and negative connotations it has in English. It has more of the implications of the English usage of care, as in caring for and looking after. This, I was told by men and women - although not all the latter as we shall see agreed with it - is what women are supposed to do. It is 'normal' (sometimes expressed as *svabhavik*, natural) for them. Indeed, many of my female informants, old and young, employed or not, were categorical in claiming this realm of domestic responsibility as their own. Jaya, during a discussion about her husband with myself and her friend, Mukha, told us 'I look after the house, the kids and everything. I say this is my responsibility. I do these things because I am a woman'. Mangala, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic. She had been listening in the background to the conversation I had with Ujam and the others at LC. After they left, she said to me 'you know, not all of us think like them. I think men should help more in the house. After all, the kids are theirs too and they should take some of this responsibility'. I shall return to this shortly.

What is 'normal' for men, and what is their responsibility, is that they service and care for the household by providing the economic wherewithal to maintain the family, to feed, clothe and educate the children, and to provide a 'standard of living' which contributes to the status and prestige of the household. Their masculinity in this context depends on having women perform domestic services for them. In households where women work outside the home, two main issues arose in my discussions with women which relate to these notions of femininity and masculinity.

While some of my informants' husbands were supportive of their efforts to find employment, or do additional training to improve their career prospects, public perception as well as their own, of their masculinity rested on being seen to be the primary economic provider

in the household. Of those few professional women I met, the educational standard and job status among married women was lower than that of their husband. Like their counter-parts in lower income groups, who may strive against considerable odds to attain some level of training or education to find employment, to achieve more than their husband can lower his public status as the primary economic provider for the family (cf. Caplan 1985:90 and Ramu 1989:139 in urban South Asia, and Warriar 1988:139 among Gujaratis in north London). One woman, for instance, remarking on the ability and intelligence of a close friend, pointed out that despite urgings from other women and several good job offers, her friend's public disinclination to take them up or pursue further education because of lack of time, masked her private admission that to do so would belittle her husband who was an unskilled factory worker. It is also the case that many women publically acquiesce in this, while privately attempting to find areas of negotiation within these constraints. In the example above, the woman referred to eventually began a child-minding business which she ran from home. She was supported by her husband in her suggestion that she undertake some formal training in child care which, on its own, had some future employment potential.

In return for support and consent to pursue employment or training, women collude in maintaining their husband's public reputation and his masculinity as it relates to being the primary economic provider. Jayshree's (Appendix C) husband had been on sick leave from his job at the Ford car factory for eighteen months. Although without any 'official' employment of her own, Jayshree became something of an 'invisible' entrepreneur in her attempts to contribute to the household budget. She always seemed to have 'spare' clothes to sell - I have no idea where they came from - and used the facilities at the women's centre she attended to sew saris and blouses for other women at a price. Other women, though, as we shall see later in the chapter, were not particularly supportive of her efforts. When the husband of another woman I knew was experiencing financial problems in his business, she and her mother-in-law resorted to making large amounts of *papad* to sell outside the area to help make ends meet. They

told no one about this, and I only discovered it by accident when I visited unexpectedly one day and was confronted with a back garden full of the stuff laid out to dry. It was all right for me to know because I was not 'an Asian lady', but they were very concerned that no one else should know because it 'can be bad for this family'. If their husband was not seen to be doing his duty to support them it could, in other words, damage the reputation of the household on which they depended. While some women may privately contest the idea that their husband is the primary economic provider in the household, publically they acquiesce to a perception of his dominant role. Not to do so would demean his public reputation - even if, like Jayshree's husband, he collects sickness benefits from the State - and this in turn protects the reputation of the household.

The second and related point is that a woman's employment should not be seen to usurp her primary responsibilities in caring for the home and children (cf. Ramu 1989:139; Warriar 1988:142, 148 & 150). Among female informants in paid employment, the idea that this was 'normal' or natural for women and not 'normal' for men, was contested by some women. Mangala, as noted above, felt that men should contribute more to housework and childcare. In her own case, she said that when she had undertaken training for her job, her husband was 'very good and said I could do it, but every night I had to cook and clean and then do the study. It was very tiring and a lot of work but I really enjoyed it'. Her husband helps in varying degrees with small tasks around the house and in looking after the children, but Mangala feels he should do more. However, she had come to accept that the situation would not change and, in return for his consent to continue working, she carried on with the double burden of her job and the household. Bhanu, on the other hand, said that her husband helped her a great deal, sometimes preparing and cooking the evening meal and helping her with the washing and 'hoovering'. Unlike Mangala, Bhanu did not dispute the fact that the overall responsibility for the smooth running of the house and the care of the children was hers. If anything, she took considerable pride in this. Perhaps with more help

at home she did not feel the bitterness Managala did toward her husband's lack of assistance.

Amba (Appendix F) was also bitter toward her husband. She gave up her job because, she told me, she could not manage her work at home as well as her paid employment. Her husband refused her requests for extra help with housework and the care of their two young sons, both of which he saw as her primary responsibilities as a wife and mother. With no close female kin to call upon for help, she felt that his inflexible attitude left her no choice but to leave her job:

There was never any time...I used to shout at everyone. It wasn't good, not good for the children. My children have to come first... Some people said I should divorce my husband because he wouldn't help me in the house but that's no answer. More Asian women are getting the divorce now but many more stay married. They suffer but in the end it usually works out.

Amba qualified as a doctor in India prior to her marriage. Her husband, who had an economics degree, ran his own business in London. Perhaps her husband, whom I never met, felt that his masculinity was especially threatened by the combination of the higher status and potential earning power of his wife's employment on the one hand, and a diminution of at least some domestic services all of which he perceived as 'women's work'.

I think we can see here, however, that not all men and women share the same perceptions of masculinity. Bhanu's husband, Hari, presumably did not see his work in the home as essentially demeaning his masculinity, and neither did Bhanu see her husband as 'feminine' in performing them. I shall discuss other aspects of masculinity and femininity further in the next chapter and at other points in the study. However, as constructions of masculinity *per se* was not a central focus of my research, these observations are not as detailed as I would wish, but it is obviously an important area for further research.

The final point I want to make here is that although angry with her husband, Amba seemed to me during our discussions, to try and

reconcile her feelings of bitterness toward him with an explanation which would be publically acceptable and which she could live with.

She told me:

I am a mother. I have my children to look after and they are my responsibility. Some people say, 'oh, she's well educated and yet she's at home all day'. But that's what I choose to do, to look after my children and their welfare. Some English women are always working but when they retire and look back on their lives, they are alone. They never married, never had children or a family. They have some friends but it isn't the same as your family.

From where I sat, far from choosing to stay at home and look after the children, Amba actually had little choice in the matter. What she did 'choose' to do was to claim for herself the role of a self-effacing wife deferring, at least publically, to the authority of her husband, and a compassionate mother self-sacrificing on behalf of her children (cf. Allen 1982:10; L. Bennett 1983:255). For Amba, the children 'come first' even if she 'suffers' in the process. Women may complain of the additional burden paid employment entails, or of their inability to enter or continue with it, and some may privately attempt to negotiate within these constraints. But where their choices are limited, it seems to me unsurprising that they seek self-satisfaction and self-worth in fulfilling the cultural roles expected of them as wives and mothers. It is, perhaps, for this reason that women like Jaya and Amba claim for themselves so categorically the responsibility for the household and for the care of its members. This in turn raises the question of just how 'normal' the notions of *dharma* and *seva* are in relation to women's care of the household. At least some of my informants perceive themselves as individuals, with aspirations and rights which are not necessarily associated with their *dharma* as wives and mothers to care for and serve husband and family. I shall return to this in the next chapter.

### 3.5) Neighbourhoods : Neighbours and Friends

For women themselves, the neighbourhood is a source of 'company' and friends. Relationships and networks are created in, and extend throughout, the local neighbourhood and beyond. They are developed and

nurtured on trips to shopping areas and local markets, when taking children to and from school, when attending *satsangs* (devotional circles), calendrical religious functions, organized women's groups, English classes, visits to health centres, or in numerous kitchens on quiet afternoons. They may involve no more than conversations in the street, or giving 'company' while out shopping. Hospitality may be extended to 'come to my house', perhaps for tea and snacks, and can be accompanied by chides to those who have not visited for some time. As well as giving company and occasionally performing some service for another woman, these relationships also involve conversations in which news and information are exchanged and gathered. Women enquire about potential or approaching marriages, about health or the course of an illness, about visiting relatives or a child's progress at school. They may ask others for information on employment, for particular welfare services, for accommodation available in the area or the location of cheap travel agents, as well as for advice on treatments, introductions to folk healers or the procedure for consulting a private biomedical practitioner. Explanations may be sought or given as to why a child's cough persists, why they are not putting on weight or why a particular treatment does not appear to be effective. Other women then, are an important resource of information and assistance within the local neighbourhood and beyond.

Not all women are 'joiners' (Caplan 1985:33-34) in the sense that they attend clubs, classes or groups. Hemkurva and her mother-in-law, Prabha, are two such women but, in addition to kin and friends in other parts of London, they visit and receive visits from many neighbours, Gujarati and non-Gujarati. They are particular friends with their near-neighbour Bharti, and her mother-in-law Dukshma before she died. Another neighbour is an elderly Sindi woman and her daughter-in-law whom Prabha met when taking the children to school. Prabha's husband was born in Sind and this sometimes provides a background of reminiscences for the older women of their earlier life on another continent, although more current and contemporary topics usually occupy the two women. A Muslim Gujarati neighbour, who lives above the local sub-post office which she runs with her husband, was

invited by Hemkurva on one of her trips to the post office to 'come to my house' for 'company' and conversation. There are several other Gujarati neighbours whom these two women regularly visit or receive visits from, including one woman, who, like Prabha and Hemkurva, came from Malawi. In the case of a young Gujarati mother, Dilip, Hemkurva's husband, arranged an appointment with the private paediatrician whom they had consulted in relation to their own children.

Women with young children - particularly under school age - whether living in nuclear or joint households, point out that they have little time for organized social groups. They note that it is older women, freed from much of the primary responsibility for everyday domestic work and child care, who have such leisure available. Providing they are in reasonable health, and once they have established a basis of contacts and acquaintances, many older women pursue afternoon rounds of meetings, social and religious activities which belie any notion that their social world centres on the household alone. On afternoons when local women's clubs meet, groups of the same two or three women collect each other *en route* and often alternate visits to their homes for tea afterward. Two such women are Laxmi, an elderly Suthar, and Ujam, a Shri Gaur Brahman, who live next door to each other but one. They visit each other's homes during the week and sometimes shop together. Another close neighbour was Dina, whose husband, Hitesh, was, like Laxmi's husband, Ram, on the committee at the Gujarati Welfare Association (2.14). Laxmi and Ujam also used to attend a *satsang* (devotional circle), organized by Hasmita's mother-in-law. These *satsangs* are informal gatherings of (mainly older) women, who meet in each others homes during the day for singing and readings from religious works. A friend invites a friend and for a while the group may be quite strong. But women tend to drift in and out according to their home circumstances, or sometimes their health, someone may go on a trip to India for several months, or there may be an argument within the group and it begins to disintegrate, often to re-emerge in another woman's front room with a slightly different group of women.

Sarla (Appendix B), a 48 year-old Lohana, and her friend Nalini (Appendix B), a Charotti Patel of the same age, were two women who drifted in and out of *satsangs* and two of the women's groups. Sarla was widowed in 1981 and suffered from asthma and bronchitis. She regularly attended a hospital out-patient clinic and her own GP for medication, and to obtain the inhalers she used two or three times a day to relieve her breathlessness. Sarla had also visited an Ayurvedic practitioner in Leicester - recommended by her sister who lived there - who was a 'specialist' in asthma treatment. Along with a recommended diet which, Sarla said, she was not very good at keeping, she also took the herbal preparations he sent to her and for which she paid £15. Perhaps it was because as a widow herself, Sarla was also friendly with Vimla (Appendix C), a young Darji widow with three children who lived with her brother and his wife and their child. Nalini, who lived a few minutes walk away from Sarla, tried, not always successfully, to encourage her to attend group meetings and always gave 'company'. She called regularly to see her when she was unwell, and they often shopped and browsed together at the near-by market, stopping frequently for Sarla to catch her breath. Both women were also inveterate snuff-takers. I was with them one day when we were browsing in a kind of sell-anything shop. When they came upon the snuff, Nalini kept a look-out while Sarla tested a few samples. The shop-keeper must have had X-ray vision and came hurtling along the narrow aisle 'no touching, no touching'. I was embarrassed but they moved slowly, picking up objects and turning them over before emerging from the shop to wheezy laughter from Sarla and giggles from Nalini. These women were also on friendly terms with Nrupa (Appendix C), a 67 year-old Mistry and another snuff-taker, who was a regular attender at several different groups. All her children were married and she and her husband lived alone in Plaistow. The meetings with her friends several afternoons a week, she explained, 'give me something to do'.

While many are active in families and social and religious groups, older women can experience a sense of loneliness or isolation if, for example, like Nrupa their children have moved away, if they are widowed like Sarla, or perhaps have strained or unhappy

relationships with younger family members. Among younger women, intra-generational friendships outside the household can offset pressures of hierarchies in the kinship group, including domination by their elders. Whether old or young, the 'company' of friends of similar age provides women not only with a space to express themselves, but also with considerable emotional support.

I have noted women's caste affiliation in the examples above to indicate that, while friendships exist within one's own caste, inter-caste friendship is also a common feature of many of the relationships both old and young women among my informants create in east London. Occasionally, these may extend to include interaction between all members of the household. Hemkurva and her neighbour, Bharti, both of whom lived with their widowed mothers-in-law, were one such example. Some of my informant's husbands knew each other on a casual basis, or their children played together, but this did not usually ripen into the kind of inter-household relationship which existed between Hemkurva and Bharti. For most women, interaction takes place during daytime home visits, meetings in the street or at a club, taking children to school, shopping or browsing. Women themselves do not necessarily seem to want more than this. What they seek with their inter-caste friends is a space to share family problems, personal experiences, opinions and emotions unencumbered by the sometimes onerous duties, rivalries and tensions which can exist within and between households.

Savita, a 32 year-old Leva Cutch Patel who arrived in England from Kenya in 1974, was active in the women's section of her caste association as well as the branch of the Swaminarayan sect to which she belonged. Hasmita, also from Kenya, participated in the East London and Essex Lohana Union where her husband was an active member. They met Amba when teaching Saturday morning Gujarati classes, and both knew Jasvanti (Appendix E) through their mutual friendship with Mangala at LC. Hasmita also knew Jasvanti through their caste association, where Nita also used to attend the occasional caste function before her divorce. Apart from Nita, whose relationships with

all but Mangala had become 'distant', as she put it, since her divorce, these women saw each other on a regular basis - usually several times week - often at group meetings or 'functions' which were held by one or another of the organizations to which they belonged. Savita and Hasmita, though, were particular friends. Both lived in nuclear households with their husband - one an accountant in a small family business, the other employed as an ethnic minority worker - and two young sons. Hasmita had obtained a BA while living in India and Savita, as well as doing piece-work at home, was studying part-time at college. Both women aspired to a professional career in the face of considerable opposition from their mothers-in-law, but their mutual support and the small services they exchanged to help each other provided a shared element in their friendship.

We can also see that friendships can exist with other South Asian neighbours. While there is some residential clustering of Gujaratis (see Map 3 p37) in the north and central areas of Newham especially, a woman's neighbours may include not only Gujaratis but also Punjabis, Pakistanis, Tamils, occasionally Bengalis or Rajasthanis, as well as English neighbours. In some contexts, Gujaratis refer to themselves, along with Punjabis, Tamils and so on as 'Asians' or 'Indians'. But like castes other than their own, they also resort to stereotypical descriptions of 'low' or 'uneducated' Bengalis, or 'greedy' Pakistanis, for example, to confirm their own sense of superiority and distinctiveness. But in their everyday interactions with neighbours, divisions and stereotypes often dissolve in individual relationships among women who find many points of commonality, from their shared experiences of migration and sometimes racism, to what is shared between their cultures - for example, household and family relations, kinship obligations and duties, ritual and religious practices, concepts of food classification, illness and treatment. The details may differ but many concepts are familiar.

With close friends what is shared can sometimes relate to very intimate and personal experiences. Jaya, a Shri Gaur Brahman, exchanged visits during the day with her Lohana friend, Jasvanti,

calling her *nani ben* (little sister). This 'fictive kin' relationship was not formalized or ritualized further but was, rather, an expression of feeling between the two women. Both had experienced crises in their lives when I met them - for Jaya it was an unexpected pregnancy, while Jasvanti's brother had been involved in a particularly tragic episode which had affected her deeply. In South Asian society, to invite a woman 'to be like my sister', as Vatuk (1969:266) observes, implies a measure of warmth and intimacy. Unlike the relationship between sisters, though, these friendships also entail degrees of personal choice and trust<sup>(6)</sup> in a world where women's narratives and experience highlight the sometimes tenuous balance between revealing intimacies and secrets, and the threat of exposure and betrayal.

### 3.6) Competition, Rivalry, and Difference

While the neighbourhood is a potential resource for women in terms of information and assistance, which can be used for anything from finding employment to a remedy for child's cough, and while it is also a source of friends and 'company', it is also a source of rivalry (*hariphai*), difference (*bhed*) and expressions of discontent. I would agree with Werbner (1988:186) that friendships among women 'may be formed very rapidly'. However, maintaining these relationships can sometimes be a precarious business. Jealousy, greed, and pride were themes which recurred in women's stories of relationships broken off, ruptured or left in abeyance. Friends, whether of one's own caste or not, may turn out to be false allies in attempts to escape the constraints and tensions of kinship obligations, who betray confidences, fail to return services or share their good fortune. Inter-household rivalry can spill over into the neighbourhood through the gossip (*vatachit*) of aggrieved parties (which depends, of course, to whom one is speaking). Rekha's daughter, Juilee, for instance, had been made redundant from her job in a factory, but found another job at a factory which her brother saw advertised on a notice outside. As it turned out, Rekha's *bhabhi* (BW) was already employed there but had not told her of the vacancy. The problem was, Rekha told myself and

three other women as we stood nattering one day, Juilee was going to be made a supervisor and now her *bhabhi* ignored her daughter at work:

At work she doesn't sit with my daughter but sits somewhere else. My daughter says "don't worry mummy, I have other friends and I can sit with them". This shouldn't be so with relatives but my *bhabhi* is jealous of her. She has been there five years and still works the machines. It's her English. Now she goes every Wednesday for English classes but my daughter has no problem and now she will be supervisor.

I am not certain if it was this single incident which caused such animosity between Rekha and her *bhabhi*, or whether there were other factors involved. But I do know that Rekha found it difficult to reconcile her poor accommodation and economic situation with the level of education she and her husband had attained (both were qualified teachers in East Africa). She was disdainful of those women who could not speak English and used this, and her education perhaps, to maximize her own status and that of her own household. Rekha's other strategy of implying a lack of family loyalty on her *bhabhi*'s part in withholding knowledge of a vacancy at her work, received nods of agreement from the other women.

At EL one morning, Bhanu was telling Yogini, Kanta, Sadhana and myself of the problems she had experienced since moving from her terraced house, into a larger home in a neighbouring middle-class suburb. She said that her own and her husband's family as well as friends, had accused her of having 'a big head', and of 'forgetting them' because she had not invited them to her new home:

I have asked a few people, but we are having the redecorations and I want it to be nice for them when they come, for them to be comfortable. But now they say I have this big house and have forgotten them. When we left Uganda we had nothing. Hari [her husband] and I have worked hard for this but now they are jealous.

Yogini said to me 'with family this should not be so, there should be love between them, but with money, there are always problems'. Bhanu told me later, on our own, that she felt the problem had come about because she had written to her mother in Kenya, detailing the cost of

the house and refurbishments 'not to boast', but because 'I wanted her know that we were comfortable after all our problems. I thought this would put her mind at rest'. Her mother, though, had told her brother and 'everyone else' in the family, and now they all thought Bhanu was rich 'but we aren't'. I noted in the previous chapter that there can be considerable class discrepancies between households in the bilateral family, and for that matter, between agnatically-related households. While ideally, households within a kin group should share their good fortune, this needs to be set within the context of household competition for status within the kinship group, as well as in the neighbourhood and wider Gujarati society of which they are part.

### 3.7.) The Problem of the Accounts

The following case study illustrates the way in which relationships among women are based not only on co-operation, but on competition and perceptions of difference. Women compete with others for status, reputation, influence, or a share of scarce resources, such as accommodation or employment. They strategize and seek to maximize their contribution to the welfare and auspiciousness of their own household. It also illustrates various domains in which women can successfully acquire influence and prestige (*contra* Ortner and Whitehead 1981), and exercise power from different positions and perspectives in the fluid relationships of the local neighbourhood.

Not long after I started fieldwork, an incident took place at one of the women's groups with which I had recently become involved. Soon after I arrived at a well-attended and noisy meeting, an elderly woman whom I later identified as Laxmi (Appendix B), stood up and commanded the other women to follow. I was near the back of the hall and not knowing what was happening, and in some confusion, I looked to Jayshree (Appendix C), my young Charotti Patel contact for guidance. She deftly dodged my questions and simply indicated that I follow everyone else. We finished up walking to another centre nearby where we joined forces with a predominantly elderly men's social group. The women and men at this time were all very new to me, many just faces

without names or histories. None would answer my queries as to what was going on and it seemed to me that those I asked, either feigned incomprehension or ignored me. The origins of this incident occurred before I came to Newham and I do not claim to have the 'whole picture' of the various actors, their motives or their roles in it. Eventually, however, several versions of what took place were proffered by various participants.

Rekha, sometimes in the company of her husband, Arvind, told me in different contexts over a period of time what she saw as the origins of the 'walk-out'. At one time, Laxmi had been vice president of the club when a Marathi woman had been president and Jayshree the treasurer - a post for which Jayshree was unqualified in Rekha's opinion because of her lack of education and poor English. One day, Laxmi had asked to see the accounts. 'It was perfectly justifiable', Arvind said, 'if you belong to a club to see where the money has gone'. Jayshree, however, had refused. According to Rekha, she had told Laxmi that 'if she didn't want to come to the club anymore then don't bother'. Following this, Laxmi had told the other women not to attend the club anymore 'and now hardly anyone goes there'. The problem of the accounts arose, Rekha said, because the women had got together to make a large quantity of *chevds* (a dry snack which is found in many South Asian shops) and had sold it to make a profit of £100. Rekha reported that a lot of the women would bring food from home and Jayshree would tell them to leave it at the club so they could all use it when they cooked. 'But when you came the next time, she looked around and pretended that she had<sup>no</sup> seen it and then say that someone had taken it. But she was the one who had taken it home'. One day, for example, Laxmi had brought a big tin of oil for cooking and when they had finished, she went to take it home. 'She [Laxmi] said to Jayshree, "where is the oil" and Jayshree had said, "oil, do I wash in oil?" But she had taken it home with her. That's how she is. She's low that one'. Then Laxmi and Ujam had asked to see the accounts, but Jayshree refused. 'But', Arvind observed, 'she was the treasurer and knew what had happened to the money'.

This story was largely, but not so forcefully, corroborated by several other 'defectors' from the club. Rekha, though, had also experienced another incident with Jayshree which centred on the national elections in 1983. Like Jayshree, Rekha lived in overcrowded private rented accommodation and both women's households were on the register for local council housing. Together with Nalini, who also attended the centre, Rekha had canvassed for Labour Party candidates on election day outside the voting centres. Rekha said they stood for a long time handing out leaflets and had to walk back to the centre at the end of the day where many people, including the mayor and several local councillors, had gathered. These local dignitaries had asked Jayshree, who was then the nominal president of the club, to tell them who had helped during

the day. She said that about twenty women said they would help but only three had been the main ones, herself, Reshma and Lali. 'But', Rekha objected, 'she had stayed at the centre all day'. When the photographs were taken to appear in the local newspaper, it was these three women who were included with the mayor. For Rekha, this was part of a continuing process in which Jayshree unfairly used her position at the club to gain favour with local politicians and dignitaries to enhance her chances of council accommodation. Despite these proceedings, however, Rekha continued to spasmodically attend the club in the face of Laxmi's strictures, and one can only surmise if this was to keep open her chances of influencing her own case.

Another side of this story came from Kersha, whose mother-in-law, Reshma, although not holding any official office at the centre, was regarded by many, not only as the mainstay of the club, but a woman of good character and reputation because of her religious devotion and the ceremonies she held - including a large celebration at Shivaratri which she had organized. It was not her but rather Jayshree especially, and Lali, and Mani (Appendix C), who were the main targets of criticism among other women. According to Kersha, her mother-in-law thought it would be a good idea if the club could make some money to finance outings and buy books and other things for the centre. Along with Jayshree and Lali, they set up a stall to sell some *chevda* (*dry snacks*). Her mother-in-law had asked other women to contribute but none of them had done so and now, after they had made £100, the other women became jealous and wanted to know what had happened to the money. Whenever her mother-in-law had suggested something, the others and especially Laxmi, said they did not want to use it for that and, Kersha remarked, 'they got nowhere. This is the whole problem with us. There is always fighting over money. The women get jealous and very suspicious if you do anything and then there's a big fight'.

This incident sparked off a series of arguments and disrupted relationships among this group of women, the news of which, as I later found out, was relayed through their networks to others removed from the group. Some patched up or eventually ignored the situation and resumed relations with those with whom they had been in dispute. Others, like Nalini and Sarla, simply watched as spectators not wanting to become involved. Gradually, I became aware that the problem of the accounts was only part of the dispute. Other factors indicated that within this group and between women themselves, relationships are also based on competition and perceptions of difference.

Reshma, her daughter-in-law, Kersha, Mani, Lali, and Jayshree were all members of the 'five village' marriage circle in Charotar in Gujarat (cf. Pocock 1972). Lali had attended the wedding of Reshma's youngest son to Kersha some years earlier. Rekha was not alone in expressing some animosity toward these women. It was felt that they were trying to 'take over' the group and the facilities available at the centre. A sewing machine, ostensibly for the women to use for their personal work was, I was told by several women, being used by these 'Patel' women to sew petticoats and blouse pieces which they then sold. One woman told me that when she went to use the machine, she could never find any bobbins because the Patels had 'hidden them all to stop other people using it'. It may have been that far from using the machine for personal work, this woman also intended to sew items for sale. She was not the only woman at the centre, including Jayshree, who attempted to contribute to the household finances in this and other ways. But obstructing her and other women's access to the machines was viewed by them in terms of a perception of difference based on a general stereotype of 'Patels', who always 'stick together', and who are 'mean with money'. Nalini, also a Charotti Patel, did not belong to the same marriage circle and did not especially support them against the other women. While perceived as a 'Patel' by others, Nalini herself distinguished between those belonging to the 'five village' marriage circle and her own. Nalini, I should note, did not want to become embroiled in the argument at all and always tried, with her friend Sarla, to stand apart from this and other disputes. She told me that 'it's always the same with women. They're very jealous and competitive and one says she wants to be president and another says she wants to, and they are always fighting and arguing about who does what'. In taking this 'neutral' stance, on several other occasions Nalini acted as a kind of a 'peace-maker' when disputes threatened to flare up.

The men's group to which we all decamped after the 'walk-out' turned out to be part of the Gujarati Welfare Association, mentioned in the previous chapter, the president of which was Laxmi's husband, Ram. Some women expressed the idea that Laxmi was trying to recruit

members to the Welfare Association at the expense of the UP centre. There was considerable rivalry between these two centres - the latter being a kind of 'pan-Asian' organization, and the former a Gujarati one. The Welfare Association promoted the welfare of Gujaratis, and was an arena for members of the local Gujarati community to gain prominence and status within that community. Her husband's position as president of the Welfare Association perhaps had something to do with her own election to the presidency of the women's section, as far as I could ascertain, sometime after the 'walk-out'. However, after more than a year's acquaintance with Laxmi, her husband's position as president on its own is not, I think, an entirely adequate explanation of her influence. Unlike say, Bharti's mother-in-law Dukshma, Laxmi was the senior woman of a large joint family. She had five children, including two sons, all of whom had children of their own. During my fieldwork her granddaughter gave birth to a son. She and her husband lived alone, but I do not know if the parental estate had been divided between the sons. I do know that she and her husband visited Gujarat toward the end of my fieldwork and others told me that they had considerable property there.

I could not, in fact, bring myself to ask these questions of Laxmi. She was known to many other women of my acquaintance, and among younger ones was described as being very 'forceful', a woman with a 'big ego' according to Savita and her friend Hasmita. I could only agree with them. She could cut a conversation dead with a look from fifty paces. Laxmi made disapproving pronouncements on anything from the failure of widows to shave their heads on the death of their husband, to the behaviour of young mothers in not properly caring for their children. Indeed, Hasmita hinted that as an acquaintance of her own mother-in-law, Laxmi was one of several older women, including Ujam, who had passed comments on her 'free' behaviour which resulted in Hasmita giving up Saturday morning Gujarati teaching. I do not mean that Laxmi's numerous pronouncements resulted in instant obedience, but she was undoubtedly a woman of considerable influence. At sixty-seven, this small, spry, alert and immaculately neat woman with a husband of eight-three, was a *saubhagyavati* - an auspicious woman

whose husband was alive, and very actively alive at that. Unlike any other of my female informants of a similar age, Ram's longevity sustained Laxmi's own auspiciousness in a way no longer available to older women of her age.

Reshma, on the other hand, had gained a reputation, and considerable status among this group of women, for her religious devotion and knowledge of rituals.<sup>7</sup> While older female relatives are felt to have considerable knowledge themselves, there may be times when personal problems arise which a woman does not want to share with family members, but where her own knowledge of possible rituals to undertake is inadequate. An independent 'expert' if you like, is then consulted on an informal basis. On the other hand, it may simply be that a woman wants to refresh her knowledge of a ritual, or a *katha* (story), perhaps because her child (or an anthropologist) asks questions she feels unable to answer. Women like Reshma become known locally for their extensive knowledge of rituals and acquire a reputation as a 'good woman' for sharing it with others.<sup>8</sup> Her reputation in turn, reflects well on the status of the household within the neighbourhood as one which is auspicious (*shubha*).

In seeking the grace of the deity through good works and charity (*dan*), Reshma used her influence in other ways. It was through her patronage, and one could suggest her shared caste background, that Jayshree had established a position for herself at the centre from which she could exert, or hope to exert, some influence on local politicians to improve her inadequate housing. Both Jayshree and Rekha were competing for a very scarce resource in Newham - namely council accommodation. The women I knew who were living in council property, including Jayshree and Rekha, were all well aware of a recent change in the law which would enable them to buy their property, often at lower than market rates, after a five year residence period. Hence, the two latter women were concerned not only to improve the accommodation and welfare of their households, but were aware of the potential benefits this could bring in terms of raising its status in the future as a property-owning household. Jayshree chose to pitch her

cards with the club at UP. Rekha, who had no real ally - her relationship with Laxmi was cordial at best - kept her options open by attending both groups. She and her husband, Arvind, continued with their membership of the Welfare Association and continued to attend 'functions' there. Sometime after I left Newham, I found out that it was Rekha and her family who moved into a council house.

Together with the other examples above, this incident highlights the way in which women compete with each other to maximize status, reputation, and influence which in turn, contributes to the welfare of their own household - whether finding employment or accommodation, acquiring positions of influence and status, or contributing to the auspiciousness of their household through good works. Perceptions of difference among this group of women - village of origin, caste or class - were manipulated and used situationally to maximize advantage and status for themselves and their households, and by others to discredit them. But in this very process of prestige and status-seeking, my informants seem to me to be caught in a kind of moral double-bind. On the one hand, there should be loyalty and solidarity between agnatically-related households and the extended kin group, friends should be supportive and keep confidences, neighbours should give 'company', exchange information and assist one another. On the other hand, one's primary loyalty is to one's own household, and one's duty as a wife and mother is to protect and care for that household. But competition for resources to enhance and protect the welfare and status of that household, can invite the envy and jealousy of others. The world in which my informants lived seemed to me to be constantly threatened by the jealousy of others - whether kin, caste-mates, friends, or neighbours. Other people - but not oneself - I was constantly told, are like that. One man, on telling me of his daughter's imminent engagement, cautioned me not to reveal this news to anyone else for 'people are always jealous and they may want to disrupt this tie (*bandhan*)'. It is not surprising, then, that various protective measures are required to ensure the well-being of one's household.

### 3.8) Gifts and Good Works

Among my informants, the local neighbourhood is also important in another way. While kin, friends, caste-mates, and neighbours may be a locus of jealousy and greed, they also provide a pool of potential recipients for women's own 'good works' which ensure well-being and auspiciousness for themselves and their family. These 'good works' are referred to as charity (*dan*). In the light of Raheja's (1988) recent and thoroughly informative account of, among other things, the notion of *dan* in Uttar Pradesh, it is perhaps worth discussing my informants use of this term before giving examples of it. Raheja notes that in Pahansu, the giving of gifts (*dan*) is always 'to remove some form of inauspiciousness and transfer it to the recipient' (ibid:70). She does point out, though that the 'term *dan* is occasionally used in the more general sense to include charity, alms, and the like' (ibid:260 n3). She notes differences between 'alms' (*bhik* or *bhiccha*), which are given in non-ritual contexts - to wandering ascetics and *yogis* - and *dan* or *dan-jahej*, which are prestations made at the birth of a son, to Brahmins and on other ritual occasions, to assure well-being and auspiciousness. My informants spoke simply of *dan*, which they referred to as charity, to acquire merit and create auspiciousness.<sup>49</sup> When talking about *dan*, or indeed of any of the rituals they performed, informants spoke of auspiciousness for themselves, or specific members of their household or family, or of its members in general, rather than of transferring inauspiciousness to others. Menski (1991) makes a similar point in relation to marriage rituals among Hindus in Britain. He points out that 'most rituals of marriage are performed with the single purpose of increasing or creating auspiciousness. Knowledge about inauspicious elements that these rituals seek to dispel or overcome is extremely vague' (ibid:67). Although my linguistic skills did not match those of Raheja, my informants too, were more concerned with creating auspiciousness and acquiring merit, rather than with overcoming inauspicious elements in rituals.

One of the most common forms of charity (*dan*) which female informants undertook, was the giving of gifts at the completion of a

vow (*vrat*). During one of the nine nights of *norta*, a festival for the Mata - mother goddess - I attended an evening 'programme' at LC. There were perhaps one hundred and fifty people present, most of whom, as far as I could ascertain, came from the local neighbourhood. At the conclusion of the 'programme' - which included *garba* dancing and singing - tables had been set up at the doorway on which were placed stacks of glasses and bowls of sweets, as well as *prasad*. As well as the *prasad* (left-over offerings to the gods), as each person left the hall they were given a glass with a sweet inside by a woman standing at the table. Mangala told me that this was *lahani*, literally the distribution of gifts. This is done at the conclusion of a *vrat* (vow) where one has given up some item - usually food - until the vow has been completed. This could be months or years. Whatever one has foregone during that period is placed into a container - a glass, a stainless steel bowl and so on, depending on one's finances - and distributed, often during the auspicious period of *norta*. Mangala, and other women I asked later, said that *lahani* was charity (*dan*), done at the fulfilment of the *vrat* to thank the Mata for granting one's wish (*ichcha*).<sup>(10)</sup> The gift itself was considered to be a good omen (*sarun sukan*), and other people accepted it without asking why it was being distributed.

When Jasvanti had completed a *vrat* to the Mata, she went to the house of a *bhui* who lived nearby. This woman was known locally to be possessed by the Mata, or as Jasvanti put it, she 'had the Mata in her'. She had converted the front room of her house into a shrine for the Mata. Jasvanti took with her a gold chain with an ornamental centre piece, and two saris, which the *bhui* placed on the image of the deity. This was to 'thank the Mata' for granting her wish. When Bhanu moved into her new home, she began 'doing Fridays' - meaning that she had been fasting and reading a story (*katha*) about Santoshima, the goddess of contentment, on the efficacy of the vow each Friday. At the completion of her *vrat*, Bhanu invited eight of her neighbours' children, boys and girls, and gave them a meal, excluding any sour food which the goddess 'doesn't like'. She also gave them sweets to take home. I shall discuss *vrat* in more detail in Chapter Five, but

here one can note that failure to complete the *vrat* and fulfil whatever one promised the Mata, can bring problems to the household in the form of illness, infertility, family strife, financial problems or other calamitous events.

*Prasad*, I was told, is separate from all this. As well as being distributed to participants at all public rituals, women would often bring *prasad* from home or, if they had attended a ritual themselves, to share out at women's meetings or to neighbours on the street. This was to share God's goodness with neighbours and friends but was not charity (*dan*). In addition to *dan* given at the completion of a vow, gifts are also given to obtain merit (*punaya*). As one woman told me 'when you do *dan* you get a lot of *punaya*'. One of my Brahman informants said that she sometimes receives gifts from neighbourhood women, such as a small scarf or sweets, because giving to Brahmans 'is supposed to please God'. She does not ask why it is given nor does she refuse it. Jasvanti, though, said that 'some of these Brahmans want expensive things and I can't afford this'. She gives presents, usually sweets, to her *bhanej* (ZD and ZS)<sup>(11)</sup> because 'we say that to please your *bhanej* is to please one hundred Brahmans' (cf. Mayer 1960:223). Several other women told me that they gave sweets to children - any children - for this too 'pleases God'. This seems to imply some kind of hierarchy of merit whereby one accrues more merit with God for giving to certain categories of people. However, women told me that who you give to is 'individual', 'it's between you and God'. As Jasvanti also points out, this can also depend on a woman's financial position.

Through these meritorious acts and the merit acquired, women empower themselves and can, in turn, intercede with the gods on behalf of others. When Jasvanti's father-in-law was recovering from a stroke, she explained to me that her Punjabi GP told her 'I must have a lot of *punaya* because people take months and months, even years to get better from this stroke, and that our family must have a lot of *punaya* for him to get better so quickly'. I shall return to the idea of accumulated merit and empowerment later in the study. When I was

asking about *punaya* at LC one afternoon, in a discussion with Mangala, Rekha, Ujam, Laxmi, and Bayjoot, they told me that *punaya* is the opposite of *pap* (sin, evil). *Dan* and *punaya* - which several women referred to as *punayadan* - were, they said, auspicious (*shubha*). Rekha said that 'there are always people who want to harm you, who are jealous of you. We do these things to stop their evil (*pap*) coming to us'. So as well as acquiring merit and auspiciousness for themselves and their households, women also protect their households from the jealousy and evil of others. As we shall see in Chapter Five, the overriding concern of the domestic rituals which women perform is to ensure the well-being and protection of their household.

### 3.9) England, English Neighbours, and The English

In conversations where they related their early experiences of life in Britain, a recurring, perhaps idealized theme among my informants, was the comparison between the comfortable and familiar interactions and situations in their land of origin - whether East Africa or Gujarat - and the alien, the unfamiliar, and the unknown in this country. Thirty one year-old Jasvanti came to England from her birthplace in Kenya in 1974. She lived with her father-in-law, her husband - a shift-worker at the Ford car factory - and her two daughters in their own home in East Ham. Echoing many other women in her comparative description of life in Africa and England, she explained that:

Africa is like India. It's very hot there like India and many women had servants. The women used to visit each other during the day because there wasn't anything else to do, but here there are all sorts of things. The kids have to go to school or nursery school and they have to be picked up, and then there's the shopping. Most of this in Africa was done by servants but here you have to do it all yourself and you just have to get out and do it. When you've done it once, it's easier. In Africa it's slower, you can take your time but here everything is in a rush.

Not all women from East Africa had servants, but the idea of a 'slower' pace to life, compared with the 'rush' of urban England, was a common theme among women whose early life had been spent outside this country. This theme of difference between a slower East Africa -

and Gujarat - and a rush in urban England, also recurs in other areas of their lives. We shall see later in the study, for instance, similar comparisons are made in relation to the length of time spent recovering after the birth of a child. There were also several occasions when informants told me of relatives, acquaintances or neighbours who died as a result of a 'heart attack', which was attributed to the 'rush' of life in England. One woman, for example, who was telling me that a Gujarati neighbour's husband had recently died of a 'heart attack', remarked that this is 'very common with Indians here. It's just rush, rush, too much worry, too much work'. Indeed, it sometimes seemed to me that any sudden death, especially among men, was attributed to a 'heart attack'. Sarla and Nalini at LC, Bhanu, Yogini, and Kanta at EL, and Hemkurva and Prabha, pointed out that it was not just the 'rush' or pace of life in England, but the stress - a commonly used English word - to constantly earn more money to buy things for 'show' which contributed to the increase in 'heart attacks' in this country.

A related theme concerns the way in which male and female informants talked about what they referred to as 'English' medicine, and 'home' or Ayurvedic medicine. The latter two categories - and I might add, other forms of 'complementary' medicine, such as homeopathy and acupuncture, which informants utilized - were perceived to act slowly in the body. They had few if any side-effects and, as Mukhta (Appendix F) among many others told me, this medicine 'lasts forever. When the sickness is cured it doesn't come back again, but the thing about it is, it takes a long time [to work]'. English medicine, on the other hand, is said to be fast acting and strong but has many side-effects and does not necessarily last for a long time. Shanta told me that a cough and cold she had stayed with her for three months. She went to her GP several times and was given antibiotics, but they had little effect. Eventually, one of her daughters, who is a pharmacist, obtained some different tablets for her which rid her of the problem. But, Shanta said:

They put on fat, you know. I got rid of my cold but I got fat. Another time my father had pains in his legs and the doctor gave him tablets. His legs had no more pain but now his teeth hurt,

his gums you know. One thing goes away and another thing comes with these tablets.

These ideas also connect with the way in which informants perceived the cold environment in England to affect their bodily constitution. I shall discuss this in more detail, especially in Chapter Six, in relation to food.

Nita highlights another problem which many women experience and sometimes never overcome - that of language competence:

Look, when I first came here in 1976 [from Kenya], I was shy and frightened. I thought that when I spoke people would laugh at me. But you have to have guts and get up and do things and meet people otherwise you'd stay at home all day and do nothing. It was really difficult at first but after a while it got better and I really tried with my English and when people didn't laugh at me, I got more confident. Now I do a lot more. You have to try.

Having 'guts' and 'getting out' were phrases I heard repeated on other occasions by different women. This is not always easy, particularly when newly arrived in Britain and particularly if English is limited. Both these factors can contribute to a lack of confidence, a fear of appearing foolish, and almost a dread among some women of exploring even their local environment. Simple things like a shopping trip could become a nightmare - or a farce - of misunderstandings and embarrassing encounters.

At LC one afternoon during the English lesson, when we were all sitting around in our usual circle, the women starting talking about, and laughing at, their experiences when they first arrived in England. Ujam, putting on a gruff voice, told of how she had gone shopping wanting to buy some tomatoes. 'I said, "give me some tomatoes", but the man was very angry'. The others contributed their own snippets, with Ujam pointing out to me that 'in English you say please and thank you all the time but in Gujarati, it's the way you say it'. Shanta caused great hilarity when she told how, instead of saying 'excuse me' to a man at the bus stop she had knocked with her umbrella, she said 'kiss me!' On another occasion, Laxmi's daughter-in-law told of a time when she worked in a factory where the 'boss' signed time-cards at the beginning and end of work. When she first started, the boss, having

signed the card, gave it to her and told her to 'take it back'. She thought he meant for her to take it back and go home. So, much surprised, she got up to go home until another woman explained her mistake. Sharing these experiences with others, including instances of racial abuse and discrimination, seemed to me to help women alleviate feelings of inadequacy and helplessness when dealing with the English, and with what they saw as their very different customs. On these occasions, their shared experiences united them in making fun of themselves, but also in making fun of the peculiarities of English culture and language in comparison to their own.

Among my informants, contact with English neighbours varied considerably, and women experienced anything from friendly if sporadic contact, to studied silence or outright hostility. Women who have lived in England for sometime, and who are able to converse reasonably well in English, usually have more confidence in dealing with these neighbours, but others may have little if any contact with them. Apprehension about racism and racist remarks certainly plays a large part in this, but as one of the Gujarati organizers of a woman's group also explained:

The women are so shy and afraid of them. They never met English women and are afraid to mix with them. They don't know how to conduct themselves and are afraid of making mistakes and so English women are strangers to them.

This provides a sharp contrast to the comments above on the way in which, among themselves, women laugh at their *faux pas* and at the oddities they perceive in the English and their way of life.

Perhaps because as a westerner myself, I had numerous conversations with Gujarati women in which they compared their own lives with their perception of English women. A mixture of views emerged from these conversations where an opinion expressed one day, would be contradicted or modified on another occasion. To some extent, this depended on the context of our discussion. For example, if I asked a direct question, I would sometimes get a 'stock' answer that English women do this or that and likewise for Gujarati women. This information was useful in that it gave a guide as to what the 'norms'

of English and Gujarati womanhood were perceived to be. Juxtaposed to this, were the off-hand comments women included when talking about themselves or a particular situation in which they found themselves. I hesitate to generalize too much from this because these women have different experiences and contacts with English women, but several points did seem to emerge.

On the one hand, they evaluate positively what they see as the greater independence English women enjoy: to make decisions and act on their own initiative without the approval and sometimes constraints of their husband or mother-in-law; not to be bound by the duties and obligations toward kin; to marry if widowed; to talk with whoever they like without inviting gossip and speculation; and to create relationships where the jealousy and status of others does not threaten to undermine it. On the other hand, many women also express a strong commitment to the joint family and the security it brings, and their sense of personal and social fulfilment as wives and mothers which engenders positive feelings of belonging. While the ties and obligations between kin can be onerous and confining at times, women can also find in these relationships a sense of personal worth, a place as a member of an extended family, and as a wife and mother, which they see to be absent among English women. They take a certain pride in their responsibility for upholding traditional values and for passing them on to their children. However, as I noted earlier (p.24), for some women, their sense of personal and social fulfilment within the household and family may be as much the result of a lack of viable alternatives, as it is their sense of duty to serve and care for the family.

It is most of all the morality of English culture which they view negatively - the perceived lack of commitment to the family, of care and respect for elders, the 'loose' behaviour of women, including smoking and drinking alcohol, the open sexuality of the society, the acceptance of 'living together' and having children outside marriage, and the lack of religious values and practices. While they may view some other South Asian women as 'uneducated' and 'backward' - even if

they themselves have little formal education - English culture is perceived if you like, as morally 'backward'. These comparative exercises seemed to confirm feelings of self-worth and identity among Gujarati women - as a wife and mother within a family, and as a woman within a culture which is seen to be morally superior at least to the English.

Shaw (1988) notes something similar among the Pakistani women she studied in Oxford. She points out that 'Islamic women see their roles in Britain quite explicitly in terms of maintaining and transmitting cultural and religious values and protecting their families from western influences' (ibid:5). A similar attitude toward western society and its' values, and the role of women as bulwarks in upholding traditional values, has also been noted in India itself (Copley 1981; Caplan 1985). Examining pamphlets and other written material from the AIWC (All-Indian Women's Conference), Caplan (ibid:195) notes that the sanctity of the family, and women's overwhelming responsibility for it, are heavily stressed. The security and stability of the Indian home, and 'even Indian society', through the chastity, modesty, and sacrificial and compliant behaviour of its women, is contrasted 'with what is seen as the insecure and unstable notion of life in the west' (ibid), where 'women's lib', and the sexual freedom of women, has contributed to the 'moral degeneration of society' (ibid).<sup>(12)</sup> I shall return to the notion of the security of the household and of Gujarati culture in England, and the perceived threats to this security, in Chapter Six.

### 3.10.) Conclusion

James Scott (1990), in his discussion of domination and the 'arts of resistance', uses the term 'hidden transcript' to 'characterize discourse that takes place "offstage", beyond direct observation by powerholders' (ibid:4). This contrasts with 'public transcripts' of subordinates in the presence of the dominant. 'The hidden transcript is thus derivative, in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect

what appears in the public transcript' (ibid). The discourse of the 'hidden transcript' among my female informants, both challenges and confirms the dominance of the powerholders. Out of ear-shot of the English, of men, mothers-in-law, or the local neighbourhood of anonymous gossips, women create relationships in which they can express discontent with gender-related and inter-generational hierarchies and tensions, kin and caste obligations, and cultural sanctions. Relationships with other women also provide linkages and channels of communication between households and kin, castes and cultural groups (cf. Early 1980:174; Sharma 1986:154-5). Men remain rather shadowy background figures in the small group and dyadic relationships which women create. Occasionally, these relationships expand to include male household members, but for the most part these are woman-centred (Yanagisako 1977) relationships.

We have also seen that in these relationships, women are engaged in a process of competition for resources which contribute to the welfare and reputation of their own particular household, and which in turn, they protect through meritorious acts and charity (*dan*). While women themselves question the idea that they are in some way inferior to men, they do recognize that in many areas of their lives they are subordinate to them. They collude in varying degrees to keep their 'bargain with patriarchy', to maintain *ijjat*, *sharam*, and *man* in return for male protection, social acceptance and moral worth. The extent to which they resist domination or collude in it is variable, often individualistic, and sometimes momentary (Okely 1991). Hasmita resisted complete capitulation, and showed she was 'independent' by continuing to run her club. There does not appear to be any neat class classification in this. Amba, a highly-educated, professional woman 'chose' not to divorce her husband and forsook her career. Nita, who had few qualifications, took an almost opposite path. I think that Kandiyoti (1988) makes an important point when she notes that this bargaining with patriarchy not only informs the choices women make. It also shapes 'the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity' (ibid: 285), since these relationships permeate women's early socialization and are present in their adult cultural milieu. In

the next chapter, I shall look at various ways in which cultural concepts of respect (*man*), shame (*sharam*), duty (*dharma*), and service (*seva*) inform the social context of the lives of my informants in east London.

CHAPTER FOUR

DOMESTICATING WOMEN : CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY

#### 4 ) Introduction

There now exists a large body of cross-cultural literature which identifies women as the agents responsible for the health and well-being of the family, for providing health care in the household, and for child care.<sup>(1)</sup> This observation raises a number of questions concerning the notion of care itself and how this is culturally and socially constructed. It also raises the question of how care, and responsibility for care, is gendered. In other words, we need to go beyond the ideology of female responsibility and ask how this is constituted in notions of femininity and masculinity, and *vice versa*. How, *pace* Strathern (1987), do people make known to themselves this gendered difference, and 'the manner in which people allocate causality or responsibility to one another, and thus sources of influence and directions of power' (ibid:23). I want to look at these ideas in this chapter in relation to women and their socialization into responsibilities of care in their natal and conjugal households, and the different responsibilities and relationships of care which different categories of women establish. I also examine the moral implications and constraints of care, as well as the dissenting voices of some female informants who question the 'naturalness' of women's responsibilities for the health and well-being of households and children.

##### 4.1) Care and Responsibility

There are many senses of the term *dharma* in Hinduism - from religious law, correct action, moral duty - whether of an individual, family, clan, or caste, for example - to the notion of *sanatan dharma* as the moral order of the universe (cf. O'Flaherty & Derrett (eds) 1978). In the context of family life, informants refer to the *dharma* (moral duty) of different categories of individuals at various stages of their domestic cycle. Thus, for example, it is the *dharma* of parents to find spouses for their children. *Seva* (service) also has many contextual referents - the selfless service and devotion of a devotee to a deity (P. Bennet 1983 & 1990:189-191); *seva* in public life

(Mayer 1981); and in the family (Vatuk 1990). *Seva* ideally entails selfless service and devotion and is linked in Hinduism to the notion of merit (*punaya*) which accrues through acts of *seva* (cf. Mayer 1981). For example, in the context of family life, a wife ideally serves and cares for the comfort and well-being of her husband. This, as I also noted earlier, is what women are supposed to do; they are responsible (*javabadar*) for this. But *javabadari* (responsibility) is also used by my informants in the sense of being accountable for or liable for blame if one does not care for and protect (*sambhala rakhavi*) one's husband or children. Care implies responsibility and protection, as well as solicitude and concern (*chinta*). In terms of a child's upbringing (*balakni ucheri*), care entails not only protecting them but giving them love and teaching or training them for the future. Duty, service, responsibility and care, then, are all closely linked concepts which are expressive of moral relationships within the household and kinship group.

#### 4.2) The Natal Household (*Pihar*)

The following sections consider women's socialization into various responsibilities of care prior to marriage. The term *pihar* is actually used by women after marriage to refer to their natal household.

#### 4.3) Children and Kinship

Among my informants, children receive care and attention not only from parents and siblings, but from numerous members of the bilateral family. As we shall see, some, especially the father's sister, have important ritual and gift-giving roles. Members of this group also participate, directly or indirectly, in a child's education regarding kinship terminology and identification. There were many times when I struggled with this terminology only to be corrected by eight or nine year-olds and younger, who had no difficulty in placing relatives on the father's side (*dadani paksa*) or mother's side (*nanani paksa*). Contextual variability posed some confusion at this age, but differences in English usage of terms, such as aunty and uncle, were

generally recognized. Although a lot of this learning takes place in the household, when visiting or receiving visits, attending rituals, or listening to adults in their everyday conversation, the identification of patrilineal and matrilineal kin is an important aspect of a child's early socialization and their recognition of their own place in relation to other family members.

The children I knew distinguished between their mother's home - their *mosaliya* or *nananu ghar* (*nana* = MF) - and the house in which they were living, their *dadanu ghar* (*dada* = FF). The latter term was used by those living in a nuclear or joint household. The general term for grandparent, both maternal and paternal, is *bani bapuji*. In many households the term *dadi* (FM) has been replaced by the term *ba* (mother) which, among many of my informants, is used by members of the household in both reference and address for FM. Similarly, *babu* or *bapuji* (father) has replaced the term *dada* (FF).<sup>(2)</sup> Parents call their children by name, or in terms of their seniority - for example, *didi* (eZ) or *nani ben* (yZ), *moto bhai* (eB) or *nano bhai* (yB) - or by the more affectionate terms *dikro* (S) or *dikri* (D). Grandparents use similar terms, replacing *dikro* and *dikri* with *dikrano dikro* (GS) or *dikrani dikri* (GD). The children I knew, in reference and address, most commonly called their siblings by name, although they also use terms of seniority. They almost invariably called their mother by the English term mummy, and their father daddy or papa. Terms used by children for other kin relations are noted in the text.

#### 4.4) *Sanskar*: 'Living Properly'

Parents have a considerable responsibility, through the environment they create in the home, in establishing the 'habits' and behaviour of their children which they take into later life. Bennett (1976:37) observes that, in Nepal, a 'rather vague' concept referred to as *bani* or 'habits', is a focus of parental responsibility for child development. Such 'habits' are learnt by children through imitation and are affected by parents and their home environment. Gujaratis refer to the notion of *sanskar* (refinement, education) to describe a

similar concept. Hemkurva described *sanskar* as good *guna* (qualities) which 'come from the parents to the children, not just when they're born but if you have a happy home and a nice family then the children will be happy and good'. For Jaya 'it's giving them [the children] a good example like my mother gave to me'. The example and 'atmosphere' - a word used a great deal by informants speaking English in this context - set by parents in the home implies not only proper conduct and behaviour (cf. van der Veen 1972:62), but also moral qualities including care, duty, love, and spirituality. Geeta, a middle aged mother of three, remarked that:

Bringing up children is *sanskar*. If I say about someone, "Oh, she has bad *sanskar*", it means that she isn't doing it properly, she isn't living properly. It's a whole way of life, eating the right food, the right way to behave, doing these ceremonies and things like that.

When I was talking with Nita about *sanskar*, she echoed other informants' comments in noting that it was the example set by parents for their children, teaching them to behave properly and conducting themselves in a proper way so that 'they get these habits and attitudes early in life'. She went on to tell me, though, that since she had divorced:

people say I can't do it, I can't set a proper example for the kids because there is no man here. This is a terrible problem for me. It's hard now but it will be a real problem when they want to get married. At first, after I took the divorce, I couldn't think about getting married again but now I want someone to look after me and the kids. We need a man to protect us. Lodi [her son] is the man in this house but he is only six and too young to do this.

To my knowledge, Geeta had never met nor even knew of Nita, but had she done so she would probably have included her as someone who has 'bad *sanskar*' - an example of someone who 'isn't living properly' - a divorced woman with no male protector for herself or her children.

'Living properly' and setting an example of conduct and behaviour forms part of the socialization of children into the obligations, duties, and responsibilities they have toward different members of the extended bilateral family, and especially toward those within the

joint agnatic family and household. Children are not set apart in the household but participate in its daily life. In comparison to the situation in many English households, where the arrival of a child heralds a change in household routine to accommodate the infant, in Gujarati homes few concessions are made to the child who is incorporated into daily household life. The child is rarely left unattended and often sleeps during the day downstairs in the kitchen or living room amid the normal activities and noise. She/he is not left to cry but is picked up and cuddled by any member of the family. Fathers coming home from work may waken sleeping infants to cuddle and play with them - usually leaving their cries to be soothed by the mother. Visiting relatives, especially grandparents, do likewise; they make no attempt, as happens in many English homes, to keep their voices down for fear of 'waking the baby'.

Children are not excluded from adult discussions, including disputes and arguments, but are taught and are expected to keep these within the household and to be loyal to its members in relation to outsiders. Whether a child's *dadanu ghar* is joint or nuclear, outsiders here refer to those who are outside the household residential unit. It is the status and reputation of the latter to which one owes primary allegiance. Just how this notion of honour and loyalty is inculcated into children, how it is that they internalize this from what, in my limited experience, seemed to be quite a young age, is really beyond the competence of my data to explain. Adults I asked told me that they just learnt it from their parents, and seemed to imply that it was something they knew before they could remember anything else. Trying to observe loyalty being learnt by young children is quite difficult, and I do not have enough data from young children to do more than generalize. One point I would make from my experience of the few households I knew very well - but which I do not think is confined to Gujarati households - is the way in which household members develop a kind of 'silent language' in the presence of others and which young children learn, presumably by imitation, and through reprimand for transgressions. I observed this language of looks and gestures between adults, and between adults and children, as

a means of curtailing or obliterating conversation on some topics. One day when Hemkurva and Prabha were preparing food for dinner, they told me of some financial problems the household was experiencing at the time. A short time later when Dilip's 'cousin-sister' and her husband came to visit, they enquired after Dilip. Mira, then aged five, had barely got the word 'daddy' out of her mouth when her mother - with a smile on her face - glanced quickly down at her daughter and with a slight flick of her hand, smoothly carried on the conversation, effectively silencing her young daughter. I presumed that she used this gesture to stop her daughter repeating any of the recent conversation we had engaged in as it would reflect negatively on the household, and on her husband.

#### 4.5) Socialization and Gender

Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989:1-5) recently, and very poignantly, reconstruct a birth in a north Indian village. The child is a girl. The attendant women 'drift away, subdued...After a boy's birth, there would have been celebrations, presents, and jollity, so this birth is a disappointment' (ibid:5). Leela Dube (1988:168) makes a similar point, noting also that the inevitability of a girl's separation from her parents at marriage 'is first put across through lullabies and nursery rhymes' (ibid:170).<sup>(3)</sup> Among my informants, while individual men and women may be disappointed if a child is female, especially if they have no sons, the birth of a daughter in east London is not greeted with the same collective dismay and lack of celebration as it is in rural north India. The context of their socialization differs enormously and, moreover, differs within households and extended families. Nonetheless, a process of socialization takes place where ideals of femininity, of feminine behaviour, and female responsibilities, shape their 'gendered subjectivity' (Kandiyoti 1988) as one which is subordinate to men.

#### 4.6) Care of the Domestic Space

The 'habits' of proper conduct and behaviour for girls in their natal home has traditionally focused on the care of the house - acquiring the skills of management, housework, preparing and cooking food, looking after younger siblings, and waiting on and caring for guests. Of the young girls I knew, doing small jobs around the house began quite early. They centred mainly on setting the table, clearing away after meals, helping with drying up and putting away dishes, tidying rooms, and looking after guests and any younger siblings. Even at seventeen, though, Shobana, Hemkurva's daughter, had not made many inroads as far as cooking was concerned. Hasmita told me that her mother had 'never bothered much' with teaching her to cook. When she went to college there were others to do washing and cooking, so that by the time she married 'I couldn't even make chapati'. Hansha (Appendix F), on the other hand, at twenty-three, was a dab hand in the kitchen and enjoyed cooking when her friends came to visit, or helping her mother in the evenings. Older women, though, told me that they had learnt the essentials of food preparation and cooking from their mothers. As Ujam pointed out one afternoon at LC, 'no-one then would want a girl who couldn't cook'.

Caplan (1985:70-1) notes of her informants in Madras that few girls actually participate in cooking and 'many have to begin to learn immediately prior to or even after marriage'. Perhaps this explains the difference in ability between Shobana and Hansha, and Hasmita's predicament as a new bride. Responsibility for the actual cooking and preparing of food resides with the wife/mother - initially under instructions from her mother-in-law - rather than the daughter. A few of my informants told me that their sons had tried cooking - not Gujarati food, but things like spaghetti or hamburgers - but had left such a mess that they did not encourage it. The extent to which boys help with housework seemed to me to depend very much on their own father's attitude, as well as the attitude of women in the house, as to what constituted 'women's work'. Savita tried to get her two sons to do more around the house, just simple things like clearing away

dishes or tidying up after themselves. Her husband, though, forcefully pointed out that this was her job 'as a woman', and forbade any participation from his sons. Hasmita said she had some support from Dimesh to get their elder son to help with 'small things' in the house, but felt that she was constantly undermined when he visited Dimesh's mother who strongly disapproved of men helping with domestic work. Bhanu, on the other hand, said that her 14 year-old son helped quite a lot in the house, helping to wash-up, keeping his room tidy and generally not 'making a mess'. She was uncertain, though, whether this represented a change in 'habit' or was a temporary response to his 'gender studies' classes at school.

The teenage girls and young unmarried women I knew were often quite forceful in their opinion that they would demand a more equitable division of domestic work from their future husbands. But these tasks were largely 'heavy' tasks, such as 'hoovering', doing small repair work, moving cupboards and, as one girl said 'carrying all the shopping and things'. Her father objected that he already did these things: 'Would you ask me to do the ironing or clean the cooker? This is women's work'. In other words, returning to the theme of an earlier discussion in the previous chapter (3.3), there seem to be variant perceptions of what is feminine and what is masculine in so far as domestic work is concerned. Several women told me that their husband did not consider housework as work at all. Older women, like Hasmita's mother-in-law, and Ujam, Laxmi, Bayjoot, Rajmani, and Jethi at LC, viewed all domestic work as essentially feminine. These views were contested by younger women like Savita, Hasmita, Amba, Mangala, Bhanu, Surbhi, Hansha, and Chandrika (Appendix F). The latter made distinctions in terms of 'heavy work' and 'keeping things tidy', but also included tasks like cooking, washing-up and 'helping with the children'. They did not perceive the care of the domestic space as entirely their responsibility, even though in the case of Mangala, Amba, and Savita, their husband did, or in the case of Hasmita, her mother-in-law.

#### 4.7) *Sharam*

Caring for the household is not only concerned with looking after the domestic space. It also involves feminine behaviour which ensures the social care of the household. It is in her natal home that a woman learns what is appropriate and proper conduct and behaviour for herself as a female. A girl's reputation and the honour (*ijfat*) of her household in relation to her, rests not only on her virginity, but on her behaviour and her sense of *sharam*. Catherine Thompson (1981:39) notes the difficulty in translating this concept because of the many contextual nuances of the term. Rushdie (1983:38-9) captures this so well when he notes that it contains 'encyclopaedias of nuance. . . embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts'. Thompson (1981:41), among others (Sharma 1978; Jacobson 1974), points out that one of the contexts in which women display *sharam* is in the practice of veiling. Unlike these and other village women in north India (Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989), my informants did not veil in front of men or women. Older women told me that this was customary when they were younger, and I have several examples from women in their thirties and forties who told me that in East Africa they also veiled, most often in the presence of their father-in-law.

My younger female informants, though, did learn other ways of expressing *sharam* though body language and speech. Young girls shout, argue with each other and play as boisterously as boys at home, but they are sharply reprimanded for such behaviour if visitors, any visitors, called. The same behaviour in young boys seemed to me to be treated more leniently. Many was the time I saw Hemkurva's daughters quite severely called to task for shouting or interrupting conversations, while their numerous 'cousin-brothers' wreaked havoc without condemnation from the adults present. Perhaps this could be explained in terms of the different traditions of household interpersonal relations noted previously, but other general observations made at rituals, 'functions' and women's meetings I attended, incline

me to the opinion that differences do exist. Nita would sometimes shout at her son when he ran around the flat playing some loud and boisterous game, but then laugh indulgently because he was 'the man of the house'. She was less tolerant of such behaviour in her daughter, telling her not to 'act like a boy' and to 'learn to be quiet'. Leela Dube (1988:177) also notes that girls are encouraged to speak softly and to learn to 'demonstrate [their] capacity for self-restraint: talking and laughing loudly is disapproved of; a girl should not be argumentative'. However, it is in the presence of men that this behaviour is most frowned upon, and in cases I have witnessed, it is often a girl's father who hands out reprimands if she is argumentative, if she interrupts, or if she is 'too free'. This latter English expression was often used by informants as a derogatory term for women who were seen out and about too much alone, who were not circumspect in their public behaviour, or who were seen talking to unknown men in the street. Savita told me, in English and with some bitterness, that this kind of behaviour 'always makes people gossip. Indian women have to be careful not to be too free otherwise people will call you a prostitute. That's the worst thing anyone can call an Indian woman, a prostitute'.

I noted in the previous chapter (3.2), that *sharam*, *ijfat* (honour), and *man* (respect) are idioms which express relationships of power.<sup>4</sup> Feminine behaviour includes a language, both verbal and non-verbal, of restricted communication in the presence of men, of 'self-restraint' in Dube's (1988) terms, which is a means of imposing control by men and other older women. Learning about *sharam* for girls is also about learning respect (*man*). (This, I might add, is no less the case for boys). Respectful behaviour for girls, particularly in the presence of men, entails listening rather than talking, not interrupting or speaking out of turn, of accepting rather than questioning and, especially, of learning about those topics which cannot be spoken of. What both these notions - *sharam* and *man* - effectively create and seek to maintain is the dominance of age over youth, and male over female. Both reflect on the honour (*ijfat*) and

reputation of household and carry sanctions of loss of honour, loss of respect, and accusations of shamelessness.

A sense of *sharam*, though, is concerned with more than simply demeanour. It involves a concept of physical modesty which, as Thompson (1981:48) observes, has a considerable emotive force which Rushdie so graphically captures. The female body, and particularly the genitalia, is something to be concealed and kept private. Girls are made aware by rebukes and constant remarks, almost as soon as they are out of nappies, to cover their panties or smooth down their dresses. On numerous occasions when taking several girls as young as four to the swimming pool, I was banished amid giggles and screams while they struggled with wet costumes and partially dried skin to dress themselves alone, or with the help of older sisters. Such behaviour could probably be observed among young English girls, but this sense of *sharam* is internalized and carried over into adult life as well. On one occasion, I returned to a friend's house after a registry office wedding to change clothes prior to the Hindu ceremony. About eight to ten other women arrived for the same purpose, and they either located an empty room, or engaged another woman to shield them from view with a sari while they changed. These sometimes tortuous efforts to hide the body, even in partial undress, contrasted sharply with the behaviour of myself and an English woman present. This occasioned considerable comment around us. Perhaps they were being polite, but these women pointed out that while our 'open' behaviour was 'normal' for us, they really found it impossible to be 'open' themselves.

Thompson (1981:49) suggests that western women have not been socialized into such deep-rooted feelings 'about what should be public and what should be private with respect to the body and bodily functions'. Why should women not share a commonality of their bodies at the physical level? Certainly, with the women of the wedding party and, for example, others at the antenatal clinic, I never got beyond the notion of *sharam*. But if we think of *sharam* in relation to power and control, I think it is at least possible to suggest that where women perceive, or are taught to perceive, their bodies as objects of

*sharam*, then this sense of alienation from their own bodies also alienates women from each other.

#### 4.8) The Menarche

Unlike other parts of South Asia,<sup>(5)</sup> my informants said there was no ceremonial recognition of the menarche (cf. Hershman 1977; Jacobson 1978).<sup>(6)</sup> In fact, Bhanu reacted with some horror when a Tamil friend extended an invitation to attend her younger sister's first menstruation rite:

They put on a special sari and are decorated with flowers and things, and there's a big celebration. She asked me to go but I thought no, I can't do this, this is just too much! Gujaratis don't do this. It isn't something to show your father or your brothers and **never** talk to them about it or make a big show of it.

But that the menarche is recognized as changing the status of a girl was noted by male and female informants. I was told this does not mean now, as it did traditionally, that a girl is married, but it does mean that she is a woman in the sense that pregnancy is a possibility. She has become 'big' (*moti*), she is *pukht* (mature), or as one man told me, for a girl means that she is 'ripe like a fruit, like a mango ready to be picked'. A woman's sexuality is activated at the menarche and she becomes potentially 'fruitful'. This contrasts with the situation for boys for whom puberty does not necessarily entail a change in status. There was not a lot of consensus among my informants, though, as to when a boy was considered an adult. In different contexts, Bhanu, Mangala, Hasmita, and Jasvanti said that it could be around sixteen or seventeen years depending on the individual and whether his attitudes and behaviour were 'grown-up'. Bhanu said that although her son's voice was breaking and he was 'growing up', she did not consider him to be an adult as yet. A Brahman priest told me that, for a Brahman boy, adulthood begins after the sacred thread ceremony. He qualified this by noting that the ceremony meant that he could now begin his religious learning but this did not mean that he was ready for marriage. Three other older women at UP said that

traditionally, when a boy got married he was considered an adult but now that marriages take place much later this could be when he goes out to work. Prabha said laughingly that men are always children.

As is the case in many other parts of South Asia (Beck 1969; Babb 1973; McGilvray 1982; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989), sexuality among my informants is closely associated with notions of *garam* (heat) and *thanda* (cold or cool).<sup>7</sup> These opposites, as we shall see, recur in many other contexts in relation to illness and food. An individual may have a naturally 'hot' temperament (*garami svabhav*), or a 'cold' one (*thandi svabhav*), but within these individual variations there is the idea to keep these qualities in balance (*samatula*). Blood (*lohi*) is particularly heating and accumulated menstrual blood makes a woman especially *garam*. Semen, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the 'end-product' of blood in men. I did not ask my informants about nocturnal emissions, but Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989:248 n48) note that a man with nocturnal emissions is regarded as 'suffering from *garmi* which would decline if he had sexual intercourse'. Among my informants, sexual intercourse for men and women is considered heating (Chapter Five).

Although a few women point out that each month an egg in the womb causes bleeding, what they all agree on is that the monthly menses is necessary to rid the body of stored blood. Unlike many of the English informants Savage (1991:162) interviewed, who said they would have been pleased to have lighter periods, my Gujarati informants expressed considerable concern that the amount of blood should be normal, or balanced (*samatol*). If too little is passed or if a period lasts for only one or two days, a woman may complain of feeling hot (*garam*) and giddy, that her body is too 'big' and too 'strong' (*takat*), that she becomes 'hot tempered' (cf. McGilvray 1982:31). Too much bleeding on the other hand, can lead to weakness (*nabalai*) and tiredness. In either case, it is detrimental to a woman's health as these elements in her body are no longer in balance. If bleeding is heavy or persists for longer than five or six days, food which is felt to be particularly cold (*thando khorak*) is eaten to reduce the stored heat

and blood flow, and if bleeding is felt to be too light, hot food (*garamo khorak*) is taken to increase it. <sup>(8)</sup> While men and women can have naturally hot or cool temperaments, there is an association here between female sexuality, heat, and strength, which women themselves seek to control through bodily balance according to their own individual temperament. The idea that a woman is strong (*takat*) is at variance with ideals of femininity which stress dependence and passivity.

The care of the body - what is normal and abnormal blood flow, dietary considerations which enhance or restrict it, physical activity and the control of pain - are learnt largely from one's mother or older sister. <sup>(9)</sup> Women point out that during menstruation, heavy work and excessive exercise should be curtailed as this increases bleeding and contributes to weakness and tiredness. It is also noted, though, that for women in nuclear households and for those in outside employment, this is often impractical. Older women say that when women had to work in the fields or do heavy work in the home, the monthly seclusion enabled them to rest and restore the body to health. Knowledge of the management of menstrual pain is also learnt at home from one's mother or older sister. A variety of herbal preparations are employed - gum powder (*gundar*) mixed with water, for example, was often mentioned as a means of alleviating pain and reducing excessive bleeding, as well as over-the-counter products, such as Panadol and Aspirin.

Menstrual blood is also considered impure (*asvacch*) and dirty (*gandun*). In common with women in urban South Asia (Wood 1975:49), and among other South Asian women in Britain (Homans 1982:255), there has been an attenuation of practices which relate to menstrual pollution among my informants in east London. The traditional practice of separating menstruating women from others in the household was not observed, with older women pointing out that, in any case, young women will not sit in cold and draughty hallways. Where women live in nuclear households they continue to cook during their menses and many do so even if living in joint households, although some limit this to

preparing food while another woman does the actual cooking. This did not appear to pose much of a moral dilemma for my informants, who explained this mainly in terms of the practicalities of household composition. Younger women, like Bharti and Jasvanti, said that these were 'old' practices which did not apply any more. Men and women should not have sexual relations for three or four days, or until bleeding has ceased. The end of the period of pollution is marked by washing the body and hair and wearing a clean sari.

What women do emphasize, and what they do observe, is that while menstruating (*adav* or *adeli*) a woman does not attend the temple, worship at the household shrine, or attend any ritual. Surbhi, for instance, explained that it was her sister who told her that after three or four days she should wash her hair, bathe, and put on a clean sari. 'She [also] said I shouldn't light the *divo* (candle) at home or go to the temple because God doesn't like it when women do that if they have their monthly'. Whenever I was invited to attend any ritual I was always asked (very politely) not to come if I was menstruating. When I asked why this was so, or why they were not permitted to attend or perform any *puja* (worship), the answer was invariably because 'God doesn't like it'. In his analysis of temple priests and the relation between Hinduism and caste, Fuller (1979) notes that when asked the purpose of a ritual, his informants replied that 'it pleases god' (ibid:461). Worship pleases God so that the deities use their power (*shakti*) for beneficent purposes. The gods themselves cannot be polluted. But Fuller goes on to observe that the gods do not tolerate any pollution of the temple, the images, or of the materials used in worship. Despite their benevolence, if no ritual of purification is performed, the gods may be angered and 'might punish those responsible for this pollution - either an individual or the community at large - or remove their power from the Temple images, or both' (ibid:469).

Among my informants, a pre-pubescent girl is free to attend any ritual, either as a participant or an observer, as she is not subject to any pollution. With the onset of puberty her menstrual pollution renders her unclean in the presence of the gods. When Bhanu, as well

as other informants in different contexts, asked me to ensure that I would not be menstruating when I attended a *bal mavara* (first hair cutting ceremony) at her HZD's house, she told me that if an *asvacch* woman came to the ceremony 'it could cause problems for this family'. If a woman knowingly transgresses this rule, she does not pollute the deity by her action. However, her transgression may at some time in the future be perceived as a 'cause' of illness or misfortune, either to herself or to other members of the household. In other words, women refrain from any form of religious activity while menstruating, not because of their polluted state, but because of what may happen if they do not. As Rasmussen (1991:754) suggests, these are not so much restrictions as precautions which, among my informants, are taken to ensure the well-being of the household. It is also the case that men as much as women pose this threat to well-being for, prior to any form of worship, both men and women must observe purification rites. As Fuller's (1979) article makes clear, failure to do so can result in calamity for the individual, the community or the temple. But in nuclear households at least, a woman's periodic monthly pollution also has implications for household members who are no longer ritually protected by women unable to perform *puja* at the household shrine (*ghar mandir*).

A further point which women emphasized to me was that at the menarche there was a change in relations with men. Women told me that as changes in their bodies made it obvious that they had reached puberty, people commented adversely on their public behaviour with men if it was considered too 'free'. Although relations with their father and brothers continued to be caring, lapses into girlish playfulness or immodest behaviour brought sharp reminders that they were no longer children. But this kind of public recognition, and the recognition within the household itself, that a girl has reached the menarche, is somewhat at variance with what women themselves told me. As Bhanu points out above, menstruation should be kept from the men in the household. Jasvanti too, told me:

My mother told me that your brothers and your father shouldn't know about it. They don't use pads like now in India. They used pieces of cloth and this had to be done very carefully so that no

one like your father or your brother knew about it. You know, sometimes there is always the chance that you might stain your dress or sari and this is really terrible if this happens. It's a real disaster because it's showing your condition to everyone.

Married women often laughed at memories of older women continually impressing upon them that they 'mustn't touch boys', or 'have anything to do with boys'. Nonetheless, they agreed that their behaviour toward men did change, often because they were told that physical contact with men could lead to pregnancy. One woman in her mid-forties described her experiences and the way in which this information was imparted:

[My aunty] said that from now on I wasn't to touch boys. I had to be very careful with them and I wasn't to touch them or anything because I could get pregnant. I said, "Well what about my brother?" and she said that all men are the same. I was so afraid that I didn't even talk to boys after that. It wasn't until I went to college and saw all the girls talking to boys that I thought, "Well they aren't pregnant", because my aunty had said that I could get pregnant and have a baby. I stopped talking to boys because I thought the baby would jump somehow from his mouth to mine and I would get pregnant. I didn't know anything about it but I did know that it was terrible if you weren't married and you had a baby. I was really frightened and it affected me for years. I just stopped talking to men and then when I went to college and did anatomy, I realized how it all happened.

At EL a series of classes were organized around pregnancy and childbirth, both as an educative exercise and as an aid to familiarize women with NHS procedures in the local area. One morning, Surbhi, Neema, Kusum, Aarti, Bhanu and four young Pakistani women and myself got to talking about menstruation. Surbhi, who arrived in England when she was twenty in 1983, said that she had been menstruating for three months before she had the courage to tell her mother that she thought she was 'very sick' because she had been bleeding. Kusum said that something similar had happened to her: 'I thought I was dying', she said. The others, including the Pakistani women, all agreed that they knew nothing about menstruation and all recounted similar stories of bleeding for sometime before telling their mother or older sister that they were 'sick' (*bimar*). Talking to other young women in different contexts, it was obvious that they too had not been prepared with any

knowledge of the onset of menstruation. They explained this by telling me that this was not a proper topic of conversation with one's mother. Surbhi said 'after this [the menarche] happens to you, there are some things you just don't talk about with your mother. It's for respect (*man*)'. Kusum said it would be shameful (*besharam*) to do so. Jacobson (1974:123), Thompson (1981:48), Fruzzetti (1982:14), and Blanchet (1984:38) all point out that in north India, it is this relationship of respect between mothers and daughters which precludes any instruction, or even conversation, about anything to do with sex. It is a thing of *sharam*.

At LC one afternoon when I tried to initiate a discussion on menstruation, the older women present, including Ujam, Laxmi, Vali, and Jethi, were not impressed and Bayjoot rather angrily flicked over the page in my notepad and indicated that we go on to another topic. It was not, Ujam said, 'proper' to talk about this in public. In a similar vein, if ever I began to ask about menstruation - or contraception or sex - in a household when a woman's mother-in-law was present, the younger woman would more often than not suggest we went into another room to 'be more comfortable'. Once there, I was told that this was not something to discuss in front of one's mother-in-law. It would not be showing proper respect for the older woman.

However, some younger mothers among my informants are preparing their daughters for the menarche with more information. This is partly, they explained, because of their own abrupt and sometimes traumatic experiences, engendered by their ignorance and inability to obtain information, and partly because their daughters now learn about it in school and within their peer group. One woman explained how she discussed menstruation with her ten year-old daughter:

I have prepared her for it. I showed her the pads and other things I use and I said to her, "sometimes you'll see me carry things to the bathroom and hiding it. You watch me and you'll see. Not your father or your brother, they won't see it, but you watch". And she said to me, "I saw you mummy, I saw". She has a friend who also knows about it and I know that they talk about it too.

What this woman could not bring herself to do, though, was to talk

with her daughter about sex and conception itself. This, she hoped, her daughter would learn about at school. It would be too embarrassing for her to discuss. Whether or not women continue to explain pregnancy in terms of 'not touching boys' I do not know. What the mothers I knew continue to make clear is that, even if they are prepared to discuss menstruation to some extent with their daughters, talking about sex and conception is still *sharam*. On the other hand, women do exchange knowledge across generations on the management of the body during menstruation.

In a discussion of women in a Guatemalan village, Lois Paul (1974:294) suggests that there is a conspiracy of secrecy among older women who, by keeping girls ignorant of the processes of reproduction, maintain their ascendancy and control over them. Cultural notions of *man* and *sharam* among my informants could be said to be utilized to the same end. However, among some informants at least, sex education in schools, access to higher levels of educations for girls, as well as peer group discussion, undermines much of the control older women were able to exert by mystifying and withholding such knowledge. On the other hand, I think that it is because of the adult context in which female informants are socialized that women continue to internalize a perception of female sexuality as a thing of *sharam*. This is not the same as saying that women - and men for that matter - do not acknowledge their sexuality. *Sharam* and *man* would not have the power they do among my informants if sexuality was of little concern. Furthermore, I would argue, through this 'internal voice' (Das 1988:198), men do not need to directly control female sexuality; women do this themselves. The code of sexual morality, framed by notions of *man* and *sharam*, is a form of male power in which older women collude to secure an advantage over younger women in their bargains with patriarchy.

#### 4.9) Rituals and Care

Children also learn much of their knowledge of religious practice and ritual observance by watching and listening to their mother. Other

women, including and especially grandmothers if living in the same household, also play a significant part in transmitting this knowledge. Education here is part of everyday activity which children imitate and learn, largely through the practice of the women in the household. It is women who care for the domestic shrine - for cleaning it, bathing and dressing the images, adjusting the contents, and adding new pictures or images. It is also women who are largely responsible, through their own worship, in teaching children the rudiments of the daily *puja* - the lighting of the lamp and incense, bowing before the images, the prayers to recite, and the rules of purity in approaching the shrine - the removal of shoes and the importance of bathing before worship. Children learn from women the names of the deities and the stories associated with them, the nature of fasting which (mainly) women undertake, and of the rituals and festivals which are celebrated in the home (cf. Logan 1988a:9-16).

Although it is to children of both sexes that this knowledge is passed, it is young girls who participate more in domestic rituals and life cycle rites than their brothers. Knowledge of the fasts which are undertaken in the household, for instance, is passed on to boys and girls. But while it <sup>is</sup> unusual for young boys to fast on a regular basis, girls may begin to do so from an early age. Logan (1988a:22-23) describes an annual fast especially for girls - *molakats vrat* - (see also Stevenson 1971:51-2; Gopalan 1978:113) which is performed to protect one's brothers and/or ensure a good husband. We shall see later in this chapter that women, through their rituals, continue to protect and care for their brothers throughout life. As we have already seen, women as wives ritually care for the health and well-being of their husband. At life cycle events too, it is girls rather than boys who are more active participants. We shall see later that women not only conduct many of these rituals but are the pivotal actors, with girls as children and adolescents, active and necessary participants. In their natal home, girls witness many of the rituals they will be expected to perform when they marry, albeit in a more or less different form. It is, perhaps, appropriate to look here at one particular ritual which is observed annually in the home by female

members of the household, to illustrate the pre-eminence of women in performing domestic rituals, and their role as educators of their children.

*Shitala satam* is a *vrat* (vow), <sup>(10)</sup> observed by many of my female informants annually, when the grace of the goddess Shitala is sought to ensure the health of children in the coming year. Throughout north India, Shitala is associated with smallpox (Babb 1973:18-19; Bang 1973; Junghare 1975:298-99; Nicholas 1981), and measles (Gopalan 1978:117), and is a term still used by some of my informants to describe these illnesses. Female informants differentiated between measles and chicken pox in terms of the size and type of spots which appear, but chicken pox itself was not always clearly differentiated from smallpox. According to the WHO, smallpox was eradicated in 1977 but several informants reported cases of smallpox after that time. One woman, for example, told me that when she went to India in 1980 to consult an Ayurvedic specialist for a skin ailment, which various home remedies, her GP, and a private biomedical specialist had failed to cure, she was called home because her oldest daughter had '*mataji*, smallpox'. In treating such illness, as well as a trip to the GP, various home remedies are invariably employed by women to redress the imbalance of excessive heat (*garam*) in the body. Shanta and Rekha also told me that prayers are said at the household shrine for the recovery of the child and, when well, the mother and child thank the Mata for her blessing of health. Bhanu said that when her daughter had measles, she prayed to the goddess Kali that she may be well and, when recovered, she took her small daughter to the *ghar mandir* (household shrine) and showed her how to thank the goddess and told her what to say in her prayers.

While many of my informants associate Shitala with these illnesses, it is in the more general sense of a protector of children (cf. Wadley 1980b:34-5) that she is worshipped at *shitala satam*. The ritual protects children and promotes good health in the coming year. I was also told that it is performed by women who are having difficulty in conceiving or who experience recurrent miscarriage. The

story (*katha*) which accompanies the rite has several variations and, while not all women knew the details, many accounts coincided almost exactly with those recounted in Wadley (1980b:48-9) and Gopalan (1978:119-123).<sup>111</sup> Not all women performed this rite, but failure to do so can be used in retrospective narratives - usually told by other women - to account for a child's ill health, a general failure to thrive or to put on weight.

The ritual takes place in the month of *shravana* (July-August) and is divided into two sections, *nani satam*, which occurs on the seventh day of the bright half of the month, and *moti satam*, which takes place on the seventh day of the dark fortnight. *Moti satam* is the main celebration and is preceded by *nag panchami* on the fifth day, when the face of the cobra is worshipped. Women told me that in India this used to take place in the temple but here, worship centres mainly on the household shrine. At *nag panchami* women observe a fast, eating mainly cold sweets and especially milk products (cf. Katona-Apte 1975:321). On the sixth day, or the 'cooking sixth' (*randhalo chatthi*), large quantities of food are cooked to be eaten cold on the following day at *shitala satam*. In theory, the cooker should not be lit on *shitala satam* and the cold food prepared from the previous day is eaten. In practice, most women find that they have to heat food and make hot drinks for husbands and children and so compromise by not eating any heated food themselves. One or two of the gas or electric rings on the cooker are decorated with cotton wool and red powder. A small tray is placed beside the cooker. This contains some betel nut, green lentils, and a ball of millet and ghee - each said to be a good omen (*sarun sukan*). A glass of water is also placed on the tray 'to cool the goddess'. Shitala is said to come any time after midnight and, traditionally, rolled in the cool ashes at the hearth. Now with gas and electric fires she comes to check that they are indeed cool and that her wishes have been carried out.

While children mostly remember it for the quantities of food, they are also taught by their mother the rudiments of the story of Shitala, of the protection she grants them, and of her association

with illness. A few older women at LC told me that *shitala satam* was celebrated with fairs (*melas*) when they were children in Gujarat but now the ritual is predominantly a household affair with women and children in the household as the main celebrants. For women, it is their *dharma*s as mothers to nurture auspiciousness for their children and ensure their protection from illness in the coming year. While children of both sexes also celebrate the ritual at home, girls learn through their own mother's practice and instruction that observing this *vrata* - and many others - is essentially part of their *dharma* as women.

#### 4.10) The Conjugal Household (*Sasara*)

*Sasara* is the term used by women to refer to their conjugal household once married. In these sections, I consider a married woman's continuing relationships and responsibilities with members of her natal household as well as the changes which occur with her marriage.

#### 4.11) Married Sisters

After marriage or on the early death of her father, a woman's brother in north India is often seen as her protector (Mayer 1960:219; Pocock 1972:97; van der Veen 1972:75; Jacobson 1974:144). A brother has a social obligation to care for his sister, although as Sharma (1980:136-7) points out, with no jural right to maintenance after marriage, a woman is dependent on the goodwill of her brother for protection, and perhaps sanctuary in extreme circumstances. A brother can also be appealed to for help and protection in the case of widowhood, especially, for example, if a woman still has young dependent children. In the case of two young widows among my informants in Newham - Vimla, a Darji from Kenya (Appendix C), and Kamla, a Leva Cutch Patel from Gujarat (Appendix D) - both came with their small children to live in their married brother's household following the sudden death of their husband. Widowhood no longer appears to hold either the mystical implications noted by other writers (Harper 1969; B. Tapper 1979), or the social ostracism of the

past (Caplan 1985:59).<sup>(12)</sup> I returned one day after a club meeting to Sarla's house in the company of Vimla and Nalini. Sarla, a widow herself, and her friend Nalini, often gave 'company' to Vimla whose husband had recently died. While comforting the younger woman, Sarla remarked to me, 'it's sad because you see, in England after a woman's husband dies she can marry again, but we can't. Vimla is young, not like me, and she can't marry again. That's why she's crying'.

While widow remarriage was disclaimed as a possibility by members of high and low castes - including these two young widows - my data are neither detailed nor extensive enough to draw any conclusions from this. What did emerge was that, while widowhood for older women such as Sarla could be a great personal tragedy, for these two young women - both with children and both with limited English and education - widowhood had induced great insecurity in their lives. They were no longer *saubhagyavati* - auspicious women with husbands - who protected the well-being of their own household, but were reduced to being a dependent in the household of their brother. Maintaining good social relations with one's brother, then, can provide a safeguard against future difficulties which may occur after marriage.<sup>(13)</sup>

We have already seen that, unlike their brothers, women may begin a process of ritual care for the well being of their brothers when they are young girls. Two other rituals are enacted during the year which formalize this bond throughout adulthood. *Divasni rakhadi* is a day in the bright half of the lunar month of *shravana* (July-August). Married sisters visit their brother's household for (usually) the evening meal. They bring with them - or send if they are unable to attend - a *rakhadi* (protective thread) for their brother to wear on his wrist. Stevenson (1971:304) reports that a crushed areca nut, symbolizing the crushing of his problems, is tied to the thread. In east London, the thread is often bought from local shops and is made from elastic with a betel nut placed within a small artificial flower. The betel nut (*sopari*) recurs in many rituals and is said by informants to be a good omen (*sarun sukan*) which is auspicious (*shubha*). Their brother, for his part, presents his sister with gifts

of money and/or saris and cloth for petticoats and blouses. Rekha, for instance, told me that she had received a sari from two of her brothers in India, and from her brother in Newham who also gave £5. Raheja (1988:175-7) points out that in these calendrical and other gift-giving (*dan*) contexts between wife-givers and wife-takers, the gifts are given for the auspiciousness of the donor. The married sister removes inauspiciousness and sin (*pap*) from her brother and natal family. My informants, however, emphasized the protection and auspiciousness which the *rakhadi* affords their brother, ensuring his good fortune and health. For a woman, the ritual care of one's brother thus ensures his continuing protection and care. My female informants also received a *rakhadi* from their brother (cf. Jacobson 1977:266-7), ensuring her well-being and continuing participation in the rituals in his household.

On the second day of the Hindu New Year (*bhai bij*),<sup>14</sup> the order of visiting is reversed, with brothers visiting their married sisters (cf. Stevenson 1973:268, Raheja 1988:176-178). The brother's family will usually dine with his married sister, and he again gives gifts, such as a new sari or blouse piece, and often money. From what female and male informants told me, and from what I observed myself, both *divasni rakhadi* and *bhai bij* are seen as important rituals in the calendrical year. At the women's groups I attended on *divasni rakhadi*, the women all displayed their own *rakhadi* with considerable pride and talked about the visits to their brother's household with anticipation. *Bhai bij* was observed by everyone I asked and, again, it was perceived as an important and also happy (*sukhi*) occasion. At Hemkurva's house one evening her MZ, MZS, MZSW, and their neighbours, Bharti and Girdhalal, plus all their children were present. When we got to talking about *bhai bij*, Hemkurva's MZS said in English 'our sisters are very important to us. We always give to them. We honour them. This is very different from you [meaning me]. *Bhai-ben* (brother-sister) for us Gujaratis is very strong'. Dilip and Girdhalal all agreed with this and re-inforced the idea that the brother always gives to the married sister. In the next chapter, I shall consider in more detail the relationship between a married woman and her brother

and his household, especially in relation to her role at life cycle rites.

The relationship between sisters, especially married sisters who, in rural areas of India often live in different villages, receives little mention in much of the anthropological literature. From the dominant patrifocal perspective, this is seen as structurally irrelevant to the continuation of the agnatic group. Mayer (1960:223) only briefly touches on it, while Pocock (1972:96) remarks that among the Patidar in Gujarat 'the relationship between sisters never seems to receive comment'. This relationship in north India is not marked by the ritual and formal links which exist between brothers and sisters, but anthropologists such as Das (1976:132) and Sharma (1980:184-5), in addressing the hitherto undervalued and unacknowledged links between women, note that even in rural areas, sisters provide emotional support for each other as well as practical assistance, including arranging marriages for younger sisters.

In Britain, where married sisters may live near to each other, this relationship can flourish into one of continuing emotional and practical support. A woman's sister may provide very practical support in suggesting or introducing potential marriage partners for younger sisters or children, and in helping with the not inconsiderable arrangements involved in organizing life cycle rites and other rituals. Married sisters may also extend help to each other's children, sometimes assisting with child minding if living locally, or having children to stay for periods during school holidays. Whether or not married sisters have a stake in perpetuating relationships through marriage is not one which I pursued in detail during fieldwork. The few I did ask were largely uncertain as to the depth at which a *bhai-ben* relationship extended. When I was talking with Hemkurva and Prabha in the presence of Premesh. (Hemkurva's ZS) about marriage one afternoon, they were all categorical that Premesh would never be able to marry say, Shobana, Hemkurva's eldest daughter, because this was a *bhai-ben* (brother-sister) relationship. Hemkurva thought that it might be possible for Premesh's son to marry Shobana's daughter, providing

they were from a different *atak* (surname group) but, like Prabha, she was not absolutely certain. Sadhana (Appendix D) and Ujam (Appendix B), on different occasions, were also uncertain about this possibility, with Ujam especially feeling that this was probably still a *bhai-ben* relationship. Bhanu, though, given her experience with the Brahman priest at her niece's (BD) wedding (2.8), felt that it could be 'got around' in some way if the couple 'were in love'.

If there is a large age gap between sisters, as is the case with many of my informants, the oldest sister may well take on a relationship more akin to that of an older aunt. Between those of a more comparable age, however, the relationship is relatively egalitarian and informal. Older sisters, for instance, can be an important source of information on the management of pregnancy, childbirth and contraception. But while married sisters in urban areas can create a potentially enduring tie, disputes and arguments exist in this as in any other relationship. A woman may be quite critical of her sister's behaviour, her life style - whether too 'modern' or not 'modern' enough - the way in which she brings up her children and so on. One woman was barely on speaking terms with her older sister who lived with an Englishman and was less tolerant of this relationship than several other members of her natal family I knew. It was not, she told me, that she was against her sister marrying an Englishman, but to live with him 'openly' was shameless. She did not tell me so but the implication was that this could damage her own reputation and that of her immediate natal household. Another woman, who occasionally visited her married sister, never stayed overnight because of her 'dirty' habits and slovenly-kept home. Women recognize, though, that a sister is subject to the same constraints, pressures and responsibilities in her conjugal home as they are in their own, and often make allowances and deflect harsh criticism of her behaviour which would not be the case in other relationships. If a woman is better-off financially than her sister but gives only mediocre or meagre gifts at rituals, for instance, this 'meanness' is likely to be attributed to her husband rather than herself. Whatever the quality of the relationship with their own sisters in practice, many women

describe this relationship as one based on trust and affection, a relatively egalitarian relationship in the otherwise hierarchical world of kinship.

#### 4.12) Married Daughters

As Sylvia Vatuk (1972:42) observed some time ago, the periodic and gradually diminishing visits of rural women to their natal home is replaced in urban areas by visits of much greater frequency. Even where a married woman's parents live in other cities in Britain, telephone calls and visits maintain frequent contact, which does not diminish with time, and which can provide an enduring and mutually supportive relationship. Particularly if living locally, or even in other parts of London, married women are also better placed to be actively engaged in the care of elderly parents. At marriage and in later life, a daughter is traditionally expected to care for her husband's parents rather than her own, and it is to the sons of the household and their wives to whom this duty falls. Standing (1985:36, 1991:156-7), however, has observed that in Calcutta there has been a shift in the responsibility for parents - including economic responsibility - from sons to daughters, especially to employed unmarried daughters. Standing gives several reasons for this which centre on the reliance of the extra income a daughter provides in poor families, and the inability to pay the high levels of dowry. Among professional women in Madras, Caplan (1985:90-1) found that the earning power of daughters was also a factor in their continuing care of elderly parents, as well as their inability, after college and professional training, to find suitable husbands. In Kerala, Gulati (1981:170) found that it was among the urban poor that elderly parents were cared for more often by daughters than by sons, while among the rural poor in Himachal Pradesh, Sharma (1980:171) found evidence of elderly parents being cared for by their married daughters. In these latter cases it was the destitution of often widowed parents which occasioned married daughters to care for them. I knew of only one case where a woman lived in her married daughter's home. In another instance the daughter remained in her natal home and her husband came

to live with her and her parents. However, frequent visiting and extending care to elderly parents did take place, especially by women with adolescent and married children and by women living in nuclear households.

Shanta, for example, was a 48 year-old woman married with four daughters, the youngest of whom was eighteen. Her widowed father lived with her brother and his wife a short walk away. As she said:

They are out all day and he gets lonely. I think it is daughters who look after their parents best. My mother died years ago [her father is 80] and I visit him two or three times a week, sometimes more. Sometimes we put on a video, a Gujarati or Hindi film and then we talk about it. He has pains in his legs and I take him to the doctor but the doctor says he is just old.

While there is a strongly expressed notion that a son has a moral obligation and responsibility to care for his parents, what could be termed the 'quality' of this care can vary considerably and Shanta, for one, does not see the care her father receives as adequate. Shanta is quite careful to visit her father during the day when her brother and his wife are at work, although I do not know how her *bhabhi* (BW), or even her brother, regard these visits. Another woman and her sisters completely severed relations with their only brother because of what they felt was the ill-treatment of their mother in his home and her death sometime later in India. For all I know their mother may have made intolerable demands on her son or created mischief between him and his wife, but that she should chose to return to India rather than remain in his house was seen by his sisters as an indication of inexcusable neglect of his moral responsibility for her. Another woman bitterly lamented her only son's insistence that she and her husband take an offer of separate council accommodation because of conflicts with her 'modern' daughter-in-law. One can only surmise whether the support and frequent visits she received from her two married daughters, in some way allayed any concern she may have felt for what would happen to her if her considerably older husband pre-deceased her.

The extension of care to elderly parents by married women is less problematic for senior women, with more authority in their conjugal home, and for women living in nuclear households, than for younger women still living in joint households and for new brides. In the latter case, this depends to a large extent on a bride's relationships within the conjugal household, particularly with her mother-in-law, and the relations between her *sasara* (conjugal household) and her *pihar* (natal household). In north India, the conventional pattern of behaviour between these two households stipulates the continual gift-giving relationship from a woman's natal home to that of her in-laws (Vatuk: 1972: 114-5, 146-7; Sharma 1980: 135, 1986: 162): parents do not accept food, gifts or lodgings from their married daughters. I found in Newham, however, that the behaviour which pertains between a woman's natal kin and her affines depends to a considerable extent on the family into which she marries and the customs which obtain in that family. Data also show that this can differ between members of the same caste.

Sarla, it will be recalled, was a 48 year-old Lohana widow and had suffered with asthma and bronchitis for some sixteen years. She regularly visited her married daughter in north London, sometimes staying for a few days at a time. During the school and college holidays her two unmarried sons also spent part of their holidays with their married sister. Sarla felt that she had a good relationship with her son-in-law, pointing out that 'he treats me like his own mother'. Sarla's daughter had married a man from a 'modern' family like her own and lived in a nuclear household with her husband and young child. For her caste-mate Jasnanti, the situation was markedly different. Jasnanti's natal household was, she said, 'traditional', like her *sasara*. Her mother lived in the neighbouring suburb of Ilford with Jasnanti's brother, sister-in-law, and their children. The two women exchanged frequent visits and phone calls, and when she suffered a miscarriage with her first pregnancy Jasnanti went to stay in her brother's house. Whenever her mother came to visit her, though, she took no food and only an occasional drink which she insisted on paying for because, as Jasnanti pointed out, 'this is what we do in this

family'. She was able to visit her mother and, for example, to accompany her to the doctor if the occasion arose. But unlike Saria's married daughter, Jasvanti could not offer, and neither would her mother accept, accommodation with her, however temporary. The explanation both these women gave for this difference in behaviour was the different family traditions of inter-personal relationships between a woman's natal kin and her conjugal kin.

To summarize, I began this section by noting that the convention of periodic visits by married women to their natal homes in north India, is replaced in an urban area such as east London with much more frequent visiting, both with parents and siblings. These are not usually extended visits and may, perhaps, be no more than a few hours in the afternoon or a shared shopping trip. If parents live in another city in Britain the visit may be for a week or two. We shall see in Chapter Five that it is no longer usual for a woman to return to her natal home for the birth of her first child. Women can and do return to their natal home for longer periods if they are experiencing problems in their conjugal home, but unless they are contemplating divorce - a step which, as we have seen, carries a considerable stigma - such visits do not usually last for a long time. Married women can maintain close and frequent contact with parents, siblings and other natal kin, which provides mutual emotional and practical support as well as resources of information. Women continue to care for and nurture their brothers through their rituals and maintain ritual obligations toward their brother's children. Some women are able to extend care to elderly and often widowed parents. But despite the varying degrees of change in the inter-personal relations between a woman's *pihar* and her *sasara*, the extended role of her natal kin, and the involvement of some women in the care of elderly parents, it would seem that members of their *sasara* still demand that the primary responsibilities of Gujarati women in east London remain with them. Dilip echoed other men and some women in noting of his wife 'this is where she lives. She's responsible for the house and kids and everything. She can't go running off to visit relatives all the time or else who would look after this house?'

But the 'hidden transcript' 'offstage' (Scott 1990), revealed that underlying this compliance was a degree of dissent. Savita frequently visited her parents' home which was situated only a few streets away. But even when she was helping late into the night with wedding preparations for a few days prior to her sister's marriage, her husband would not allow her to stay overnight. Instead, she had to organize the children for school in the morning and prepare breakfast, returning in the evening to cook the meal before going again to continue with the preparations. Savita was angry with her husband for his refusal 'just for a few days' to help more at home, pointing out quite forcefully that the reason for this was because 'it doesn't look good in the community. That's the whole thing. It's what the community think. It all has to do with this, what other people will say'. The community to which Savita was referring in the context of our conversation was her caste community of Cutchi Leva Patels, but it could equally have been the neighbourhood or members of her joint agnatic or bilateral family. Putting her own parents and sisters before her husband and children would break the 'bargain' Savita has made, however grudgingly, whereby her status as a *saubhagyavati* rests on her *dharma* and *seva* to protect and care for husband and children. In the moral order of things, these are her first responsibilities. Were she to transgress these responsibilities and bring *sharam* to the household, she could be held morally responsible for any illness which befell her husband or children, which as we saw in the previous chapter (3.2), was the case with Hasmita.

It was especially during the period when my sister and brother-in-law visited me around the middle of my fieldwork that I had many conversations with women when we 'compared notes' about our families. One theme which recurred in these conversations, with younger as well as older women, was that I could have my sister and brother-in-law to stay, I could live with them if I wanted to, or my mother could live with me, but for them, this was not the case. After Dilip had made his comments about 'running off to visit relatives', and Hemkurva and I were alone, she said:

Look Meg, for Indian women, they must do what their husband

wants. I can't go and do things and not tell Dilip. He would be very angry. It's different from English women. You get married but you go out and do things without your husband. Your mother can come to live with you or even your sister. That's normal for you but not for us.

Meg: But if your mother was alive, wouldn't you want her to come and live with you?

Hemkurva: Well yes, I would want it, but I can't. It isn't what Indian women do. Everyone would talk about me and it wouldn't be good for this family.

#### 4.13) Women, Wives, and Family Tradition

A woman's responsibilities for her *sasara* begin at marriage. At a certain point in the marriage ceremony, usually just before the bride's parents wash the feet of the bride and groom, the two ends of their upper garments are tied together. Some money, green lentils, betel nut, or whatever is the tradition in the family, are enclosed in the garments (cf. Stevenson 1971:83; Khare 1976a:204). These are, I was told, all auspicious (*shubha*) items. What happens next depends on the tradition in the family. In some families, when a woman arrives at her conjugal home, this 'knot' is untied by her *nanad* (HZ) who removes and keeps the contents (cf. Stevenson 1971:103). For others, it is taken by the couple to be untied at the husband's *kul devi* shrine in Gujarat (cf. Michaelson 1983:63) by the Brahman priest who presides over it. Bhanu, ever practical, pointed out that:

In Gujarati we say, *cheda chedi chodava*. *Chodava* means to open up and *cheda chedi* means the connected thing, the link between the husband and wife - his end and your end of the tie. You can ask the *maharaja* [priest] if he will let you untie it in Africa or here in England and they may let you do this, but other priests won't let you because they want you to come to India. I think they do this because otherwise people would never go there, they'd never go to the temple. Both of you have to go, the husband and wife together. It's no good just one of you going.

Many couples, like Bhanu, who have been married for ten or twenty years have still not made this journey, largely, they point out, because of the expense of both spouses making the trip.

The fact that the 'knot' (*bandhan*) may take years to reach the *kul devi* shrine did not seem to bother my informants, nor did it alter

the fact that the bride and groom were still 'tied' in marriage. One woman told me that this tie was with her HZ for 'safe keeping'. Hasmita said that she had hers at the bottom of the wardrobe somewhere. Raheja (1988:59) notes that among Gujars in north India, a Sanskrit *mantra* describes the function of this 'connecting', as being 'to protect two masters' (bride and groom) from the inauspiciousness that is put into circulation as a result of their joining together. 'The cloth is then given as *dan* to the Brahman priest (*purohit*) of the groom's family, who thereby takes away the inauspiciousness it contains'. Raheja further notes (ibid:136-7) that the Brahman then gives it to a *dhiyana* (husbands of *dhiyani* - married daughters, married sisters, and father's sister), who protects the husband by accepting the inauspiciousness as a result of their union. I did not ask, and neither did my informants volunteer, a similar explanation. Given the general lack of knowledge of marriage rituals, and almost complete incomprehension among some younger informants, I doubt, however, that they would have come up with a similar explanation. What was emphasized was the auspiciousness of the items in the cloth, and that where these were given to the husband's sister, it was to thank her for her part in the ritual.

As a *saubhagyavati*, it is the *dharma* of a woman to protect the health and longevity of her husband, and one of the ways she does this is to perform the ritual duties and carry on the customs and practices that enhance his own welfare and that of his family. This means that with marriage, a woman changes her affiliation from that of her natal household to that of her conjugal household. This in turn entails a learning process for women when they enter their *sasara*. As one woman pointed out 'when you come to live in your husband's home then there are all these things you have to do you didn't do in your mother's home'. These 'things' are the traditions of the *kutumb* traced through men to an indeterminate depth. Neither male nor female informants were certain of how far back the ancestors (*puvraj*) were traced. Hitesh (Appendix B) told me that it could be six or seven generations, maybe more. He was uncertain. Female informants were equally unsure. Surbhi, not long married when I met her, had 'no idea'. The many different

family customs and practices (*judi judi ritabhat*), it will be recalled from the previous chapter, are authenticated by the *kul devi*. About the only thing which families share in terms of their tradition and practice seems to be the idea that the *kul devi* is always conceived of as being in India for, it is pointed out, this is where the goddess originates. Different families, though, have different representations of the deity in Britain. Bhanu observed that in her family, a candle is lit at the household shrine for the *kul devi*, but the shrine in Gujarat:

is *utpan*, it means 'god-made'. It just sprang up naturally. It started as a smaller shrine but now it has grown into a large temple with a *maharaja* [priest] living in the temple. Our temple is in Kathiawad and the priest lives there and looks after the *kul devi*. He isn't paid but he gets money from people in this family. People donate money to the *kul devi* and when you make a vow or something to the *kul devi*, you don't go to India but you just put it in an envelope and post it to the priest at the temple and he does what he thinks best.

For Hemkurva, the *kul devi* is called *bhavanimata* (house goddess). In her natal household the *kul devi* was a male god, *adabapu*, but the change in her conjugal household means that she now does *mataji puja* - worship of the Mata. The picture of the *kul devi* in the household shrine is a representation of the goddess which resides in the family shrine outside Jamnagar in Gujarat. Bharti, who came to Britain from Kenya when she was twelve, said that:

You do things in the family according to the *dev* of that family. There are small things that are different, some aren't much, just little things. When you get married you take your husband's *dev*. It becomes your *kul devi*, your *dev*. The *dev* is an ancestor from a long way back somewhere. In our family there is a shrine in Satapur near Jamnagar. It's looked after by people in the family who live in India. We don't have anything here, no pictures or anything, we just pray to the *dev*, to the ancestors.

When households divide, informants said that the separate households continued to worship the same goddess - the *kul devi* who resides at the shrine in India. Each household is then responsible for continuing to worship the goddess. It seemed to me that it was possible, then, that the *bhavanimata* was a separate goddess for the household and the *kul devi* the goddess of a much larger group. I was

told repeatedly, however, by women and men, that this was not the case and that the *kul devi* and the *bhavanimata* are the same.

A further and major area of difference between natal and conjugal family traditions is in ritual practice and observance. These changes may only entail small details but which nonetheless must be followed; or they can vary considerably in their form with other rituals included or excluded according to tradition. The meal, for example, which a woman cooks when she first enters her *sasara* after her marriage, may be of rice, or green lentils, or some other grain according to the tradition of her husband's patriline. She may serve a handful and a half of the grain, or two and a quarter, or two and a half, again whatever is the tradition. This food is then shared among the members of the household. At a 'full house' one morning at EL, Rahina, Sarka, Kusum, Aarti, Yogini, Sadhana, Monghi, Bhanu, and Kamla, all agreed with Surbhi when she described this process whereby the new bride cooks and then distributes the food to other household members, as 'a way of welcoming the bride into the house', and asking the *kul devi* for a blessing on the marriage. Other changes in ritual practice can relate to the weekly fasts which women undertake. Although a woman is free to choose a day of the week associated with a deity in whom she has great faith or hope (*asha*) to grant her wish, there may also be a day which is traditionally observed by the customs of her husband's family which requires her to fast on that day. Not all rituals which a woman performs are authenticated by the *kul devi*, but one of the major areas where the rules laid down by the *kul devi* do account for differences in practice is in the observation of life cycle rites - those which are performed and the form which they take. The rites associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and some of the different ways these are performed, will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Five.

As well as differences in ritual practice, in-marriage women must also learn the customs and practices of domestic arrangements in the conjugal home, particularly in relation to the preparation of food. Families have different ways of preparing and cooking dishes which may

not be major, but which the new bride must learn. When asking women what these changes entailed some, especially older women, found it difficult to remember precisely what they were, but all made the point that, even if they were only slight, their mother-in-law insisted they follow them, such as the amount of *masala* or spices added to a certain dish, the inclusion or exclusion of some ingredients, or the order in which they were added. Family tradition is not static, and customs and practice can change over time as events take place which are incorporated into family lore. One woman told of how her husband's father's brother had twin boys but one of them died, it was said, because he was placed in a basinette. Now, after consulting the *kul devi*, no infants in this patriline are placed in basinettes or cradles, although the modern carry-cot is acceptable. In another family, the practice of shaving the child's head at the first hair cutting ceremony has now been reduced to simply cropping the hair close to the head. (15)

#### 4.14) Strategies of Resistance

There are, then, many different practices and customs which a woman must learn when she enters her *sasara*. When I asked women how long all of this took to accomplish, older women were rather vague and said they had forgotten. Subhi told me that she was still learning. Other women, married for longer, said that they still checked things with their mother-in-law and, particularly those women living in nuclear households, often called on their *sasu* for information concerning many ritual procedures. Some of my informants have written down these details for future reference. This all seems to imply a period of adjustment to the *kul devi* of their conjugal home and the possibility, in the meantime, of competing practices learnt in their natal household. I noted in Chapter 2.6 that many women know the location of their paternal as well as their maternal *kul devi* shrine in India, suggesting a continuing influence of these deities. As the women above point out, there are all 'these things' one has to do in the conjugal home which are not done in the natal home. One woman said 'it's

difficult at first', but you do 'these things because you have to'.

None of my informants told me that they continued to worship their natal *kul devi*. However, Harlan (1992:92-96) notes several ways in which Rajput women in Rajasthan incorporate their natal *kul devi* in various ways into their conjugal household: the *kul devi* is taken on by the woman as her *ishtadevta* (personal deity); both *kul devis* are identified with the Sanskritic Goddess of whom all other goddesses are emanations; or where the old *kul devi* is retained but given less observable status. I did not observe the latter but the other suggestions would be feasible among my informants, especially the second. All goddesses, including the *kul devi*, are 'the same as the Mata' and as we shall see, my informants worship the Mata in many different forms. If this were the case, it is also possible that this is the way in which the *kul devi* and the *bhavanimata* are perceived, for 'they are the same'. I note this because it did seem to me that among the women I talked with a lot about the *kul devi*, they would say that the *kul devi* looks after 'this family'. 'This family' was often indeterminate, but always included the household and its members, and sometimes other 'close' (*najik*) households of the patriline. In other words, it did not include all members of a patriline extending back several generations.

Perhaps, as we saw earlier in relation <sup>to a</sup> woman's feelings about her natal household and family, this is a case of submerging loyalties to one's natal *kul devi*, and the practices and customs which this entails, to that of one's husband's *kul devi*. Given that the *kul devi* protects and nurtures a particular household and patriline (of whatever depth), and endows it with a specific identity and set of traditions, and given that it is the wife whose task it is to perform the rituals which ensure the protection of her husband and his patriline, competing practices from her own natal household would soon dilute, or at least confuse, this particular identity. It is not surprising, then, that it is the mother-in-law who teaches the new bride the rituals and customs associated with her *sasara* (cf. Vatuk 1972:176; Harlan 1992:95), and it is perhaps not surprising that many

older women have 'forgotten' the practices of their natal household. The men I knew had varying degrees of knowledge - most knew the particular life cycle rites which were performed in their *kutumb*, but were often vague as to the details of what was required. It was not them or their fathers, they said, but their mothers who taught their wives what to do. This makes the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law crucial to the continuation of this knowledge in the family - here referring to a group of agnates, their wives and mothers, but excluding married daughters and sisters.

However, as Harlan (1992:97-99) further points out, there are several ways in which a young wife can resist and frustrate her total assimilation. One which is relevant to my informants is when a joint household divides, or where a widowed mother-in-law goes to live with a recently-married son and dies shortly afterward. The latter was the case with Bharti whose mother-in-law died about two years after her marriage. I do not know if Bharti incorporated any of her own natal practices into her household worship, but she did tell me a few years ago at Divali that she really must learn more of the traditions of 'this family'. During fieldwork, older women told me that the younger one's 'don't bother' with these things any more, that they 'aren't interested'. For a long time, I put this down to the usual grumbles of cultural catastrophe which were a continual topic of conversation. It was not until I read Harlan's (1992) work, however, that I realized I had glossed a whole area of discourse on the potential some women have to resist, to some degree, the discarding of their natal practices. In particular, Harlan (ibid:98) points to the potential resistance of younger daughters-in-law. In households where there are several daughters-in-law, the responsibility for religious observance falls disproportionately on the senior daughter-in-law. This immediately brings to mind Hasmita and the way in which her *jethani* is more 'traditional' than she is herself (Chapter 3.2). As Harlan also observes, though, these younger women have perhaps always had greater freedom of interpretation, for her older informants made the same lament as mine about women of different ages - new brides as well as women with grown children. (17)

#### 4.15) Limitations of Resistance

Perhaps one reason why my informants did not openly express resistance - at least verbally - is that as a *saubhagyavati* responsible for the health and well-being of her husband and household, if any calamity befell him or the family, she could be accused of not caring for and nurturing the *kul devi* and could, therefore, be the 'cause' of this calamity through her neglect. The *kul devi* is perceived by my female informants as essentially benevolent, as a protector and nurturer of the household. Failure to worship the *kul devi*, though, is given as a reason for 'problems' in the family - anything from financial difficulties, to inter-personal conflicts, illness, as well as infertility. It is not that the *kul devi* actually causes these calamities but rather, that if her worship has been neglected, this must be rectified by the *saubhagyavati* who is obviously 'not doing it properly', as one woman told me. So while one may be tempted to suggest that the responsibility of women to protect men has made their worship of *kul devis* a source of influence over men (cf. Harlan 1992:89), this must be tempered by the idea that if any calamity does occur, it is the woman who shoulders the blame. This, it seems to me, is another very powerful sanction on women to subscribe - publically at least - to her *dharma* to care for and promote the well-being of her husband and household.

This last point raises the question not only of the 'naturalness' of women's care of the household and its members, but the extent to which this care is itself a matter of moral coercion. I am not suggesting here that women care for others only because they are constrained to do so, but if a woman is blamed for illness or misfortune in the family, if she is perceived to be the 'moral cause' if you like, she may be constrained or coerced to provide care - whether ritual, social or physical care - which has little to do with the 'naturalness' of her *dharma*. Whether or not a woman is blamed for illness or misfortune, depends to a large extent on her relationships with her conjugal kin - who are usually those who make such accusations. We saw in the previous chapter (3.2), for example, the

way in which Hasmita's mother-in-law employed the cultural sanctions of *sharam* and *man*, not only to restrict Hasmita's movements, but also to question her moral duty as a mother to properly care for her two sons - whom the older woman used as a weapon in her rivalry with Hasmita for the affection and attention of Dimesh. Unlike Hasmita, Jasvanti had no support from her husband when she was made the scapegoat for all manner of misfortune which befell members of her husband's patriline, and which influenced her actions when her father-in-law became ill.

Members of Jasvanti's conjugal family, both in India and in England, had experienced considerable illness and problems, not least of which was a stroke her father-in-law had suffered. Her father-in-law's elder brother had written from India to say that they had visited the *kul devi* shrine to ask why the family were experiencing so many difficulties. They had been told by the priest that in Jasvanti's house they were not worshipping the family goddess. She said that they had done some decorating and had plastered over the fireplace, but this was where the bhavanima lived and, as they had neglected her and not prayed to her, the problems in the family arose from this. As Jasvanti explained:

We didn't know this. We didn't know she lived there and so they have written to say that at *norta* we must do a special ceremony for her. I think this will help our family get rid of this unhappiness and trouble we've had. You know, I think this is because my mother-in-law doesn't believe in this that he (her father-in-law) got sick. You know, she believes in this Shri Nathaji and she wouldn't let me do these things when she was here. [Her mother-in-law, who belonged to the Pushti Marga sect, had left the household to live with her married daughter]. She didn't tell me about these things and she doesn't believe in this and she wouldn't let me ask the Mata into the house or anything and now there are a lot of problems and they say it's my fault for not doing these things.

In order to understand why Jasvanti should be singled out by her husband's family as the scapegoat for these disasters, we need to go back to her marriage. Jasvanti had been married for ten years when I first met her. Her marriage, she told me, had been 'agreed'. When I asked if she meant 'arranged', she said no, 'it was agreed because,

you know, my husband's [elder] brother was married to a woman who is my mother's sister, my aunty'. The reason for this 'agreed' marriage, Jasvanti explained, was because she was an epileptic. Her parents and other members of her natal family, urged her to marry her MZHyB 'because the family [her husband's family] knew about me and they couldn't say afterwards that we hadn't told them'. Jasvanti agreed to the marriage but, shortly afterward her aunt died. She became ill after a nail from a pair of new shoes had gone into her foot. This had become infected and she was unable to swallow, and three days later she died. However, 'he [her husband] and his family blamed me for bringing this problem into the family. Because I have this epilepsy, they said it was my fault. That I had caused my aunty to die'.

In addition to the death of her aunt - her HeBW - one of her husband's older brother's wives had died of cancer when quite young and her HFyB had been widowed twice. This particular patriline then, had suffered considerable misfortune with the premature deaths of four in-marrying women. Jasvanti, as another in-marrying woman, was singled out as a scapegoat for these misfortunes - which are reminiscent of anthropological accounts of witchcraft - because as an epileptic she was perceived by her conjugal kin to have brought the sins of her past life, her moral and spiritual imperfection, to afflict her husband's patriline. Initially, the relationship with her husband had been 'terrible', but this had improved remarkably over the past five years since she went to a *bhui* - a woman possessed by the spirit of the Mata - who lived nearby for help with her problems. She took some grains - Jasvanti did not know what they were - and prayed to the Mata to help Jasvanti. Gradually relations with her husband improved. 'My husband said that he knew he had made a mistake and that for five years he had ruined things for us. He said that he knew it wasn't my fault but everyone said it was'.

When Jasvanti's father-in-law had a stroke, her past experiences had a profound bearing on her attitude to his care. When he returned from hospital, one of her husband's older brothers came most days but his wife came only once. This was her *jeth's* second wife - the first,

as noted above, died from cancer when quite young. According to Jasvanti, 'she didn't help at all. She's very proud'. Another *jethani* (HeBW) who lived nearby, came to help sometimes during the day. Her mother-in-law visited just the once. Jasvanti was her father-in-law's main carer on a day-to-day basis, looking after his needs from food and exercise, to attending to his toilet and cleanliness, and accompanying him to hospital out-patient appointments. She cared for her father-in-law with considerable solicitude and sensitivity. She told me, for example, that taking him to the toilet and helping him to wash was 'very difficult. He cries and I say to him "this is only me, Jasvanti. Don't be embarrassed, there's only you and me here"'. Jasvanti also curtailed many of her outside activities and resisted attempts by several women to persuade her to continue with a new project which she had a large part in initiating. She told me:

I get worried, you know, because of what happened when I got married. I told you about it. I get worried that if anything happens to him, they [her husband's family] will say I killed him, that I didn't look after him properly, that they'll blame me and so I do everything for him. I have to stay at home more now and look after him and show them I'm doing everything I can for him.

Jasvanti's case suggests that whether or not a woman is blamed for illness or misfortune in the household and/or patriline depends not only on relationships within the conjugal family, but also on the relative degree of auspiciousness or misfortune in the household or patriline itself. What is also interesting about this case is that Jasvanti's mother-in-law, who had left to live with her daughter, did not appear to be the subject of blame within the patriline for her own husband's illness. Among Jasvanti's friends whom I knew, though, her behaviour was certainly condemned, not only for the problems it brought Jasvanti, but also for her apparent lack of concern for her husband's health. My own data are inadequate to explain why the damage to the household's reputation caused by her mother-in-law's departure, and her subsequent unconcern for her husband's well-being, appeared to attract less blame in the patriline than Jasvanti's moral and spiritual imperfections as evidenced in her epilepsy. Perhaps I am trying to generalize with too little evidence but it could perhaps be

suggested that there are different kinds of moral imperfections or moral transgressions, which attract greater or lesser degrees of condemnation and greater or lesser degrees of moral coercion.

#### 4.16) Mothers and Motherhood

In this final section, I want to look at a different category of women - mothers - or at least, I want to look at the concept of motherhood itself and examine the way in which an ideology which venerates and extols the mother, demands self-sacrifice and selflessness in everyday life in return for social identity and a position of authority within a household. This section intends to introduce the theme of the following chapter which focuses on fertility, procreation, and the role of women in the creation of identity within the patriline.

Comparing the role of the mother and wife in Hindu society, Hershman (1977:275) observes that as an unmarried girl, a woman is worshiped as a virgin 'and as a mother she has the opportunity to gain status and authority: but as a wife, a woman has very little status at all'. Allen (1982:10) places this in a broader perspective, noting that 'whereas western civilization stresses the sexual role of woman as wife, Indian civilization stresses the maternal role as mother'. He goes on to point out that in Hindu mythology, political ideology, the contemporary cinema and in everyday life, motherhood in South Asian Hindu society is idealized as the highest and most venerable attainment of women. David Shulman (1980:266), among many others, notes that:

The mother is by nature ambiguous: benign and threatening, nourishing and destructive. In the context of the marriage myths, she is both erotically tied to her son, yet precluded from sexual contact with him; the goddess as mother remains virginal and powerful, her power being used in both creative and destructive ways.

While the notion that divine sexuality can be equated with human sexuality has been challenged by Cantlie (1984), nonetheless the identity, status, and spiritual power which motherhood accords women in South Asia, has been noted in numerous other studies (Bennett

1976:5, 1983:225; Madan 1976:72; Hershman 1977; B.Tapper 1979; Fruzzetti 1981:10; Allen 1982:9; Caplan 1987b:284-6). A woman's position within the household, and within society itself, is considerably enhanced with the fulfilment of her maternal role and the growth of her children. Ideally, it is with the birth of sons that a woman is said to fulfil her personhood by providing progeny to continue her husband's patriline, and to perform funeral rites on his death. The mother is seen as the primary socializer of her children, an educator and an upholder of the moral virtues of her culture.

Allen (1982:10) quotes Swami Ranganathananda's (1966) pronouncements on the mother:

A nation that has educated itself to look upon God as mother has learnt to invest its view of woman with the utmost tenderness and reverence. The culture of the Hindu trains him to look upon all women, nay, to look upon the female of all species, as forms of the one Divine Mother. The mother is more worthy of reverence than the father or teacher according to our scriptures.

This is not too far away from what some of my informants told me. At UP one afternoon with Reshma, Mani, Lali, and Nandhu, Rekha had the agreement of the other women when she noted that 'being a mother is like the Mata. She is very important to us. She looks after you and protects you all the time and you pray to her'. When I was helping with the washing up at MT one morning with Hasmita, Jasvanti, and another elderly woman, Jasvanti told me:

Hinduism has a place for female goddesses and gives them prominence that other religions don't. We worship male and female gods but female goddesses have great power. This is *shakti*, female power.

Hasmita: In our religion, women are very respected and we worship female gods because they are very powerful. They are *shakti*. Even educated women like us don't forget this part of our role as mothers. We pray to the Mata who is very powerful to protect our families.

The paradox, as Allen (1982:10) further shows, however, is that 'in case such adulation might lead one to deduce a sound basis for female power and autonomy', mothers achieve this honoured position through their selflessness and self-effacing love for their children. When I asked both men and women what the concept of motherhood

(*matrutva*) meant to them, it was this enduring love, care, nurture and protection which they emphasized. Talking with Dilip, Prabha, Hemkurva, Ruxmani (Dilip's 'cousin-sister'), her husband and two sons and their wives, Dilip said:

Motherhood is looking after and caring for the children. That's the mother's responsibility. *Ba* doesn't just mean mother. It means more than that. It means that she loves and protects the children. She looks after you regardless of your age. It doesn't matter how old you are, she is always superior to you. Being a mother means being responsible for the children and the home.

Hemkurva: It's looking after the kids, always. You look after the kids even when they grow up.

At LC one afternoon, Ujam said 'it means being everything to the kids. A mother loves her children very much. Even when they grow up and leave you'. At EL after a morning class, Kanta, Sadhana, Bhanu, Surbhi, and Vilas all contributed with similar statements to those of Yogini. 'It's the mother who keeps the home together, keeps it functioning, looks after the children, does the cooking and keeps the home'. Bhanu added that 'motherhood is important for all Hindu women. Somehow you aren't a complete woman until you've had a baby. You expect to have children and that's why it's such a worry (*chinta*) if you have problems having a baby'.

These public pronouncements on the concept of motherhood itself, though, were sometimes at variance with women's own experiences of being a mother. I was talking one wet afternoon with Jaya and her friend Mukhta in Mukhta's tower-block flat, while her kids were playing with her Punjabi neighbours' children. We were sipping *masala cha* (spicy tea) and nibbling *chevda* snacks when Mukhta said to me:

You know, for you, you have a nice life. You are free. You don't have to do all this cooking and changing nappies. When we're married, this is what we do if we're women.

Meg: Well, perhaps for me now I'm free. But you're a mother and I'm not.

Mukhta: Yes, but you know, it's nice when they're older and they look look after you, but when they're little they're a lot of work.

Jaya: Yes. I'm a teacher. My father was progressive and wanted his daughter to have a good education, but can I teach now? I have to look after my children. They are my responsibility.

Mukhta: I studied for my BA in India before I was married but my my parents said this was a good match and so I gave up my

studies to get married and come to England. Now I wish I had finished. At least I would be able to get away sometimes and go to work.

Jaya: Yes, but you know, sometime if you are a woman you have to get married. A woman needs someone to look after her, she can't always be on her own. With husbands there is always trouble, but with sons it's different. They care for you when you're old and respect you.

On another rather dreary day I had gone on an outing with some of the women from LC to St Paul's Cathedral in central London. Hasmita asked me to give her 'company' while she slipped out to a department store nearby to buy some clothes for one of her sons. As we rifled through the racks of children's clothes at Marks and Spencer, she said:

You know, now I have children I feel really trapped. I can't do anything much at home because Rajesh won't give me time. He's always holding onto my sari and crying. I feel really trapped in this house even though we are away from my mother-in-law. If I'd known, I don't think I would've had children.

At the end of a meeting at LC one afternoon, when we had been talking about motherhood and some of the comments above were made, Mangala and I were washing up the tea cups and generally clearing away<sup>(12)</sup> when she turned to me and said, almost out of the blue but with considerable bitterness, 'bringing up children for us is the first duty of the mother. That's all she's supposed to do. Nothing else. Just that'.

There are some different, conflicting, and often ambiguous ideas here. On the one hand, male and female informants subscribe, publically at least, to a concept of motherhood in which the mother protects, nurtures and loves her children above all else, even above her husband. Children in return, and especially sons, honour and revere her and, most importantly, protect her in her old age. Through their selflessness and self-sacrifice on behalf of their children, women as mothers can attain not only reverence and respect, but also a position of authority within the household. But when women refer to the mother as in some way 'like the Mata', it is as a protector and nurturer rather than as one powerful and capable of unleashing

destruction. It is only at a certain stage in her domestic cycle - most especially as a *sasu* with grown sons and daughters-in-law and a living husband - that as a mother, a woman is able to exert her authority. As a young mother, or as an old woman with no husband, she may have little power at all in many situations. Nonetheless, the concept of motherhood as one of enduring love and compassionate self-sacrifice was strongly held in public by all informants I questioned.

On the other hand, this ideology of continuous care, nurture, and self-sacrifice as the embodiment of motherhood is precisely what diminishes the autonomy which some of my younger female informants privately strive for. In their 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990), these women were deeply ambivalent, even bitter, at their perception of a loss of 'freedom' which the birth of their children occasioned. I do not think that these feelings are necessarily confined to Gujarati women, for others make similar bargains with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988). The sentiments expressed here may also reflect a particular period in a woman's domestic cycle. Mukhta, for example, notes something along these lines when she observes that when children grow up it is different because 'they look after you'. However, in so far as my female Gujarati informants are concerned, what I think is relevant is that these statements question the notion of women's acceptance of their 'normal' or natural *dharma* - if they ever did accept this - to care for and nurture husband and children above all else, and at the expense of their own independent aspirations. But what they also reveal, as Jaya's comments make clear, is that women do not seriously contemplate a life without a husband, and especially children, who will 'look after' them and protect them. We return here to a familiar theme in this and the previous chapter. Motherhood is ultimately highly important for women themselves for it offers women the opportunity to acquire a measure of authority and power within the household - however transitory - together with social status, and protection in the future. In return for this, a woman's 'first duty' as a mother - however grudgingly given - is to care for, nurture, educate, and protect her children, her household, and thus herself.

#### 4.17) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show the way in which cultural notions of *sharam* and *man*, and *dharma* and *seva* inform the way in which my female informants protect and care for the physical, social, moral, and ritual well-being and auspiciousness of their own natal and/or conjugal household, and thus of themselves. Different categories of women have different relationships of care and responsibility in their natal and conjugal households. As unmarried sisters and daughters, women protect the honour of their natal household through their sense of *sharam* and *man*, and of their conjugal household as wives and mothers. As a wife, the *dharma* of a married woman is to care for her husband through *seva* to him. She protects her husband ritually, ensuring his longevity and her own well-being as a *sauhagyavati*. Married women, as daughters and especially sisters, continue to care for and protect their *pihar* through rituals which ensure the well-being of their brothers. As wives and mothers-in-law, women nurture the health and well-being of their *sasara* through their knowledge and practice of family traditions and worship of the *kul devi*. As a mother, a woman brings (hopefully) sons to continue the patriline and ensure her own protection in old age.

But in their 'hidden transcripts', women voice discontent and dissent, as well as a recognition of their subordinate position in relation to men. A major theme expressed in these transcripts from predominantly younger women is of discontent with an ideology in which the *dharma* and *seva* of women to care for husband, children and household is cast as a 'normal' or natural attribute of women. Rather, I have tried to show the ways in which relationships of power, informed by notions of *sharam* and *man*, and moral sanctions employed by men and by other women, can both constrain women to care and limit the possibilities of their resistance. The dissent which my female informants express also challenges the typification of north India women as passively accepting their changed affiliation at marriage - physically, emotionally, and ritually - to their husband's household and patriline. Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, a

married woman's participation in the religious practices of her natal household, has important implications in creating auspiciousness, well-being, and identity in that household.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOTHERS AND OTHERS : WOMEN AND PATRILINES

## 5. ) Introduction

This chapter focuses on procreation, fertility, and motherhood, and specifically on the role of different categories of women in relation to the fertility, protection, and well-being of their natal and conjugal households. Broadly, I am concerned with two issues. The first concerns the contexts in which patrilineal identity is created, and what I see as the hitherto undervalued role of different categories of women in this. In particular, I examine the pre-eminent role of the married *nanad* (HZ) in the life cycle rites of her brother's household. It is suggested that in the rituals enacted during pregnancy, the *nanad* has a crucial ritual role in creating in the potential mother, a male child to continue her own natal patriline. Postpartum rituals suggest that it is the *nanad* who creates the child's social identity. Second, I look at the way in which biomedical health care is integrated into the ritual and household management of pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum. Within these two themes, numerous other issues which relate to fertility, sexuality, and domestic religious worship are raised and discussed. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first part examines theories of procreation and foetal development, the control of fertility, and the consequences of infertility or sub-fertility for women and for the household. The second section focuses on pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum. In order to give some context to this, and to highlight similarities and differences between my informants and their English counter-parts' experiences of these events, I examine the life cycle rites which my Gujarati informants in east London perform, as well as the clinical care they receive at the antenatal hospital. Finally, an over-arching theme of the chapter relates to the notions of *dharma* and *sharam* as cultural constructs which inform women's practices and their perception of themselves as women, but which ultimately create and re-create women as subordinate to men.

### 5.1) FERTILITY: *SHARAM* AND *DHARMA*

### 5.2) Theories of Conception and Foetal Development

Informants point out that the procreation of children in a marriage requires substances from both parents, but there are variant explanations as to how these combine, and whether men and women contribute different substances to the child. One Brahman priest began a discussion of conception by telling me (in English) that there are two things in the universe:

There is *prkruti*. This is nature, the material world. Nature is called mother and this power is called *shakti*. The second thing is *purusa*, almighty power and this is male. The two combine together to create the universe, just as a man puts his seed in the female to create children in ordinary life.

He went on to say that there are five elements in the world - earth which in the body is flesh, blood and bone; the sky, which is a vacuum, where nothing is; water, which we drink and is necessary for the body; wind, *pranavayu*, which is breath; and light, *tej*.

Meg: Are they all present in the body?

Priest: Yes, in the body these are all there. They are inactive unless *purusa* is present. This must be there for there to be life.

Meg: Is *purusa* more important than *prkruti* then?

Priest: They are both important. They are both necessary.

Meg: These elements, do men and women contribute different ones to the child?

Priest: No, they are present in all of us and men and women contribute equally. When they join together the *jivatma* enters into the child's heart. *Jivatma* is the sum total of *karmas* which enable a person to have a new birth. According to his *jivatma*, he will take another life in the next birth. Inside the womb, the mother feeds the child until it is born.

When I asked Hitesh (Appendix B) about conception, he made several similar points:

When a man and a woman join together, a man leaves a substance, *virya* (semen), his seed, in the womb of the woman. This comes to the man in his food. The food becomes flesh, then bones, then blood, and then *virya*. This joins together with the egg (*indun*) inside the womb (*garbhashay*) of the woman. When this happens, *jivatma* (life-soul) comes into the heart of the foetus (*garbha*).

Meg: Does this mean that the blood and bones and flesh come from the father?

Hitesh: Yes, but they come from the mother too because the mother feeds these things inside the womb. When the baby is in the womb, it can't say to God 'please look after me'. The mother has to do this for it. But when the baby is born, it says 'waa waa', here I am and then things are done for the baby until it is old enough to do it for himself.

I found my female informants far more reticent when it came to talking about sex and it is perhaps for this reason, that none of them gave me the kind of detailed information these two men offered. At EL one morning with Yogini, Kanta, Sadhana, Surbhi, Bhanu, and Neema, I tried to initiate a discussion on sex but did not get far. When I asked how a child was conceived, Yogini, blushing to her hairline, said that it was *kami* (passion). Having got over this hurdle, not unsurprising given the public context, the women did go on to talk more about conception. Like some of my other older informants, Yogini, Kanta, and Sadhana did not use the term *virya*, but referred to the 'thing from the man'. Some younger informants, though, did mention the term in private conversations if I brought it up first, or asked them if this was what they meant by the 'thing from the man'.

Female informants were divided between the minority who said that the *virya* - however expressed - from the male mixed with the blood (*lohi*) within the womb (*garbhashay*); and the majority who said that this combined with an egg in the womb to form a foetus (*garbha*). They did not speak in terms of blood, bones, and flesh coming from the male, but they did point out that initially, the foetus is a mass of flesh, or meat (*mans*), which begins to take on some shape in the fifth month. The *jivatma* lives within the heart (*haraday* or *haday*) of the foetus, but there was no overall consensus as to when this occurs. Some women, like the two men above, pointed out that this was present from the moment of conception. Others observed that this occurred during the fifth month when the foetus began to take shape and to move. Women and men told me that by the seventh month, the foetus is fully formed (cf. Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:76). The term *garbha* is replaced with the phrase *balak avvanun che*, meaning that the baby is coming (cf. Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:76). During the remainder of the pregnancy it matures in the mother's womb. One man, explaining why he had not allowed his wife to be 'induced' as the doctors wanted, said that if the baby 'is in her stomach for another two or three weeks it will be complete, but if they induce it now it won't be fully developed'.

Although the term *garbhashay* (womb) was used by some informants, a more commonly used term was *kothalo* (sack). According to Sadhana, Kamla, Kanta, and Yogini at EL, this sack is separate from the *garbhashay*. Other women I asked, though, said that this was not the case. When I asked women to point out where the *kothalo* was on their body, they invariably described an area extending from under the rib cage to the pubis. This whole area is also referred to as the stomach (*pet*), with little differentiation of organs within it. It is this sack which releases the water before the baby is born. Women located the placenta variously under the diaphragm, near the umbilicus, or to one or another side of the abdomen. The term *ora* was used by Bhanu, Jasvanti, and Hasmita. Bhanu said that this was the 'proper' word for it, but Sadhana and the other women at EL referred to it as *kachara*, meaning dirt, which is the same term used to describe the blood passed after childbirth. According to these women, the placenta acts as a kind of filter churning up the food the mother eats. A little of the juice (*ras*) from the food passes to the foetus to nourish it during the period of gestation. The mechanism whereby this occurs was only vaguely articulated. Yogini said that the cord went into the mouth of the foetus while it was in the sack. Kanta, however, disagreed. She said that the cord from the mother went to the placenta in the stomach. The food passed through this and reached the foetus via its umbilicus (*dunti*). Discussions with other women, including younger women, confirmed other similar if vague ideas of how food passes from the mother to the foetus.

There are several points to make here. The first concerns the notion of seed and field as a metaphor for procreation, which has been widely reported in South Asia (Mayer 1960:203; Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976; Inden 1976; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Parry 1979; Khare 1982), and elsewhere (Ngubane 1977; Delaney 1986). None of my informants explicitly volunteered such a perception of procreation, and when I put this to some of the women at EL, they were rather nonplussed by my questions. Perhaps this could be explained by their reluctance to use the term *virya*, or the English term 'seed', unlike the two male informants earlier.<sup>12</sup> But even the latter did not refer to the female

input in terms of women being 'like a field'. The male semen combines either with a woman's blood in the womb or with an egg. Hitesh is quite clear that it is from the semen that a child's flesh, bones, and blood originate, with the priest less so. Inden and Nicholas (1977:52,54) observe that in Bengal, semen is regarded as the source of 'hard' structures - bones, nerves and marrow - while uterine blood is the source of 'soft' structures - skin, flesh and blood. Werbner (1986:236), on the other hand, notes that among Pakistanis in Manchester, semen is regarded as 'stronger' and 'hotter' than a woman's blood and that because of this strength, the infant's blood originates from the father. For her informants, bones, which depend on nourishment for growth, 'originate with the mother' (ibid:247 n10).

Parry (1979) and McGilvray (1982) take this further when they indicate that among their informants, there were different and sometimes conflicting notions of procreation. Parry (ibid:133) points out that in Kangra, when discussing the *kul*, or line of patrilineal descent, informants spoke of people of the clan as being of 'one blood', utilizing the theory that the blood comes from the father and the milk from the mother with the mother's womb as a field in which the seed is sown. In a different context, however, when discussing potential marriage partners (ibid:223-4), a second view is advanced wherein blood is seen to have two components 'which a rather sophisticated informant likened to a positive and negative currents in an electrical charge'. The positive aspect was common to members of the clan and passed through the male line. The negative comes from the mother and is constantly changing. A person has the blood of one's mother and father's mother in one's body, but not that of one's father's father's mother. Parry links this to the notion that while there is an absolute ban on marrying into the clan of one's mother and father's mother, marriage can take place within the natal clan of the father's father's mother once the father is dead. Similarly in Batticaloa, McGilvray (ibid:52-3) found at least three competing theories of conception which he links to a conflict in beliefs between a matrilineal tradition of the peoples of Batticaloa, and the patrilineal ideology impinging from Jaffna and Tamil Nadu. In other

words, not only do theories of procreation differ between different cultural groups in South Asia, but within these groups there are competing theories of procreation which are contextually and geographically variable.

My female informants were less vocal in attributing the child's blood to the father, but in other contexts there is some evidence to support this. For example, when talking with Nita - in English - about remarriage one afternoon, I asked her if her children would change their name if she remarried. This, she said, would not be possible. Her husband would never allow the 'children of his blood' to change their name. I said 'but a woman changes her name when she marries'. Nita agreed and said that 'the boy carries on the generations and that's why he is very important. But the girl changes her name to her husband'. When I asked if this meant that a woman is then related by blood to her husband's family after she marries, Nita replied 'no, she stays the blood relative of her own family. She doesn't give up these ties but she does take her husband's name'. This suggests that a child's patrilineal membership is determined by the blood of the father. While a woman changes her name at marriage, she continues to be affiliated to her own patriline through ties of blood. This, as we shall see, has important implications in the role of the HZ at life cycle rites.

That Hindus hold several different theories of procreation would seem to confirm Carol Delaney's (1986) recent argument concerning monogenetic theories of procreation and monotheism. She points out (ibid:496) that among her Turkish informants, the 'theory of procreation can be stated very simply. The male is said to place the seed and the woman is said to be like a field'. To the male is attributed creative power such that the child originates from the father's seed and creates its essential identity (ibid:496-7). Women on the other hand, are the 'ever-renewable soil utilized for the creation of men' (ibid:503). While women's nurturing capacity is valued, the substance they provide comes ultimately from men as it is the male who is thought to engender both males and females (ibid:497).

Delaney goes on to argue that this monogenetic theory of procreation - which implies that a child originates from only one source (ibid:496) - is consistent with monotheism, or rather that 'monogenesis and monotesim are two aspects of the same system, in triune form' (ibid:502).

However, while this may hold for her Turkish informants, as Jan Savage (1991:9) has recently pointed out, her female English informants hold two notions of procreation: one in which both parents contribute equally to the creation of child through the genetic material they both pass to the child; and another in which the 'unique, creative power is attributed to the male parent', while the female parent provides the child with continuing nurturance (ibid). In other words, English women, like the South Asians noted above, hold different theories of procreation. Furthermore, Delaney's assertion that maternal nurture is of less importance than the male contribution of transcendent creativity, is not born out by my informants, as indeed it was not among the English women Savage interviewed (ibid:81). Both male and female informants stressed the nurturance provided by women, with the male informants giving it equal prominence, while the majority of women - those at EL and Jasvanti, Hemkurva, Nita, Hasmita, and Savita - accorded it a central place in procreation. This also agrees with McGilvray's (1982:53) findings when he notes that whichever of the three theories of procreation are advanced, all informants agreed that the subsequent gestation and development of the child drew solely on the blood of the female.

What is also important among my male and female informants is that the nurture which comes from the mother includes moral qualities (*guna*). Hitesh told me that these qualities come from the father and the mother 'but a lot comes from the mother, from her mind. The mother has much influence'. In common with other parts of South Asia (Reissland and Burghart 1988:465-66), and the Middle East (Maher 1984:107; Sered 1988:512), my informants observed that a woman can affect her child during pregnancy through her own sensory perceptions. One man told of how his daughter had spent some time in bed prior to

the birth of her child. On the wall opposite the bed was a picture of a Chinese man which she often found herself looking at. When her daughter was born, the almond-shaped eyes and fair skin of this image had been transferred to the child through her mother's visual senses during pregnancy. As Reissland and Burghart (1988:465-6) note, this sense of physicality entails a notion that through the medium of one's sensory perceptions, the quality of objects, as well as humans, can be transferred from one person to another. Perhaps it is stretching a point, but if we refer back to earlier discussions on the menarche (4.7), this sense of physicality may account for the idea that pregnancy could occur through 'touching boys'.

A final point I want to make concerns the notion of the *jivatma* (life-soul). Again, there was not complete agreement although different opinions fell into two main camps. Some informants said that the *jivatma* entered the heart of the foetus at conception. Others said that this occurred at the fifth month (cf. Bennett 1976:21; Kondos 1982:253; Reissland and Burghart 1987:231. Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989:76) note three months in Uttar Pradesh). Whether from conception or from the fifth month, the wandering soul takes up life in the heart of the foetus. The *jivatma*, as the priest notes, is the 'sum total of *karmas*' (actions) from previous lives. Reissland and Burghart (1987:231) observe that among women in Mithila, from the fifth month the child is thought to 'possess a mind-soul such that it is already a person'. The child can use the mother as a vehicle of its own desires. Pregnancy cravings, for example, are felt to be those of the infant, not of the mother. The informants I asked about this at EL were sceptical, saying that these were 'old wives' stories. What informants were certain of was that if abortion (*garbhapat*) was contemplated - and many women and the few men I asked felt this should never be done - it must take place before the fifth month otherwise this would be taking a life. By the fifth month then, if not before, the foetus is endowed with a life-soul. However, it is still tied to the mother who nourishes it during pregnancy and, as Hitesh's comments make clear, it is not considered autonomous until it is able to 'do things' for itself.

### 5.3) Pregnancy and *Sharam*

As with knowledge of the menarche, many women - including some in their early twenties and thirties - told me that they knew nothing of sexual intercourse or what to expect when they were married. Certainly they were not supposed to have knowledge of this, although some women did point out they knew they would have 'relations' with their husband. Older women said that they were told by their mothers to behave modestly in front of their husband and to do what was asked of them. An older sister or aunt is expected to discuss this with a woman before her marriage but, as noted earlier, it would seem that little if any information on sexual intercourse is communicated.

Even with my closest informants in private, discussing sexual intercourse with them was hard going. On one occasion when Hasmita was talking about the differences in her life now that she no longer lived with her mother-in-law, she said that one thing she had not thought of was that her husband would be more 'loving'. In a joint household, she said, there is not the privacy but, now they were on their own, he had become much more 'loving'. When I asked her if what she meant by 'loving' was sex, she blushed and agreed. She seemed to be implying that this was not welcome and when I asked if this were so, she mumbled something about the children and all the work she had to do before changing the subject completely. Nita was a bit more forthcoming but her experiences were coloured by her husband's ill-treatment of her. 'Sex is something the mens (sic) want but for women it isn't this way. I wanted my childrens (sic) but I didn't enjoy how I got them'. Apart from Yogini's fleeting reference to *kami* (passion), Bhanu was the only informant prepared to discuss sexual intercourse in these terms:

Of course there is *kami* between a man and a woman. At the marriage ceremony, when we walk around the fire we do this four times. I asked the priest [at her niece's wedding] about it. The first time is for *dharma*, religion, the second time is for arth, for money, the third one is for *kami*, for happiness in sex and I can't remember the fourth one. I didn't know this before myself but it's in our religion to enjoy sex.

Meg: Then why don't women talk about it if they are supposed to enjoy it?

Bhanu: Because we are brought up not to talk about it. It is *sharam*, you know, something we're supposed to be shy about. A woman would never say to someone "oh, my husband is so sexy". She would just never say it.

Bhanu was a kind of oracle during fieldwork, someone who helped to shed light on my data and who suggested lines of enquiry. But even with her there were limits as to what she was prepared to discuss with me. As well as *sharam*, she told me that perhaps other women would not talk to me about sex because I was not married and that therefore I could not know anything about it. 'You know, not really know anything'. So while as a nurse, I was asked all kinds of questions about menstrual problems, vaginal discharge, contraception, illnesses and so on, because I was not married I would not really know anything about sex. This seems to suggest that women do talk about sex but in what terms I do not know. I have no data then, on how women express desire or pleasure in sexual relations, whether they enjoy it, whether they see it as part of their *dharma* as a wife, whether like Nita, it is something which men 'want' and not women, or whether it is simply a means to achieving motherhood.

Women also told me that their lack of knowledge of the 'signs' of pregnancy meant that, with their first child, many did not know they had conceived. Hemkurva, whose first pregnancy occurred ten years earlier in East Africa, described an experience which others in similar circumstances also expressed:

Ba [her mother-in-law] told me about being pregnant. I was sick and vomiting and always tired. This was about five or six weeks and we were sitting at the table eating and I was sick and my father-in-law and my husband said you should go to the doctor and get some medicine. But *ba* said no, I didn't have to go to the doctor and then later she told me that I was pregnant.

While in Hemkurva's case it was her mother-in-law who identified her pregnancy, for other women it may be a sister or sister-in-law who already has children who is the agent of knowledge. Kala was twenty-four and expecting her first child two months after I met her at the antenatal clinic when I was conducting interviews there. She was born in Kenya and came to Britain to marry three years earlier. When I

asked what she knew about getting pregnant before her marriage, she said:

I didn't really know much. I wasn't sure how I would know about it. I knew **how** I got pregnant but that was all. I didn't know what was the matter at first. I said to my sister-in-law, "look, I'm getting so fat I'll have to do something about it". But I didn't know I was pregnant. Then I started getting sick and I told my sister-in-law and she said I'd better go to the doctor because I was pregnant. She'd just had a baby you see, and she took me to the doctor.

Although some women told me that they knew that pregnancy occurred through 'relations with my husband', this knowledge did not seem to extend to knowing when they were pregnant for the first time.

I shall digress for a moment here. One evening I had gone to talk with Dipak (Appendix F), who had been recommended as a 'good' person to talk to about my research by her mother-in-law with whom Mangala put me in touch. Dipak had recently given birth and I was asking her some questions about food, breast feeding and so on. We got on to various 'Gujarati' illnesses - which, she explained, doctors know nothing of - and especially *amboi*.<sup>(2)</sup> This is characterized by a displacement of the umbilicus either upward or downward from its true position. Shanta, and several women from UP, gave various causes of *amboi*, especially eating too much heavy (*bhare*) or stale (*vasi*) food, or lifting heavy weights, which Dipak also noted. The illness gives rise to persistent stomach pain, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting. Treatment aims to re-align the umbilicus through massage and other means.<sup>(3)</sup> While we were talking, Dipak's husband came home from his job at the Ford car factory and, after the introductions, his wife brought him up to date on our discussion. His contribution was illuminating in that one of the main causes he told me (in English) was 'having sex too soon after eating'. Dipak did not blink an eyelid, neither did she blush at the mention of the word. This was not the only occasion when men I had barely met, used the word sex quite openly.

The point I am trying to make here is that the comparative openness with which men talk about sex - and with Dipak's husband, like

the Brahman priest and Hitesh above, this was my first interview with them - and the embarrassed silence which mention of the word brought from women, even those I counted as close informants. Can women know so little about sexual relations and conception? From what Bhanu told me, and what other informants confirmed, some young women are certainly 'naive' when they marry but this does not account for the reluctance of married women to discuss sex. I suggested in the previous chapter (4.6) that the early socialization of female informants of notions of *sharam* and *man*, permeate their adult cultural milieu (Kandiyoti 1988:285). Even for women like Bhanu, higher education and social class has made little in-roads into the emotions which these concepts arouse. I shall return to this when I discuss antenatal care at the local maternity hospital later in the chapter.

#### 5.4) Controlling Fertility: Social Aspects

Older informants and some younger women told me that, not long after marriage, their mother-in-law especially but also other female members of the household and extended kin group, would look for signs of pregnancy making disparaging remarks if this was long delayed. After seven months of marriage, Kusum, a young woman at EL, privately told one of her teachers one morning that she was three months pregnant. When news got around, Surbhi, not long married herself, was scornful. She told me on the bus going home that 'she [Kusum] will be like the animals on my father's farm, always having kids. I'm not doing this. We want to get settled first and then may be two, three kids. No more'. Whether from personal preference - which may have as much to do with the desire to establish oneself in the conjugal home as it has with personal choice - or because of pressure from a mother-in-law or husband, some women do want children soon after they marry. Others, like Surbhi, want to delay this for a year or two to 'get settled' financially or, as another woman put it, to 'get to know my husband'. Kersha, at twenty-six, was unusual in that she had no children after seven years of marriage. She and her husband and his parents were saving in order to join her husband's three older siblings in America. She counted herself lucky to have her mother-in-law's support for her

actions. Her mother-in-law was very 'modern and liberal' and, while 'other people are funny about it sometimes, she understands and never says anything to me about it. She knows why we are doing it'.

Whether or not the first pregnancy is delayed for a time after marriage, however, the idea of limiting the number of children to two, or perhaps three, was voiced by young as well as older women for several reasons. Aspirations for the economic and social advancement of their children and their improved prospects in marriage, rest largely on higher standards of education. Where feasible, for boys as well as girls, some parents consider private education, or supplemented private tuition for those attending state school. A smaller family means that parents are better situated financially to provide this. Among my informants there is also considerable social prestige attached to smaller families. Other South Asians, and especially 'Muslim people', are often viewed unfavourably as 'low' or 'ignorant' because they are perceived to have a large number of children. When I was on a day trip to Epping Forest (raining again), Rekha's daughter was slating in her criticisms of a Pakistani woman trying to get off the coach with four young children: 'my father says two, three children and finish. There should be proper spacing between them, not like rabbits'. Rekha herself had four children but this did not seem to make any impression on her daughter. Among informants of child-bearing age, though, they envisaged no more than two or three children. This was also supported by their husband. An additional factor relates to women's health. Older women said that they tried to regulate the number of pregnancies by exercising 'control', meaning sexual abstinence, for the period they nursed their previous child, enabling them also to regain their strength. Just how their husband viewed this I do not know. But most of these women had experienced at least five pregnancies and sometimes considerably more, as well as miscarriage, sometimes stillbirth, and the early death of some of their children. This, they remarked, had a very poor effect on their own health. They were positive in their attitude toward contraception as now, with fewer children, women's health had improved considerably.

The few men I spoke to were in agreement with these sentiments, although their reasons were more in terms of finance and status. One man told me that with the cost of marriage now he would 'never keep his head above water' with 'hundreds of kids'. Kanta (Appendix D), a Darji, in a different context and talking about a different subject, told me that in her 'community' 'we don't do this. We are not like Patels'. I have pointed out that marriage and marriage transactions were not a focal point of my study so 'dowry inflation' may not apply to all castes. Nonetheless, for those where this is an issue - 'Patels', Lohana, Vaniya, and some Brahmans at least - financial considerations of parents in terms of smaller families was certainly mentioned. Men also stressed that with 'modern' and 'scientific' health care, women no longer died in childbirth and infant deaths were, in Dilip's words 'a thing of the past'.

#### 5.5) Contraception: Perceptions and Access

Contraception varied between the use of the sheath, oral contraception, and Intra-Uterine Devices (IUD's). None of my main female informants said that they used the 'cap', or diaphragm, as a method of birth control. One could perhaps conclude that this is related to the notion of the impurity of bodily secretions and the reluctance to insert the cap into the vagina. Many of these women, though, did not know of the diaphragm as a form of contraception. This could, perhaps, be a reflection of biomedical practice which, until recently, has emphasized the IUD and the Pill as favoured methods of female contraception. Sterilization is an option for some women who have several children, usually no less than three, although this is not unproblematic. The woman's age was given as a major factor in making the decision and, although both husband and wife may agree that they want no more children, sterilization may be discounted on the grounds that if anything were to happen to the children, a woman's fecundity would need to be active. As far as vasectomies for men were concerned, the only reliable data I have come from three women who said that they had discussed this with their husband but that he had refused. None of the women would say more than that their 'husband

didn't want it'. Perhaps this has something to do with Indira Gandhi's 'forced sterilization' programme which a few women mentioned. It may be that, as the woman is held responsible for fertility, she is also held responsible for the suspension of her fertility once she has given birth. Or it may be that a man may feel his masculinity is threatened if he is sterile. My data, unfortunately, are inadequate to answer these questions.

In discussions concerning contraception, it was in my capacity as a nurse that women would often approach me for advice and information which centred on two major areas of concern: any irregularity in their menstrual cycle, including vaginal discharge; and the effect of different forms of contraception on the body. While the monthly menses is a normal occurrence, other discharge is perceived to be indicative of ill-health and is often associated with weakness and skin problems (cf. Bennett 1976:13). The amount of blood passed each month should be balanced but, like some of their English counter-parts - from my experience of them as a nurse - Gujarati women point out that oral contraception reduces the length of the period and the amount of blood passed. Especially if this is accompanied by weight gain, however, my informants view this in terms of a build-up of unclean blood and heat in the body which is said to become very strong and powerful (*shakti sali*). Those who have, or have had, IUD's, complained of greater blood loss, pain, and feelings of weakness and tiredness. With oral contraception and IUD's, a major concern is that too much or too little blood passed may impede conception in the future and debilitate a woman's health. This suspension of their fertility, through either oral contraception or an IUD, seems to suggest that one way or another a woman's body is not in balance. This imbalance relates to her sexuality in that she is either too *garam* (hot) and *takat* (strong), both of which it is felt make women aggressive and, as Bhanu told me, 'sexy'; or she is debilitated, weak and *thanda* (cool) from excessive blood loss. The former makes a woman sexually aggressive and, while I was not told this, it is possible to infer perhaps that the latter makes her unreceptive to the sexual advances of her husband. The use

of the sheath, on the other hand, did not interfere with her menstrual cycle or her bodily balance.

From my conversations with women what they wanted was information as to how these forms of contraception 'worked' in their body: when to commence contraception following a birth; whether it would affect their milk supply if they were breast feeding; if it would cause vaginal discharge; and how 'safe' (in terms of effectiveness) it was. I noted in Chapter Three the way in which notions of *sharam* and *man* in female relationships across generations in the household constrain discussion on sex and menstruation. A similar attitude applies to contraception. With intra-generational women, though, this was not the case and in several households, young *vahus* knew of each other's method of contraception. For Hemkurva and Bharti, this knowledge extended to 'cousin-sisters' and the wives of 'cousin-brothers'. Women can also utilize their own networks for this information. It seemed to me that this topic was discussed reasonably freely among younger women.

From the conversations I had with women in their home or at meetings, what emerged was that for some, access through health professionals to this information - including the range of contraceptives available - was problematic. Some told me that it was their husband who decided on the form of contraception to use. Others discussed it first with their husband who then consulted the GP - a pattern which repeated itself in relation to menstrual problems. This suggests that these topics are discussed between husband and wife, although this may have something to do with how long they have been married. Sarka, Rahina, and Kusum at EL, said that they would never discuss this with their husband. Other women, though, who had been married longer, were not so constrained. Consulting the GP themselves posed a problem not only because, in many cases he was male, but also because in the majority of cases he was also South Asian. Hemkurva had used oral contraception but wanted a change because she felt she was gaining too much weight. However, she had heard through friends that the 'coil' caused heavy bleeding and pain. Like many other women, she

was unaware that there are numerous forms of oral contraception and was unaware of the 'cap' as a method of birth control. When I suggested that she discuss this with her GP, she was categorical in her refusal: 'no, not that, I can't do that. It's too embarrassing. He comes here to the house to visit Tara [her daughter] you know. I can't ask him'.

There were female GP's in Newham - although when I was contacting GP's (see Appendix A) only three of these were female. This did not seem to loom large in why a particular GP was chosen to 'sign on' with. When I asked seven women at EL, Hemkurva, Hasmita, and Bhanu, this process was rather haphazard. For some it meant that when they married they 'signed on' with the GP the rest of the household attended. For others it was a case of a GP near-by, many of whom were also South Asian. When she arrived in England, Surbhi registered with her husband's household's GP who was English, as he was 'not far away'. These women did not really have much say in their choice of GP as it was either the husband who registered the household or, the household was already registered with a particular GP when they arrived. They were all reluctant to change their GP (all of whom were male) to a female doctor. The reason given for this was that the GP 'knew the family'.

These women felt that discussing issues such as contraception or menstrual problems with a male South Asian GP, who would share similar notions of female modesty and appropriate behaviour between the sexes, would be even more embarrassing than with an English GP. In Hemkurva's case this was made more difficult because the doctor visited the house frequently to care for her daughter who was a diabetic. But similar sentiments were echoed by other women who do not have this extra dimension in their relationship with their male doctor. In addition to this, there is the difficulty of finding appropriate language in this context to express their problems adequately without compromising their modesty. I shall return to this later in the chapter.

Limiting the number of children is viewed positively by old and young alike but it can be a cause of some consternation if two or three of the children are female. As we saw in the previous chapter, although some married daughters are able to extend care to elderly parents, it is largely the case that parents look to a son and his wife for care and protection. This is as much the case for men, such as Mukhta's widowed father-in-law (3.2), as it is for women. We have also seen that although brother and sister share the same blood, women marry out to continue the patriline of their husband while a son carries on his father's line. Sons also perform the funerary rites for their parents. If a woman dies before her husband, he is the chief mourner but a woman cannot do this for her husband. I have little data on these rites but what I do have - mainly from Hemkurva, Dilip, and Prabha - confirms other north Indian practices (Parry 1979: especially 137-142) but in a modified form. For example, traditionally women did not attend the actual rites themselves but now there are 'English funerals' which include both sexes. A Brahman priest told me that when a person dies a little of the outer body (*sthula sharir*) goes with the soul to wander as a *preta* (ghost). As Parry (1985:614-5) points out, the object of the funerary rites is to convert this ghost into an ancestor (*pitra*).

The preference for a son has been noted in South Asia itself (Bennett 1976; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989) and among South Asians in Britain (Homans 1982:247). On many occasions I was told that now 'boys and girls are the same, there is no difference'. I do feel, however, that in many cases these were sentiments for a public western audience, namely myself. Female informants without children or with no son, as well as the men I asked, did want to have at least one son but this was also juxtaposed with considerations of family size. When Hemkurva gave birth to her third daughter, her remark that there would be 'no more children, Mira is my son', was forcefully echoed by her husband and mother-in-law who all agreed that, financially, three children were 'enough'. When I asked Dilip who would perform his funerary rites, he told me that any of this brother's children - in this case his classificatory brothers - could perform the ritual

because all these children were 'brothers'. Jasvanti on the other hand, had two daughters aged six and three, and was under some pressure from 'my in-laws' to have another child in the hope of having a son. She was, though, very ambivalent about it because her youngest daughter was now at nursery school 'and I'm free. I really don't want to be washing nappies and things again'. Like some other young women, for Jasvanti it was not only economics, status, and maternal health which were factors in limiting family size; she also expressed a desire to be 'free', perhaps to return to work or undertake some kind of training programme - in other words, to satisfy her own personal aspirations.

#### 5.6) Miscarriage and Stillbirth

Despite the desire to delay the first pregnancy among some women, and the concern to limit the size of the family, female fertility remains of central importance, no more so than when a woman's fertility is called into question. Miscarriage (*kasuvavada*), difficulty in conceiving, sterility (*vanajhiya*), and sometimes the failure to have a son, are generally assumed - at least initially among my informants<sup>4</sup> - to be problems which lie with women (cf. Sharma 1978:10; Stone 1978:10; McGilvray 1982:62; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:89). At the beginning of my fieldwork, I asked two women on separate occasions to write down the term for sterility. They gave me *vanajhiya*, but also added *strine kon balak nahi* - a woman who has no child. Some time later, when I asked several women at EL if *vanajhiya* could also be applied to men, they were hesitant at first before saying that they supposed it could. The term itself seems to imply that it is women and not men who are infertile. If a daughter fails to conceive or experiences recurrent miscarriage, her natal family may attempt to deflect criticism by looking to her husband and his patriline to locate responsibility. One woman, for instance, told me that her husband's sister had been married for twelve years and, despite several operations, had no children. The woman's husband had had many tests which showed that it was not his fault: 'but it is in his family. There are many there who have no children. It is his family

who are like this and not my husband's family'. However, within the context of her *sasara*, several women told me that, as Nita put it 'like everything else, the woman gets the blame'. Apart from those younger women who had decided to delay their first child, all my married informants had children. A few, as we shall see, experienced temporary infertility, and so comments made in this section about infertility are based on discussions with women who have children.

Miscarriage is said to occur for several different reasons, all or some of which may be advanced in any one situation. As we shall see, while there are few restrictions of diet during pregnancy, a commonly expressed idea was that an excess of *garam* (hot) food during pregnancy could result in miscarriage. While *garam* food is beneficial in increasing the blood flow if one's period is light, during pregnancy the same effect can induce miscarriage. Too much work in the home, lifting heavy weights, failing to rest, and 'stress' or 'problems', are also commonly noted. Retrospective explanations also point to omissions by women in their ritual practice, including the failure to periodically honour and worship the Mata.

In theory, a woman does not announce her pregnancy until at least the third month as this is recognized as a period when she is vulnerable to miscarriage. In fact, a woman should not 'announce' her pregnancy at all for this would be shameful. If a woman does miscarry within the first three months, the hopeful lack of public knowledge of her pregnancy to some extent deflects the shame of her failure, but this is still known within the household. As one young woman put it, if you miscarry 'you would feel terrible...you don't say anything about it, you don't talk about it outside the house and even then, there are only some people you could tell'. Who you can tell depends to a large extent on a woman's age and her position in the household. If she miscarries with her first pregnancy, before she has been able to prove her fertility and establish close relations with other members of the household, her situation is particularly vulnerable and open to criticism. Her mother-in-law may provide little support blaming the woman herself and perhaps commenting adversely on her

natal family. This was certainly Jasvanti's experience when she miscarried with her first pregnancy. Whether or not a woman's *jethani* (He9W) or *nanad* (HZ) is more sympathetic depends, as Surbhi remarked, on the relationship 'you know, how close you are and how old you are. This is very difficult when you're first married but it changes a bit when you're older'. In Chapter 3.2 we saw some of the potential areas of conflict a young *vahu* can experience with these categories of women in her *sasara* - with a *jethani* as a rival in terms of the parental estate, and a *nanad* for the affection of a woman's husband. But as Surbhi points out, this changes 'a bit when you're older' as these women probably have children of their own.

The relationship between husband and wife is also important in this situation for the emotional and personal support of her husband can help to alleviate criticisms from other family members. For some women it is their mother to whom they turn and, as we saw in the previous chapter, women like Jasvanti returned to stay with her mother in her brother's household following a miscarriage with her first child.

While it is not possible to hide the fact of miscarriage in the household, the notion that it is not openly discussed and is hidden as much as possible from public knowledge is very strongly held. It is a thing of *sharam*. In a group discussion following a film on pregnancy at EL, Bhanu summed up the 'silence' which surrounds the topic in this way:

May be you would be sitting around like this seventeen years later, like today, and someone would say, "Oh yes, I had a miscarriage once". That would be the first time anyone heard of her having a miscarriage. No one would know before then. You just don't talk about it. A woman has to get over that depression and things by herself. You don't go around telling people about it. You don't say that you had a miscarriage.

But women do, of course, talk about miscarriage and acknowledged to me at least, any they had suffered. However, they were able to speak from a position of security in the knowledge that they had children who were alive and well.

When Kusum threatened to miscarry not long after she had affirmed her pregnancy with us at EL, Bhanu said that Kusum's mother-in-law had taken her to the GP. Kusum had seen a few spots of blood (*lohi*) and the GP had told her to rest. Other women confirmed that it was indeed the case that the GP was consulted. They also said that *thanda* (cold) food should be eaten. Savita told me that she was learning from her friend, caste mate, and teacher, Labhu, how to do massage for threatened miscarriage. She assured me that many women sought this treatment but I do not know if Kusum took this option.

As far as stillbirth is concerned, I was told that this is even less discussed than miscarriage. When I asked women how many children they had, their responses referred to the number of live children and those who had survived a normal birth. However, when I asked how many pregnancies they experienced, some of my older informants recited lists which included miscarriages and stillbirths which often included the sex of the child. No death pollution appears to attach to the family except the normal pollution which accrues to a woman during menstruation. The child does not receive a name and it is buried rather than cremated (cf. Carter 1982:129).<sup>(5)</sup> Bennett (1976:15) observes that a recurrent theme which emerged from discussions among women in Nepal, was the effect of childbearing on a woman's health. A Gujarati saying to the effect that a miscarriage is equal to seven pregnancies reflects a similar concern among my informants. As well as the notion that miscarriage and stillbirth reflect a failure on the part of women, like childbirth they have a debilitating effect on the body. With miscarriage, however, special care must be taken otherwise this may impede the chance of conceiving in the future.

### 5.7) Infertility

The importance placed on fertility means that any problems a woman has in conceiving is cause for considerable anxiety and worry. As we have seen in the previous chapter, while women may express doubts about motherhood after the event, not to have children, as one woman told me 'is a terrible thing'. As a mother, a woman brings good fortune,

health, and well-being to her husband's household through (hopefully) the sons she bears to continue the patriline. A barren woman on the other hand, poses a threat to that well-being and the well-being of other households. The 'cause' of *najar* (evil eye) in young healthy children, for example, is often attributed to the envious and jealous intentions of infertile or sub-fertile women - often Muslim women. 'e' When women themselves spoke of the inability to have children - whether of women they knew or as an abstract idea - they expressed considerable sympathy in recognizing the consequences of this and, particularly, no one to care for them in their old age. The situation may be different if, say, one of two daughters-in-law are unable to have a child which could affect the distribution of the parental estate. However, while recognizing that childlessness may be due to a physical problem, such as 'blocked tubes', the 'cause' may also be located in an omission by the woman in her ritual practice or in a failure to honour the Mata.

Biomedicine, as well as other forms of therapy are sought - usually simultaneously - if infertility or sub-fertility occurs. I was told of, but did not meet, Ayurvedic practitioners who specialize in treating such women. These treatments include the use of herbal preparations and a dietary regime. My informants were rather vague as to the precise details of this treatment as none said they had consulted Ayurvedic practitioners for this purpose. Jasvanti told me that, following her miscarriage, her mother had given her *garam* food to 'get rid of the blood', and had recommended rest. She had also suggested that Jasvanti 'do Tuesdays' - in other words, undertake a vow which I shall come to soon - to seek the help of the Mata. Bhanu, who had experienced several miscarriages while in East Africa, also said that she had not consulted any Ayurvedic practitioners there but, she thought, in any case there were not too many of them around. Savita told me that Labhu, a woman with knowledge (*jnan*) of various traditional medicines and remedies, had her own specific ways of treating this but it was not something she would tell anyone else. In contexts where I asked women about treatment for illness, a similar

point was made that these traditional healers had their own secret remedies and decoctions.

Some younger women - Nita, Mangala, Bharti, and Amba in particular - were dismissive of traditional medicine in these circumstances, noting that if a woman's tubes were blocked, or her womb diseased, it would be of little use. In common with older women, they emphasized the effectiveness of biomedical treatment which may include surgery. For instance, when I asked Nita what she would do if she married again and found she could not have children (which she told me she would want to do), she said that she would seek help from her doctor and, if necessary, her (hoped-for) husband would have to pay for private (biomedical) treatment. However, what all women stressed, at least the married women I knew, was that if a woman was desperate to become pregnant she would try any treatment which might help her to conceive.

#### 5.8) The Mata's Blessing

Whether or not such therapy is successful depends on whether the Mata (mother goddess) extends her grace to the infertile or sub-fertile woman. The Mata, I was frequently told, should periodically be invited into the house to ask for her blessing and protection. Failure to do so is used by women in their narratives to account for illness or distress, to explain why a woman's pregnancy was difficult, or the birth prolonged or complicated, or to account for problems in conceiving or carrying a child to term. She is appealed to not only for problems with fertility but to bestow her grace and protection on the household for its well-being and health. These ceremonies can be held at any time, although women said the most auspicious time was at *norta*, the festival of 'Nine Nights' especially for the Mata.

At EL one lunchtime, when many of the women had drifted away after the class, Bhanu, Yogini, Kanta, Surbhi, and myself were chatting when we got to talking about the imminent birth of Sarka's baby. Bhanu remarked that she did not look well and hoped that

everything would be all right: 'you know, I don't think she has asked the Mata to her house. She doesn't do *kholo*'<sup>7</sup> in her family'. But, I objected, what could Sarka do if this was not the tradition in the family? Bhanu hesitated, but Surbhi saved the day by saying that Sarka's household was like her own - she did not do *kholo* either but they both did *be lota*. A *lota* is a stainless steel pot or jug which features in many such rituals including, as we shall see, the seventh month ceremony at a woman's first pregnancy. *Be* (two) *lota* means that for each *lota* placed in front of the shrine, seven women, or at least an uneven number of women, are invited to the ceremony. Whether it is nine women or three women, for example, depends a great deal on one's financial situation.

When I asked women and men why uneven numbers of women were invited to this and other similar ceremonies, no one seemed to know. 'This is just what we do' was a common response. However, when I was talking with Mukhta (Appendix F) one afternoon, she gave me an almanac which relatives in Gujarat had sent her. The context of our discussion centred on her wish to have a boy after two girls. She directed me to the astrological chart which indicated the best days to conceive if one wanted a boy, all of which were even numbers. Mukhta had tried this, as well as another ritual which I shall describe, with success. Perhaps, then, uneven numbers are associated with women and even numbers with men. This seemed to make more sense when Surbhi told me that in her family 'we do *be lota* for the first boy'. However, *ek* (one) *lota* is done for each boy after that. The invited women are said to be representatives of the seven sisters of the Mata. 'They are like the Mata' I was told, so perhaps the uneven numbers of women invited are associated with the sisters of the Mata. When I put this to some of the women at EL, they thought this might be so but, it seemed to me, I was providing an explanation rather than getting one.

In some families, the women in a bride's conjugal home may hold this ceremony soon after she is married. I was told this was not only to wish her happiness and bless her with children, but was also 'to welcome her into the household'. It will be remembered that at all

household rituals, the *kul devi* is also worshipped and the Mata ceremony here also serves the purpose of initiating the new bride into the rituals of the particular household. When women want to hold such a ceremony, they ask other women with the phrase '*mara ghar Mataji tedya che*' - 'I have asked the Mata into my house' - to which one responds '*ketala lota tedya che?*' - 'how many *lota* are invited?'. The invited women must all be *goyani* - unmarried women, or women whose husband is alive, who has children, has had no miscarriages or still births, and who is not pregnant herself. All of them, of course, must not be menstruating. I was told that usually a few extra women are invited in case some of the *goyani* begin their menses and are unable to attend. A shrine is set up, usually in the living room, and the number of *lota* placed in front of images of the Mata. The women then call on the Mata to come to the *vidi* (ceremony) and sing songs to ask her blessing. The woman who calls the *vidi* washes the right big toe of each of the *goyani* women in milk and water, places a vermilion spot on it, and sprinkles it with uncooked rice. At the end of <sup>the</sup> ceremony they are all fed - the food on this occasion consisting especially of *kir* (sweet rice pudding), *bhat* (boiled rice), and *puri* (or *puli*) (unleavened wheat bread).

I did not attend a *be lota* ceremony and this description comes from Surbhi and the women at EL plus, on different occasions, Hemkurva and Prabha, Bharti, and Rekha. Surbhi told me that at her *be lota*, which took place soon after her marriage, the *goyani* were from her 'husband's side' and other women who were friends of the family. Although Surbhi had no natal kin in England, three other women confirmed that the *goyani* for a *be lota* after the wedding are from the 'husband's side'. Jasvanti, who it will be recalled was uncertain whether or not to have another child - or more specifically 'whether I should try for a son' - referred to *be lota* as a 'Randal programme' - Randal being a manifestation of the Mata. In her husband's family, this ceremony was also done when a son was married and when a son was born into the household. The son of her HFyB's third wife (the other two had died) in Manchester had recently held this ceremony she told me, but she did not know if the *goyani* were from the 'husband's side',

as the boy's father belonged to a 'different family' and she did not know all its members. She was herself uncertain as to whether this should be the case.

*Norta* is said to be a particularly auspicious time to hold a ceremony to the Mata. Jasvanti was herself thinking about holding a ceremony at that time as she wanted guidance from the Mata as to whether or not to have another child. As it turned out, her father-in-law became ill and she decided against it 'this time'. Many of the ceremonies held at *norta* have a similar construction to those noted above. Possession is also a common feature. One house in Newham was packed at *norta* as the woman of the household was a renowned *bhui* - a female devotee of the Mata through whom the Goddess spoke - and, according to Savita, people came from all over London 'even Leicester [and] Birmingham'. Jasvanti, though, went to another *bhui* who lived nearby with many of her problems. She was an elderly widow who had set up a shrine to the Mata in the front room of her terraced house where she lived with her son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. If a woman is experiencing difficulty in having a child or, like Jasvanti, wants guidance on whether to have another, a *bhui* may be invited and through her the Mata's grace and guidance is sought for whatever the problem may be. On such occasions, the *bhui* is thus a medium for the spirit of the Mata (Lewis 1971). These are noisy events where participants shout '*bolo Mataji, bolo*' - 'speak Mataji, speak' - over and over until the Mata, as Bhanu told me 'comes into the *bhui*'. 'I get so excited', said Bhanu 'and I just wish she would come'.

Whether it is to ensure the birth of a son, to overcome infertility or sub-fertility, or to ensure the health and well-being of the household itself, to periodically ask the Mata into the house ensures her protection and benevolence. Like the *kul devi*, though, any problems which arise from a failure to do this are not perceived to arise from the Mata's malevolence. Although the Mata might be 'angry' if one fails to worship her, she is not seen as spiteful and destructive. It is, rather, that she has been neglected by the women

of the household and this must be rectified by more punctilious observance of her worship.

### 5.9) *Vrats*

A *vrat* (vow) is another means of attaining the grace of the deity for a particular objective, whether for the general protection and well being of the family through acquiring merit (*punaya*) with God, for personal satisfaction and the 'goodness of God' through devotion and discipline (*shist*), or to achieve a particular wish at times of illness or crises, including infertility or sub-fertility. A *vrat* involves a recital of a story (*katha*) about the particular *vrat* (Gopalan 1978:105; Wadley 1978:314; Beech 1982:120; Raheja 1988:71; Harlan 1992:110), a period of fasting (*upavas*), and the giving of gifts on its completion (Raheja *ibid*). While women fast<sup>66</sup> at particular times of the Hindu year, this can also be done on a weekly basis or more frequently if so desired. Each day of the week is associated with a particular deity who is worshipped on that day: Monday is for Lord Shiva; Tuesday and Sunday for the Mata; Thursday for a favoured guru who, for many Gujarati women, is Jalarama; Friday is for Santoshima, the goddess of contentment; and Saturday is for Hanuman. Saturday is not a day which is favoured by women. If men undertake a fast this is often the day which they choose although they are also free to take a different day. Wednesday, although said by some to be for Jalarama, is not usually associated with any deity at all. A woman fasts on the day of the deity in whom she has great faith, either in the hope (*asha*) that a wish (*ichcha*) will be fulfilled, or to achieve merit (*punaya*) through personal service to the deity. Women who want to become pregnant may begin a period of fasting after marriage and, for this and other problems which relate to fertility, one of the Mata's days, either Tuesday or Sunday, is often the day which is chosen.

When I asked why it is largely women who perform *vrat*, both female and male informants invariably said that this was that it was her 'job', her duty (*dharma*), or her responsibility (*javabadari*). One

woman told me that it was her *dharma* as a wife and mother to 'do this *seva* (service) for this family' - referring to her conjugal household. The rituals which are performed in the household are seen as an essentially female responsibility. Men may undertake vows if they want to but for women it is part of their *dharma* in caring for the household. These and other rituals ensure the protection, well-being, and prosperity of one's husband and children and they also ensure the continuing auspiciousness of the woman herself. (9)

Informants noted two particular types of *vrata*<sup>(10)</sup> and either one or both forms can be performed to seek the grace of the deity for specific ends. They are described as being rather like a resolution, either to do something in the future when the successful outcome of a desired aim has been achieved, or to give up something - usually a particular food - until the wish has been fulfilled. McGilvray (1982:64) puts this succinctly when he observes that the vow pledges a 'contractual agreement if the deity grants the boon of fertility', but which attributes no divine blame if this is not forthcoming. My informants also point out that if the Mata does not grant one's wish then this simply means that it was not one's fate for this to happen. A *manta* relates to the first category of *vrata* and is illustrated in the following narrative. (11)

When Bhanu married Hari she moved from her birthplace in Kenya to his home in Uganda. Hari had trained as a solicitor in London and Bhanu was a teacher. During the first few years of her marriage she suffered three miscarriages. This, she said, had been a time of great worry for herself and her husband. After the third miscarriage, she consulted doctors in Uganda and, after many tests, was told that she had a bifurcating uterus and underwent an operation to correct it. During this time she had been in constant touch with her mother who lived in Kenya (her mother-in-law was dead). Her mother advised her to make a *manta* to the Mata which she would fulfil when she successfully gave birth to a child of either sex: 'I didn't care what it was so long as it was healthy'. The fulfilment of this *manta* involved Bhanu in a journey, first of all to her husband's *kul devi* shrine in

Gujarat, and then to a temple at Mount Abu which, Bhanu said, was especially for the Mata:

One of the things was to do at the *kul devi* shrine, to give a *chunddi*. This is a small scarf, yellow or red and you buy them all over India. You just ask for a *Matajini chunddi*. This is put on the *kul devi* by the priest... We gave a coconut too and some money. There was this thing too when we went up into the highlands, to Mount Abu, for Ambajimata. We said that whenever the *manta* could be done, he [her son] would be weighed and the same amount of sugar crystals (*sakar*) given to the priest and he would distribute it to the other people there, to the poor people. But he was twelve years old when I came to do that, when my mother was with me. This was luck, it was good fate that it happened this way because normally I'd be here in England and my mum would be in Kenya. And so we told the priest about it and he said that we should give the cost of the weight of the crystals. Whatever he weighed we should give the cost of it. It was about three hundred rupees or something like that and he would decide what to do with. He might get the sugar or give it out to the people. We just said for him to do what he thought best. But it is very bad if you don't do what you've promised, even if it's a long time afterwards, like this was twelve years, because it means that something really terrible can happen in the family.

Bhanu did not refer to these gifts as *dan*, either in the sense of charity or of the removal of inauspiciousness (Raheja 1988:71-75) but rather, as fulfilling her promise to the Mata. One point on which all my informants agreed was that if a boon is granted by the deity, but if what was promised to the Mata is not fulfilled, then calamity could befall the woman and/or members of her household. However, as noted earlier (p227), the 'cause' of this calamity is not the Mata herself but the woman in failing to complete her *vrata*. Not, I hasten to add, that any woman told me that she had neglected to fulfil her promise, although for Bhanu, it was twelve years before she was able to journey to Gujarat to present her promised gifts to the *kul devi* and the Mata.

When Jaya first took me with her to meet her friend Mukhta, she told me on the way that Mukhta had three children 'but the last one is special'. When I asked why, she said that her friend would tell me, which eventually she did. Mukhta had two daughters but very much wanted to have a son: 'everyone said to me that I should try for a son. My brother-in-law (*jeth*) has two boys and so I thought I would

try'. She did this, however, with the help of a *manta* she made to the Mata:

I prayed to God, to the Mata, and said that if I have a boy I'll ask people for clothes and won't buy any myself and that I'll call him Bhikhu. It's finished now. I have a boy and I'm so happy and now after one year, I don't have to do this anymore because it's finished and now he can be called Bharat.

Bhikhu was a 'pet' name given to the boy, meaning to be like a beggar. Mukhta had promised the Mata that if she had a boy she would beg other people to buy or give clothes to her son for one year after his birth. By promising to dress the child in rags, or at least in cast-offs, she would show the Mata her humility and devotion if the deity granted her wish. At the end of the year, the *manta* was finished and the child could then be called by his registered name. Other women I asked - Hemkurva and Prabha, Bhanu, Rekha, Jasvanti, Yogini and Kanta - all knew of this *manta*. If a woman particularly wants to have a son, Hemkurva explained, she can do this *manta* to the Mata by humbly asking the deity to have compassion (*dya*) and grant the desire or wish (*iccha*) of a boy.<sup>(12)</sup>

A *badha* is the second type of vow which women perform and this involves a promise to forego something - often a specific food such as grain or sweets - until whatever is wished for occurs.<sup>(13)</sup> As with a *manta*, it can be done for any number of reasons, including problems relating to fertility or sub-fertility. One woman recalled, for example, that her aunt, who was childless, made a *badha* to the Mata to give up eating green lentils (*mag*) until she had a child. She kept her *badha* for more than twenty years before the Mata bestowed her grace on her aunt and the woman became pregnant and had a child. Depending on the particulars of the individual *badha* made to the Mata, the sacrificed item is given to others as a gift before it is utilized again by the woman herself. This may involve organizing a *lahani* (a distribution of gifts) as noted in Chapter 3.8. This was not described to me as absorbing inauspiciousness (cf. Raheja 1988:83) but rather, these gifts were considered auspicious and a way of thanking the Mata for granting her wish.

In the light of earlier discussions on the importance of motherhood - as a source of auspiciousness in the household and in terms of a woman's social position and future protection - and of female responsibility for fertility, it is unsurprising that women utilize a variety of therapies if infertility, or temporary infertility, threatens. Similarly, as we have seen, women undertake rituals even before they are pregnant to ensure their future fertility, preferably for a son. As noted earlier, that it is largely women who undertake *vrats* is explained in terms of their *dharma*. It is their moral duty and responsibility to protect ritually the auspiciousness, well-being, and prosperity of their husband and children. When misfortune threatens this in the form of childlessness, sub-fertility, or the failure to have a son, the vows which women undertake seek yet another crucial way to alleviate this misfortune. The supplicant approaches the Mata and, with humility, and acknowledging her inferior position, asks for her desired wish. In return for the offerings promised, the Goddess may bestow her blessing and grant what is hoped for. But there are also times when hoped-for boons are not granted; when a daughter and not a son is born, when a woman miscarries, or when a woman does not have a child. As we have seen, fate is often introduced as an explanation for the failure to achieve one's desired wish. One's fate (*lekh*) is ultimately unknowable. It is invisibly written down by the goddess Vidhata on the sixth day after birth (see section 5.15) and is influenced by auspicious (*shubha*) and inauspicious (*ashubha*) planetary configurations at birth (5.16). Such natural and unknowable sources of misfortune are used as explanations in numerous situations, from the failure of a child to reach required 'A' level results, to the failure to have a child at all. But it may also be that women bring on misfortune themselves through their failure to nurture and worship the Mata.

Finally, it is worth considering here the gifts which are made at the completion of these *vrats* in terms of Jonathan Parry's (1986) recent and illuminating re-examination of Mauss's concept of reciprocity. Parry identifies two extreme ideologies of gifting. The

'pure gift' is an unreciprocated gift given to the deity and becomes 'a liberation from bondage to it, a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation' (ibid:468). The 'pure gift' is 'altruistic, moral and loaded with emotion' (ibid:466), which is everything reciprocity based on market relations is not. In the latter case, there is an expectation of an equivalent return, or more, for what has been given. When we consider the *vrats* which my informants undertake, the gifts which are given at their completion are neither examples of the 'pure gift' nor of the utility of market exchange. The promised gifts are given only when the deity grants the boon a woman hopes for, be it a child, a son, a cure of an illness, or a resolution of a family problem (cf. Wadley 1975:80-1). As Nancy Tapper (1990:259) observes of her Turkish female informants, these gifts contain 'muted elements' of both ideologies.

Needless to say this is not the way in which my informants view these proceedings. The completion of the *vrat* - the giving of gifts to the *kul devi*, the Mata, or to those who attend the *lahani* - was not said to 'send away' inauspiciousness (Raheja 1988) but were said to be auspicious items given to thank the Mata for granting one's wish. One point which all informants agreed upon was that if the *vrat* was not completed, and what was promised to the Mata not fulfilled, then calamity could befall the woman and her household. However, the 'cause' of this calamity is not the Mata herself, but the woman in failing to complete her *vrat*. It is in this sense that women are responsible (*javabadar*) for the enactment of rituals which nurture the prosperity and well-being of the household. Rituals such as *jaya parvati vrat* protect their own auspiciousness as a *saubhagyavati*. In seeking the grace and blessing of the Mata through other *vrats*, such as those noted above, women fulfil their *dharma* to provide children for their husband's patriline and future protection for themselves.

Let me summarize the chapter so far. In discussions of conception and foetal development, there is some idea that patrilineality is established through the blood of the father and, that these ties of blood do not change for a woman with marriage. But male and female

informants also agree on the importance of the mother's role in nurturing the child, providing food for it to grow and influencing its moral being and development. Evidence from other Hindu South Asians suggests that theories of procreation are used contextually. Data also suggest several theories of procreation among my informants but this is an area which requires further research among South Asians in Britain. While there is a consensus that fertility should be controlled by the use of contraception, this is not unproblematic for my female informants. First, some forms of contraception upset a woman's bodily balance and pose a threat to her femininity and sexuality. Through notions of *sharam* and *man* women themselves seek to control their own and other women's sexuality and inhibit its expression. Second, where fertility is problematic, or where a woman has failed to produce a son, recourse is made to biomedical as well as traditional Ayurvedic and folk treatments. Whether or not such treatments succeed depends on the grace bestowed by the Mata. While informants told me that 'boys and girls are the same' now, their rituals capture the continuing importance of a son - not only to ensure the auspiciousness and continuity of their husbands' household, but also to ensure a measure of authority and status and continuing protection for women themselves. Finally, it is through these rituals that we gain an understanding of the way in which *dharma* and *seva* are more than secular concepts of duty and service. They have the moral underpinnings of a religious duty and responsibility to protect, nurture, and care for the health, well-being and auspiciousness of the household. Failure to achieve fertility for my female informants, then, is as much a moral problem as it is a medical one.

#### 5.10) PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, AND POSTPARTUM : WOMEN AND PATRILINES

In Brahmanical terms, the life cycle rites (*samskara*) prepare the person over a period of rebirths for the ultimate goal of release from the cycle of rebirths and for the union of the embodied soul with god. Inden and Nicholas (1977:37) observe that each ritual is like a rebirth, transforming the body into its new status and new set of relationships, removing defects, and infusing it with beneficent

qualities. There were two Brahman priests in particular with whom I discussed *samskara*. Both priests consulted several texts which led to considerable confusion - for myself and the priests. I interviewed Mr Joshi twice at his home with each interview taking about three hours, although we did discuss other topics. My interview with Mr Pandya took place one evening at his home over about five hours. This interview was complicated by the fact that Mr Pandya had another Brahman priest from Kerala in south India staying with him. His contributions confused me even more. I still remember stumbling out onto a dark street around midnight, wondering on the one hand why my informants never seemed to be so well-versed in their 'culture' as others I had read about, and on the other hand, how I was to get home at that hour with body intact.

My first interview with Mr Joshi, which occurred not long after I began fieldwork was, I felt at the time, quite fruitful. When I returned, however, there were numerous 'corrections' to make to the first draft. Mr Joshi only ever offered sixteen *samskara* and, of these, eight were associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Another Brahman priest, who was present for a time at the second interview, confirmed this. So what I offer here is the 'final draft' from Mr Joshi with his own explanations of them. Numbers c.) and f.) were not on Mr Pandya's list but I have since realized that they could be there under different names.<sup>14</sup> These are:

- a.) *Garbhadhana*, a rite performed either before pregnancy or after conception to ensure the birth of a child.
- b.) *Pumsavana*, performed in the third month of pregnancy to ensure the birth of a male child and to mark the cessation of intercourse.
- c.) *Sighraprasavopayo yantrash*, prayers written on a piece of paper and worn on the woman's wrist for protection in pregnancy.
- d.) *Simantonnayana*, a rite performed in the seventh month for the safe delivery of the child.
- e.) *Janmajata*, a rite performed just before the cord is cut.
- f.) *Anadistaprayascitta*, prayers repenting misdeeds of the parents to ensure that the child is born with no impure thoughts or deeds from the parents.

g.) *Chatthi* the sixth day ceremony for the good fortune of the infant.

h.) *Namakarana*, the name-giving ceremony.

When I asked female and male informants whether they performed these rites, it became clear that many of the names and some of the rites were unknown to them. In most cases the Sanskrit names have been replaced by Gujarati terms. Some of the rituals are omitted altogether while others are enacted according to family traditions which are said to go back for generations. It will be recalled that these variations, both in the rituals performed and in their content, are specific to a patriline and informed by the *kul devi* of that family. Thus, the rituals witnessed by a woman in her natal home may differ from those performed in her conjugal home. In the case of two sisters marrying into different patrilines, one might find herself performing the *simant* ritual in the seventh month of the first pregnancy, while the other might not. Even if the two did perform this rite, the actual form and content may well be different for both of them. There are local and family traditions, as well as Brahmanical ones, and these may not coincide in practice. Even when they do, the purpose of the rituals as expressed by women may be quite different from that given by Brahman priests. The dominant theme which women express in their performance is not the Brahmanical notion of movement through stages of life in preparation for ultimate release from the cycle of rebirths, but the protection of the mother and child, ensuring their health and well-being throughout a period when they are vulnerable to illness, misfortune, and jealousy. This also ensures, of course, the well-being of the household itself with the birth of a healthy (preferably male) child.

#### 5.11) Early Pregnancy

Pregnancy is known by several terms in Gujarati. *Garbhavati* is said to be an 'old' word which is often replaced by the English term 'pregnant', and this is used by old and young alike. The term *bhare pagi*, or heavy legs (cf. Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:72), is also

used and refers to the notion that as the foetus grows, its weight induces aches and pains in the legs, a common complaint voiced by pregnant women.<sup>(15)</sup> The terms *garbhadhana* and *pumsavana* are neither known nor used by informants in east London. Inden and Nicholas (1977:54) point out that, in Bengal, the object of these rituals is to ensure the birth of a male child. The woman is fed 'symbolic semen' in the form of *panchamrta*, the five immortal fluids of yoghurt, milk, clarified butter, sugar, and honey, which are said to increase the likelihood that the seminal part of the child will be increased to ensure that the child will be male. A comparable rite which I found among Gujaratis is a mixture of pistachio nuts, almonds, cashews, cardamon and milk - the composition of which can vary according to family tradition - which is drunk by both spouses on their wedding night, and which is often taken by women throughout their pregnancy. I was told that this is left in the bridal bedroom by the husband's married sister or his father's sister, or sometimes by his mother or another older female member of the patriline. I did ask one woman if this could be seen in some way as 'symbolic semen' to ensure a male child, but the suggestion was greeted with such embarrassed outrage and revulsion that I never had the courage to confirm this with anyone else. The mixture, it was explained, gave energy and strength (*shakti* or *takat*). After sexual intercourse, which Bhanu said not only creates a lot of heat but also weakness and tiredness, it helps 'cool' the couple down and restores strength. During pregnancy, it is regarded as a kind of tonic to give women energy, to help them sleep at night and, it could be inferred, cool their increasingly heated state.

What can also be inferred from this is that as strength and energy are themselves associated with what is male, and that as at a conceptual level men are regarded as cooler in relation to women, there is a very definite emphasis here on creating a male child. Parry (1985:629 n11) also points out that ideally a man should 'drink milk after sexual intercourse in order to replace what he has just discharged'. He goes on to relate a myth wherein a Raja was childless. To remedy this his *guru* performed a sacrifice and *kir* (sweet rice) fed to his three queens who then conceived. Remembering the *be lota*

ceremony of which Surbhi spoke earlier (5.8), and the food consumed afterward - which among other things consisted of *kir* - the implications of this ceremony in terms of constituting maleness through food are also apparent.

Pregnancy, as I have noted, is a thing of *sharam*. With their first pregnancy, some women said that they did not even know that they had conceived. It was their mother-in-law or sister-in-law who they said was the agent of this knowledge. As we have seen in the cases of Sarka and Rahina, a mother-in-law can exercise considerable control over a younger women's practice. Even if they have some access to other contacts and forms of knowledge, they have little choice but to concede control to their mother-in-law. For any subsequent pregnancies, a woman is able to make this 'diagnosis' herself and it is often her husband she first consults rather than other women in the household. By now, and ideally, the relationship with her husband is established and less formal. For some informants, such as Hasmita, they had moved to a nuclear household by the time they had their second child. This greater independence for some, as well as an established status as a mother, considerably enhances the authority women have in managing later pregnancies. Apart from decisions concerning biomedical intervention - which will be discussed later - men have a fairly peripheral role in the household management of pregnancy. This is not to say that they are unsolicitous or unconcerned about the health of the mother and child but rather, in the household it is women who are the acknowledged 'experts' with experience and knowledge men do not possess. This is, perhaps, not surprising as traditionally it has been women in rural India who manage pregnancy and deliver children. Men do not attend the birth for this would be shameful (Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989).

From a biomedical perspective, however, this is not the case. While a woman or her mother-in-law may know from past experience that she is pregnant, the GP or nurse confirms the pregnancy before referring her for antenatal care at the maternity hospital. In other words, a woman - of whatever cultural or ethnic group - is not

considered to be pregnant until this is corroborated by a medically qualified person. In Newham, a woman's first antenatal visit entails attendance at the 'booking clinic' when the midwife takes a 'history'. This includes details of any gynaecological disorders or abnormalities, miscarriages, stillbirths or past pregnancies - the duration and type of labour, method of delivery and any associated problems - as well as a socio-economic profile. Thereafter, a woman attends the clinic with increasing frequency as her pregnancy progresses, unless something untoward or 'abnormal' occurs in which case these visits increase. Clinical intervention in a woman's pregnancy, then, begins very early on and continues throughout with periodic checks at the antenatal clinic. Although other staff at the hospital echoed the remarks of a nursing officer who told me that 'these women aren't ill, they're pregnant but not ill', as Graham and Oakley (1986:103-4) point out, an 'as if ill' frame of reference is used in antenatal clinics, predominantly in the carrying out of routine tests and procedures.

It is the continual clinical monitoring of pregnancy in England, compared with the situation in India and East Africa, which many Gujarati women who had experienced the difference remarked upon. Hemkurva's comments were typical of many others:

In India and Africa it isn't like here where every month you go to see the doctor. There you go after two months for a check and after that you go again when you have the baby and just before, but not all the time like here. In England you have to go all the time when you're pregnant and the doctor looks at you, but it isn't like that in India and Africa.

These women do not view pregnancy as an illness and it is only toward the end, or before if anything is 'abnormal', that many women feel a visit to the doctor is necessary. But despite the fact that many feel these visits are 'a waste of time', attendance is encouraged, if not felt to be 'compulsory', by members of the household. For the pregnant woman herself, the visit to the antenatal clinic provides her with the reassurance that she is doing everything possible to fulfil her responsibility to maintain her own health and that of the child.

## 5.12) *Panchamasi*: The Fifth Month

It will be recalled that around the fifth month, the foetus changes from a mass of flesh to take on some form and shape, and to start kicking and moving inside the mother. From this time it is noticeable that more attention is given to the diet of the pregnant woman and to restrictions on her activities. Female informants pointed out that they have a 'normal' diet during pregnancy (cf. McGilvray 1982:55; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:77-78) but there is some concern to balance *garam* (hot) and *thanda* (cold) food, especially in the latter part of the pregnancy. Women told me that very heating food, such as *karela* (a bitter gourd) and *palak* (a type of large-leafed spinach), are eaten if one wants to induce menstruation - for example, if a ritual is coming up and a woman knows her period will fall during this time, she will try to bring on her menses earlier so that she will be able to attend. The same principle applies during pregnancy and hence such foods are avoided to prevent miscarriage. Weight gain in the form of oedema of the fingers and ankles, and burning on micturition, were also attributed to excessively heating foods. On the other hand, very cold food, such as banana, are avoided as this can delay the onset of labour. In addition to this, food during pregnancy should be light (*halko*). Heavy food (*bhare khorak*) is said to cause diarrhoea, vomiting, and stomach pains.<sup>16</sup> This food takes more energy for the body to digest and, during pregnancy, this energy is needed for the foetus to develop and grow.

As noted earlier (5.2), unlike the women of Mithila (Reissland and Burghart 1987:231), Gujarati women did not attribute the mother's pregnancy cravings to those of the infant but rather, to her own temperament and personal proclivities. The women at EL - Yogini, Kanta, Sadhana, Kamla, Usha, Monghi, Sarka, and Bhanu - and Hemkurva, Nita, and Hasmita, told me that if a woman likes and is used to eating pungent (*tikhun*) foods, for example, she may do so. However, if anything untoward occurs as a result she then bears the responsibility for it. A few women told me that black foods can darken the child's skin and should be avoided during pregnancy. But food proscriptions

found in other parts of South Asia (Blanchet 1984:71-2), such as the avoidance of certain types of fish which are said to cause malformation, or double yolked eggs which can cause twins, had little currency among my informants, probably because they all subscribed, at least publically, to a vegetarian diet. Such iconic representations were considered to be 'old wives tales' held only by 'backward' and 'uneducated' women. Hasmita, Sarka, Rahina, Jasvanti, and Hemkurva did point out, though, that their mother-in-law, and often their mother, advised a reduction in the amount eaten during the last two months or so of pregnancy to ensure that the baby was not so big as to make labour and childbirth difficult (cf. Nichter and Nichter 1983:239; Fernandes and Gutherie 1984:992). Jasvanti and Hasmita told me, however, that they had read that this was not the case and during their second pregnancy had not taken this advice.

Ideally, physical activity is also reduced - particularly work in the home such as 'hoovering', moving furniture, lifting heavy objects and so on. Both Sarka and Rahina, though, often complained at EL that they had to continue with the housework they shared with their *jethani* (HeBW). Hemkurva on the other hand, received a great deal of help from her mother-in-law, Prabha. It was obvious from my interviews in the antenatal clinic, that many women in paid employment continued to work until the sixth or seventh month, depending on their general health. Household composition, financial considerations, as well as female relations in the household, were all contributing factors in whether or not an ideal of reduced physical activity during the latter stages of pregnancy was realized.

By the fifth month the physical appearance of pregnancy is also obvious, and both the woman and child are said to be vulnerable to the jealous and harmful intentions of others. Just who these 'others' are was only vaguely articulated but, I was told, it could be a woman who was herself infertile or who had experienced problems in carrying a child to term. Whether such women are members of the kinship group, caste, or neighbours was unclear. I heard no stories, for example, of women who had actually experienced the effects of this jealousy during

their pregnancy. When I asked Yogini the reason for the stillbirth she had experienced when eight months pregnant, she said these things were 'up to God'. Nonetheless, as a precautionary measure against the perceived threat to mother and child, *panchamasi* is a ritual performed in the fifth month to protect both throughout the remainder of the pregnancy. On an auspicious day (*shubhani divas*) in the fifth month, a protective black thread (*kalo doro*) is placed on the woman's wrist by her husband's sister (*nanad*) to protect her from malice and harm. A piece of cloth long enough to encircle the wrist is cut and several items which are felt to be particularly effective in their protective properties are placed in it. These are also said to be auspicious (*shubha*) items. Some oil which is poured over the image of Hanuman at the household shrine each Saturday and which, over a period of time accumulates a blackish sediment, is mixed with some dust taken from the centre of the cross-roads nearest to where the woman lives. This is placed in the cloth together with a cowrie shell, some green lentils and/or an iron ring.<sup>17</sup> These threads are now available already made up in shops and some women use these. This protective thread (*rakhadi*) is cut off at birth when the protection is no longer necessary, the mother having delivered a healthy child. The child then requires its own protective measures. *Panchamasi* is sometimes incorporated into the next life cycle rite in some families. Others omit it altogether, depending on the family tradition.

We saw earlier that it may be the married *nanad* (HZ) who leaves the milk drink in the bridal bedroom to 'cool' the couple after intercourse - with its implications of creating a male child. We shall see in the rituals performed throughout pregnancy and afterward, that the *nanad* is a major ritual officiant in her brother's household. On the one hand, a woman's married *nanad* is now affiliated to her own husband's patriline and, through her own fertility, brings prosperity and well-being to that *sasara*. On the other hand, from the perspective of the *nanad*, the pregnant woman is her *bhabhi* (BW). It is when we consider the role of the *nanad* from her perspective as a *ben* (sister) to her *bhai* (brother) that her concern to protect her brother and his household becomes clearer. If, as was suggested earlier, a woman

retains ties of blood to her own natal patriline, in these ritual contexts she is, through her brother, ensuring the continuation and protection of that patriline. I shall elaborate on this as we go through the remaining stages of pregnancy and the postpartum.

#### 5.13) *Simant*: The Seventh Month

*Simant* occurs in the seventh month of the first pregnancy only. The foetus is fully formed by this time but not yet mature enough for birth. *Simant* is more commonly referred to as *kholo bharavo*, or simply *kholo* (lap). The lap, as Catherine Thompson (1983:118) observes, is often used as a symbol of the filial relationship between mother and child, 'as well as female fecundity and, as we shall see, its importance here lies in the central activity of the ritual - the 'passing ceremony'. Specifically, in this context, the *kholo* refers to the V-shaped corner of the sari extending from the knee to the breast in the distinctive way Gujarati women wear this garment. One of the Mata's days, either Tuesday or Sunday, is chosen for the ritual but, because of problems with travelling and work, it is nearly always held on a Sunday in England.

Even if the tradition in their own husband's household excludes this ritual, women will themselves have probably attended many *kholo* celebrations of other female kin in the course of their life. Surbhi told me, with some regret, that this 'was not done' in her husband's household but that she had been to 'many others' in her village in Gujarat. A similar situation pertains among young Gujarati women in England. Apart from weddings, a *kholo* is probably the next most common ceremony which is held among my informants. Bhanu told me that *kholo* is so popular among Gujarati women, even if it is not done in their own household, because 'it is the first celebration of a woman's first pregnancy'. When discussing the ritual with some women at LC, Rekha remarked that a woman 'is like the Mata, she is about to become a mother for the first time'. The *goyani*, who are especially invited for the ceremony, are said to be the representatives of the sisters of the Mata who come to the house to help the woman celebrate her first

pregnancy. At the end of her *khola* when the guests were chatting and relaxing, I asked Bharti in the presence of Dilip as we talked outside for a moment, just why it was so important:

I don't know. I suppose it's so important for Indian women to have children. And this ceremony, it's a special time for you, for the woman. When you get married it's different, but the *khola* is for the woman.

Dilip chipped in: 'it's a big celebration for the womens (sic). You see, all the mens (sic) are outside. It's for the women because being a mother is so important'.

Apart from two occasions when a woman's husband and her husband's younger brother are involved, this is indeed a female affair. Like Dilip, other men I asked said that this ceremony was for women. Usually, as at other life cycle rites, a room is set up with videos or sport on TV for the men to watch. Sometimes, weather permitting, they stand around outside talking. While women themselves are the main actors in the *khola*, and as we shall see in many of the other life cycle rites, men stand apart from it as they largely do from the management of pregnancy and as they do from the birth itself. Men themselves say of these ceremonies that 'this is what women do' - it is part of their *dharma* to perform them. On this women agree. They enact life cycle rites to protect the health, well-being, and prosperity of their husband, their children, and the household and their own auspicious state as a *saubhagyavati*. But the *khola* is different in that it is also for the woman herself. It is a time when she is honoured and feted, when she is about <sup>to</sup> fulfil her *dharma* and become a mother. When I asked women if they were actually the Mata at the ceremony and the *goyani* were actually the sisters of the Mata, they were certain that this was not the case. They were 'like the Mata' and her sisters in that they shared her female aspects of nurture and protection as a mother, but they were not the goddess herself.

The content of the ritual and the sequence of events varies according to the traditions of the family and so it is difficult to try and describe a 'typical' *khola*. As we saw earlier, some women

perform *be lota* rather than the *kholo*. In order to give some context to the ritual, however, I shall describe Bharti's *kholo* which took place in her house but shall note, where relevant, some differences which can occur - although there will in all probability be many others. It is also important to remember that this ritual, as any other, takes place against a background of noise, of children falling over and crying, of women talking and laughing and, of what to an outsider such as myself seemed like organized chaos.

I had gone to stay at Hemkurva's house on the evening before Bharti's *kholo*. Bharti's own house, she said when she dropped in for a 'few minutes peace' during the evening, was full of 'relatives' - Girdhalal's two brothers and their wives and two of his sisters and their husbands. She was tired after all the preparations and hoped 'everything would go well' tomorrow. The preparations for a ritual such as this are made for several weeks beforehand - the necessary pieces of equipment have to be organized, the food which is served at the end has to be arranged - often by 'outside' caterers - and the finer points of the rite must be refreshed. On the *kholo* day - a Sunday - everyone in Hemkurva's house, including myself, bathed and dressed in finery with Hemkurva, as usual, adding to my meagre bits of jewellery and lending me one of her saris. Bharti had opened up her 'thru lounge and, at the garden end, a large table had been set up from which drinks were served and later the food. Girdhalal had set up several garden tables with umbrellas and chairs in the garden. At the far end of the lounge a shrine (*Mataji mandir*) had been erected, about three feet in height and covered with a canopy. Garlands of flowers hung over the shrine and were placed in front of it, along with rice and betel nut. During the course of the day, quantities of money were also placed in front of the shrine - anything from coins to five and ten pound notes. This, I was told, is kept by the mother for the child.

Four pictures of the Mata were represented at the shrine. These pictures were identical but, Bharti said, they were all the Mata, especially Lakshmi - the goddess of wealth and good fortune, and

Sarasvati - the goddess of education and learning. Other women also told me that these were two favoured representations of the Mata at *kholo*. On the floor on front of this was *ek lota* (one water pot) with a coconut on top. (19) As noted earlier, for each *lota* seven women - or at least an uneven number of women - are invited to take part in the ceremony. These women are all *goyani* - *unmarried women or women whose husband is alive (saubhagyavati)*, who are not menstruating, and who are themselves not pregnant. In many cases, more women are present but these particular women are the pivotal actors in the ceremony as the representatives of the sisters of the Mata. Bharti said that they (her mother-in-law, her husband, and herself) had 'prayed to the [*kull devi*]' when they lit the lights and candles at the shrine. The goddess had been offered *mitho bhat* (sweet rice like *kir*). Other women also reported that this was what they did, although what is offered to the *kul devi* at this and other rituals depends on the tradition within the patriline.

Gradually, as more people arrived and the house was full to overflowing with around (as far as I could estimate) seventy-odd guests, the women made their way to the shrine. Seated in front of it they began several songs in which the Mata is asked to come to the ceremony. Once 'inside the shrine', as the women next to me told me when I asked, the Mata is then asked through the songs to bless the ceremony. Next, the *goyani* processed to the *mandir* carrying gifts - eight shirts, eight saris and cloth for blouses, another special *kholo* sari, and a coconut marked with a red trisula. The *kholo* sari was given to Bharti by her mother, the coconut by her married *nanad* - in this case her husband's elder sister - and the remainder by Bharti's brothers. The coconut was presented to Bharti by her *nanad* and, with the *goyani* in attendance, she was ushered upstairs in procession to the bathroom. Only they are allowed to be present when she bathes and washes her hair for the first time in her pregnancy. She also changed out of the wedding sari she wore for the first part of the ceremony, into her new *kholo* sari - a beautiful amalgam of heavy red and gold silk in this case. Lengths of cloth, alternating red and white, were placed on the stairs. On either side of each stair was placed a betel

nut on top of a coin. These are all said to be auspicious (*shubha*) items - laid out by her husband's younger brother - through which Bharti slowly moved downstairs, with the *goyani* behind her, as the audience bowed to her and sang songs asking the Mata to bless her with happiness and success.

When I asked (many women and some men) why a woman does not wash her hair until this time, informants told me either that they did not know or simply that the goddess 'doesn't like it'. Fuller and Logan (1985:94) among others, point to the notion that in Hinduism sin and pollution are said to lodge in the hair. Perhaps this was what Dimesh was groping toward when I asked him why there is a ceremony for the first hair-cutting. He thought that 'it might be to get rid of the bad things from the mother, you know, when he's born, the dirt'. Hasmita was considerably appalled by this idea. She exclaimed:

No, I'm sure that's not what it is at all Dimesh! Where did you get that from? No Meg, I'm sure that's not it otherwise why would we wait for eighteen months? It hasn't got anything to do with bad things from the mother.

Suitably chastized, Dimesh retired. No informants in the context of the *kholo* volunteered such a connection.

Back in front of the shrine, the items for the 'passing ceremony' (cf. Thompson 1984:269) were brought out. A married woman whose husband is alive, who has successfully given birth, and who has had no miscarriages, abortions, or stillbirths (*akhovan*), stands facing the pregnant woman. In a dish covered with heavy red silk was placed the coconut smeared with red, and a package containing betel nut (*sopari*), green lentils (*mag*) and money, plus a plastic bag of rice - five pounds in this case. Sometimes, these are all wrapped up in the red cloth. The *akhovan* held the dish while she and Bharti passed these items from the dish to the *kholo* of Bharti's sari seven times (in some cases this is five times). In some families, these items may include barley or some other grain. Each item is said to be a good omen (*sarun sukan*) and all are auspicious (*shubha*). Women say that in passing them backwards and forwards, the *akhovan* is passing on her own good fortune and her good wishes for a safe and easy delivery of a healthy child.

If *panchamasi* was not performed in the fifth month, a woman's married *nanad* (HZ) places the protective bracelet on her wrist as well as another bracelet. The latter, like Bharti's, is made of silver and gold. The *nanad*, I was told, does this to wish the woman a safe and easy delivery and to wish happiness and prosperity for the child. The married *nanad*, for her part, receives gifts such as money, jewellery and/or saris to thank her for her role in the ceremony.

The *akhovan* then stood in front of Bharti holding a baby boy of about five or six months. Bharti's mother-in-law gave her a glass of milk, pistachio, almonds, cashews and cardamon - the same, it will be recalled, that is drunk on the wedding night to 'cool' the couple after sexual intercourse. When I asked a woman standing near why this special drink was given, she told me that after all the excitement this helped to 'cool' her down. I think, though, that it is legitimate to draw similar conclusions from these two acts, wherein the 'coolness' of the drink is reconstituted in the body of a male child, especially here where the *akhovan* holds the baby boy in front of her. Other women I asked in different contexts, however, told me that this is a 'tonic' to provide strength and health for the mother and child. Bharti then gave respect to her mother-in-law by bowing and touching her forehead to the feet of the older woman - or at least attempted to do so in her pregnant state. In return she received a blessing from her mother-in-law for happiness (*sukhi*).

It is at this stage of the ritual that a woman's husband is called for. Girdhalal and Bharti sat facing each other. The same baby the *akhovan* held as Bharti took her drink was placed first in Bharti's *kholo* and then passed backwards and forwards three times between them. This echoes the passing ceremony itself but it is not seen as a symbolic act, either of the birth itself, or of a male child in particular. Rather, it is said to demonstrate to a woman that she too can have a happy, healthy child. Girdhalal then left to return to the men outside and his place was taken by his younger brother. What followed was the enactment of a 'joke'. One of the *goyani* brought a large bowl of *kunkum* (red powder) mixed with water. Both participants

smear this on their inner hands and slap each other's face leaving behind the markings of the paste. (20) This is done seven times with the assembled women calling out the number at each strike. It is very much seen as the 'fun' aspect of the ritual. The actions of the younger brother, I was told, are interpreted as 'look what has happened to you!', and Bharti's reciprocation being 'well, it will happen to your wife some day!'. Still seated, a bowl of *penda* - sweets made predominantly from milk - was placed in front of Bharti. A young boy of about two years of age, helped by Bharti's *nanad*, placed the sweet into Bharti's mouth. Her *nanad* and mother-in-law did likewise. Bharti then got up, bowed to her *nanads* around her and fed *penda* to them and the young children present. The *penda* which is fed to the woman is the same sweet which is given to relatives, friends, neighbours, or acquaintances to celebrate the birth of a son and, thus, has obvious implications here. What is also important is the role of the woman's *nanad* in creating in the mother a male child to continue and protect her own natal patriline. Women themselves, though, do not view this act in these terms but rather, as a way of bringing sweetness and joy to the child, to the woman herself and to those sharing her celebration. The latter is also the explanation given by women and men when *penda* is distributed to neighbours, friends or, as frequently happened, to those attending women's groups.

After retiring to wash the marks from her face, Bharti returned and sat in front of a low table while the other women formed a noisy, haphazard line. She washed the right big toe of each with milk and water, and placed some red powder and uncooked rice on the toe and forehead in turn. Each women received a gift, here a small stainless steel bowl containing a betel nut and some money, or whatever is the tradition in the family. These are auspicious items associated with a *saubhagyavati*, and which are also given to the women who come to celebrate *jaya parvati vrat* (3.3). Women told me that having called the women to the house to help fulfil the desire for an easy and safe delivery, and to celebrate her imminent motherhood, this is a way of thanking them and showing them respect as representatives of the sisters of the Mata. In some families, this procedure takes place when

the women first assemble for the ceremony. If a large number of guests have been invited to the *kholo* a separate hall may be hired in which to feed the guests, otherwise they are feasted in the home. As I noted earlier (5.9) when discussing Mata ceremonies, whether a woman has one, two, six, or more *lota*, depends to a large extent on the financial considerations. The 'core' attenders are a woman's natal family and her husband's family and it is usually from this group that the *goyani* are chosen. This was also the case at Bharti's *kholo*. As well as the extended bilateral family, caste and non-caste friends and neighbours may also be invited but, when trying to limit numbers for financial or other reasons, it is more often the latter who are dispensed with. Apart from Hemkurva and her household - including myself - Girdhalal had also invited some of his friends. As far as Hemkurva knew, we were the only neighbours invited because we were also friends. Those who attend a *kholo*, then, are predominantly those members of the bilateral family and some friends who attended the wedding - although a *kholo* would be rare indeed to have the same number of guests as a wedding.

I noted earlier that there are many variations on this ceremony. The sequencing may be different and in some households it continues for two days. Bhanu told me that, in her family, a Brahman is called before the *kholo* when the shrine is set up, and again on the final day to bid her farewell. Among women of other castes, though, this was not the case. Hasmita had only seven women and no men. In some families it is the mother-in-law who does the passing ceremony and in others a woman's *nanad* (HZ). The permutations seem endless depending on the tradition within a particular patriline.

The symbolic elements of the ritual focus on fertility and birth, the containment of heat, cooling the mother to create maleness, and a progressive transition from wifeness to motherhood. It is tempting to give a much more detailed symbolic analysis but to do so would distort the way in which both female and male informants view this ritual. The items used and the rites performed are not viewed in terms of the removal of sin or inauspiciousness (Raheja 1988), nor as an elaborate

symbolic representation of semen/milk, uterine blood, and fertility, nor even of maleness constituted through *penda*, milk, and coolness. They are rather, all said to be auspicious (*shubha*). They are good omens which protect and bring good fortune to mother and child and thus, to the household itself. The whole theme of the *kholo* ritual for women is an expression of happiness, joy, and fun, with family and friends joining in the celebration. What is also striking is that there is little in this for men. The prospective father himself has a minor role even though, through his wife, this ceremony marks his transition to fatherhood. In fact, in the rituals of pregnancy and childbirth among my informants, fatherhood itself is not celebrated in any major way.<sup>(21)</sup> What husbands provide, as ideally they should in everyday life, is the financial wherewithal to enact these rituals. As female and male informants point out, what the *kholo* ceremony celebrates in particular is motherhood itself and the creation of a woman as a mother. What is important in this is the role of the *nanad* and mother-in-law - the one protecting and ensuring the continuation of her natal patriline through her brother, and the other her *sasara* through her son. Finally, it is women themselves who create the mother in their role as representatives of the Mata. At the end of the ceremony, these women are themselves honoured and 'thanked' for their part in the ritual - a sequence which occurs in other similar rituals such as *jaya parvati vrat* and the *be lota* ceremonies noted earlier. It is the *dharma* of women to enact such rituals to nurture, protect, and make auspicious their conjugal and often their natal households. This suggests that womanhood itself is continually recreated on these ritual occasions.

#### 5.14) Household and Clinical Management of Pregnancy

I was told that, traditionally, after the *kholo* ceremony was over, a woman returned to her natal home to stay until some three or four months after the birth. This occurs less frequently in England, with some women staying in their husband's home through preference, others because their parents are still in India or East Africa or else living with their sons in Britain where space is limited. Older women

who had returned home for the birth said that, in their natal home, they were not expected to do any work and were able to rest. When the baby was born, they observed the six week period of seclusion (which I shall come to shortly) and were thus able to regain their strength before returning to their *sasara*. Unlike other areas of north India (cf. Raheja 1988:93; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989:98-9), to remain in one's *pihar* for the birth was not considered to be shameful. This suggests that from the point of view of her *pihar*, a woman's fertility is of considerable importance. While motherhood establishes a woman in her *sasara*, it also confirms the auspiciousness of her *pihar*, not only in the giving of a *kunvarika* (virgin) at marriage, but as a giver of wealth and prosperity with motherhood. But in England, if a woman's parents do not live locally, a further complication arises in registering again in another health district with another hospital and GP for the birth of the child.

Along with the household management of pregnancy, my informants also utilize the biomedical facilities of their GP and the antenatal clinic at the local maternity hospital. Indeed, for second and subsequent pregnancies, and with the increasing attendance at the antenatal clinic as the pregnancy progresses, the clinical management of pregnancy looms just as large as any rituals which are performed. In the context of the household women are the acknowledged 'experts' in terms of managing pregnancy (and postpartum). This is an arena which, traditionally, men are said to know little about and my (few) younger male informants concurred with this view. It was fine with them for their wife - usually with advice from their mother and other female kin - to manage their pregnancy. When it came to biomedical intervention, however, a different pattern emerged - both from the perspective of the health professionals themselves and from the perspective of the men of the household.

Not all my informants attended the local maternity hospital for their antenatal care. Hemkurva went to a hospital in a neighbouring health district because she and Dilip had heard that it had a better reputation. Although I did not meet any women who had done so, I was

also told by several informants that some of their relatives had attended private hospitals. I was unable to follow up those pregnant women I met during fieldwork when they attended antenatal clinics,<sup>(22)</sup> but it was obvious from my time at the maternity hospital that some of the Gujarati women who attended knew each other in other contexts. For example, I met Kamla's (Appendix D) (classificatory) brother's wife one morning, and several other attenders knew informants as neighbours, friends, or caste-mates. What emerged from many of the taped-interviews I collected at the antenatal clinic between Gujarati women and obstetricians, was that my informants shared with other women - of whatever culture - many anxieties and difficulties in communicating their concerns to the doctor (cf. Graham and Oakley 1986).<sup>(23)</sup> For those with limited English - and indeed for those informants whose English was fluent - communication was further impeded and confused, often because of the use of English 'lay' terms by the doctor. The concerns which women themselves raised - whether oedema of the extremities, nausea and vomiting, tiredness and so on - were often brushed aside or trivialized by jokey responses (cf. Homans 1985:160; Graham and Oakley 1986:113-5 on English women's experiences).

Harshida, for example, was a 24 year-old who came to Britain from her birthplace in Kenya when she was fourteen. She lived with her husband, a financial consultant, and her parents-in-law. She was concerned about the 'swellings' in her hand and feet which, during her consultation with the obstetrician, she tried to raise. At the end of a brief encounter the doctor asked:

Think you're getting enough rest at home?

Harshida: I think so.

Dr: Get some more [laughs].

Similarly, Jivi was twenty-nine, born in Uganda but went to Gujarat in 1972 before coming to England two years later. She lived with her husband, a machine operator, her fifteen-month old daughter, widowed mother-in-law, and her husband's unmarried younger brother. She was 'fed up this time', not eating well and experiencing difficulty sleeping:

Dr: Do you, do you take naps during the day?

Jivi: No I don't.  
Dr: Why not?  
Jivi: [laughs]  
Dr: Why not?  
Jivi: You know, you know I  
Dr: [interrupting] You can't sleep at night you should make up for it during the day.

Like their English counter-parts (Graham and Oakley *ibid*:105-107), within the context of the antenatal clinic it is the health professionals who assume expert knowledge and powers of agency. Lalita was twenty-eight and came to England via Uganda and Kenya for her arranged marriage. She lived with her husband, a mechanic in a factory, their three year-old son, parents-in-law, and her husband's two unmarried brothers. Her son had been delivered by caesarian section:

Dr: Right. You probably know that [pause] you're going to have to bear with this one by caesarian section as well.  
Lalita: [indistinct, then shakes her head] No.  
Dr: Well, Mr Sampson has seen your notes  
Lalita: Yes  
Dr: and advised that you need a caesarian section. Err [looks at Lalita's notes]. Well. We'll reconsider your case later on. We won't take a decision but, umm, you must know that, err, we're thinking of repeating it. If everything went well  
Lalita: Yes  
Dr: if the baby's head engaged near term, we would probably change our minds and allow you to go to a normal delivery.

But also like many of their English counter-parts (Graham and Oakley *ibid*:109-110), my Gujarati informants in the antenatal clinic rarely challenged the doctor's perspective and answered 'yes' or 'no' to questions, hoping that this was the 'correct' answer. They also share a dislike of vaginal examinations and shyness in front of male doctors. Bearing in mind the notion of *sharam*, I think that for my informants, though, this 'shyness' is of a qualitatively different order. Their passivity and embarrassment in this context is 'normal' for them in the face of male authority - whether husband or doctor. Their difficulties in expressing themselves are often as much about groping for appropriately modest terms as it is a lack of English. Most Gujarati women I spoke with in the antenatal clinic felt that

internal examinations were almost compulsory. But they also saw this as a means for the doctor to ascertain that the baby was healthy. As one young woman pointed out 'it isn't very nice you know. I don't like it at all but they have to see where the baby is. See that it's all right'.

There are several other areas where my informants differ from their English counter-parts in terms of biomedical intervention in pregnancy. In the context of the clinic itself, and sometimes at the GP surgery, if accompanied by their husband the doctor tended to assume that the woman could not speak English particularly well and communicated with the husband instead. This happened on several occasions when I was present and was especially marked in the case of Deepa, a 22 year-old who had been in England for only twenty-five days. This was her second attendance at the antenatal clinic. Prior to her examination she gave me quite a bit of information - in English - about herself and her husband and discussed her *kholo*, which she had celebrated in Bombay just before leaving India. She spoke very softly, almost in a whisper at times, but from the beginning of the consultation the doctor appeared to conclude that her English was inadequate. He sent off for her husband to be found and, in the meantime, asked several questions which Deepa was able to answer, albeit quietly and hesitantly. When her husband was located and came into the cubicle the doctor continued:

Dr: [To husband] Yeah, her blood tests showed that she is severely anaemic. She's weak. We would like to do some more tests to find out what kind of

Husband: Yeah

Dr: anaemia it is

Husband: Yeah

Dr: and following these we would treat it.

There ensued a conversation between the doctor and Deepa's husband concerning the tablets she was taking. The doctor then informed her husband that they would take a blood test that day:

Dr: [To both] The baby is all right, growing well. But the baby will take all the vitamins and things he needs or she needs regardless of mum have it or not. [To husband] That's why she's probably very anaemic now. And I'll see you back in two

weeks.

Husband: Ok. Thank you.

My female informants were placed at a double disadvantage in situations such as this. On the one hand, health professionals - in making them the object of discussion - objectify and exclude them from any consultation or decision-making. They take shyness and embarrassment as an indication that women cannot understand English and then collude - consciously or not - to exclude them. On the other hand, in terms of their own socialization and their subordinate role in relation to their husband, informants felt unable to 'speak up' in his presence. It is the husband's prerogative to take these decisions on behalf of his wife. This is not just something which happened when the husband was present at the consultation. While health professionals assume powers of agency in the antenatal clinic, the events of the appointment are reported back to the household, often in minute detail, where they are discussed and evaluated. Decisions which are 'made for' women in the antenatal clinic by health professionals, are often challenged in the household. In many cases, there is extensive consultation between husband and wife - often including the mother-in-law. But when it comes to biomedical intervention in pregnancy, my data at least show that it is very often men who assume authority in decision-making. I went to the antenatal clinic with Hemkurva, for example, when she was eight months pregnant. The doctor advised her to have an X-ray to check the baby's position. As we were walking back to the car, Hemkurva said that she thought this was a good idea as she had been having some pain and wanted to make sure that everything 'was all right with the baby'. Once she told Dilip, however, he was categorical that Hemkurva would not have an X-ray as he had heard reports that this could endanger the foetus. When Sarka was admitted to hospital in labour, the doctor wanted to rupture the membrane as she was 'slow'. Sarka, though, telephoned her husband first, not simply to apprise him of the situation, but to ask his permission for this to be done.

In other cultures in which women are traditionally responsible for the management of pregnancy and childbirth, other evidence suggests that, where biomedicine is utilized, authority in decision-making in relation to clinical intervention is then assumed by men. Sargent (1982:158), in her study of obstetric practices among women in Benin, notes that home delivery remains the responsibility of household women: '[w]omen remain relatively silent and tangential to the action' (ibid:133). In small informal dispensaries or clinics, women retain 'an active interest and often a role in treatment'. But if a woman is contemplating a national health service delivery:

she must, under most circumstances, ask permission from the male head of household. Starting with the decision to select this type of assistance, then, a woman's realm of responsibility and authority is diminished (ibid).

However, Reissland and Burghart (1989:46), in their account of childbirth in a provincial hospital in Nepal, observe that, when a woman is admitted, her female relatives 'quickly establish their authority in the management of labour'. It is they who take decisions, sometimes in conflict with the medical and nursing personnel. The male guardian who accompanies the woman to the hospital 'remains a peripheral figure' who does little more than fetch the tea. In this hospital, modern clinical and traditional practices intersect. Indeed, Reissland and Burghart (ibid:51) suggest that it is 'difficult to determine whether modern medicine has integrated traditional healing or whether just the reverse is true'. In this case, women retain considerable authority in the management and control of the birth and postpartum. In contrast, the national health hospitals in Benin, like those in the UK, do not allow 'mixed treatments' - or at least in the UK only those treatments approved and supervised by health professionals. Authority falls to health professionals in the context of the hospital and to men in relation to biomedical intervention in the household.

Women themselves do not necessarily accept this passively, at least not publically. When I went to visit Jaya one day she was in a real rage. Her husband had accompanied her to the doctor that morning but she found herself the object of discussion between the two men:

'I'm not stupid. I speak English. This is my body, my blood. He [the doctor] should have spoken to me'. It was not only the doctor with whom Jaya was in a rage but also her husband for not including her in the discussion. Hemkurva, too, was unhappy that she was not X-rayed but, in the face of Dilip's opposition, felt that she had little alternative. In terms of the household management of pregnancy, my female informants - or their mother-in-law - made decisions concerning, for example, their diet, their activity, and the remedies they used to alleviate discomfort or threatened miscarriage. But when it came to clinical intervention on the part of health professionals, their authority was often usurped by their husband.

#### 5.15) Birth

Like most of their English counter-parts, my Gujarati informants expected to give birth in hospital. When I asked women about giving birth at home, especially those I met in the antenatal clinic, the idea was not something which any of them had contemplated. In rural north India, as Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989:107) among many others point out, childbirth itself is considered extremely polluting to those involved. The midwife's work in removing and disposing of the placenta is considered especially defiling. With a hospital birth, many of the immediate problems associated with the pollution of birth, including the disposal of the placenta, are thus removed from the domestic domain. A period of pollution is observed by women in abstaining from worship from four to six weeks after the birth. Members of the household, relatives, and friends may visit the hospital when they are able but most hospitals place restrictions on the number of visitors. In Newham, the evening visiting was reserved for husbands only. The nursing officer at the maternity hospital told me that this was so that the husband and wife would have time together away from all the other visitors. The two birth *samskaras* mentioned earlier (5.9), *janmajata* and *anadistaprayascitta*, are not performed in England and, according to the Brahman priests who told me of them, rarely, if ever, in India either.

In my discussions of childbirth with women who have children, they pointed out that the birth begins when 'the water breaks' (*pani pade che*) and 'the bleeding starts' (*lohi pade che*). After this comes the pain associated with birth (*peda dukkhe che* or *peda ave che*). Alternatively, women may simply refer to a pain in the stomach (*petma dukkhe che*). The term 'labour pain', as understood in the English sense, was described as a repeated pain (*mane thodi thodi var dukkhavo thay che*) which increased as the birth drew nearer. But the term *peda*, which is more commonly used, includes the contractions of birth as well as the pain experienced after birth. Older women, when asked how they managed the pain of childbirth, said that they were encouraged by the midwife or other women in attendance to get up and move about to allay the pain. They were positive in their attitude, though, about pain relief for women in hospital. Traditionally, women should not express their pain at birth (cf. Reissland and Burghart 1988; Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989) as this is a thing of *sharam*. According to nursing colleagues who are midwives in England, however, this is not the case here and women do give vent to their pain when family members are not present to hear it. The period from the breaking of the water to the actual birth is called *suvavad*, while the actual delivery is referred to as *prasuti*.<sup>(24)</sup> Birth (*janan*) refers, as Bhanu put it, 'to the whole lot, the water, the blood, the pain, the delivery, and afterwards, the pain and getting better'.

The blood which is passed at and after birth is *kacharo*, a term which has the implication of extreme filth and dirt. Until all of this has passed from the body, said to be anywhere from four to six weeks, the woman is impure, with the degree of impurity decreasing with the passing weeks. We shall see in the next chapter that many of the dietary considerations in the postpartum period are aimed at ridding the body of this filth. It will also be noted below how externally applied heat assists in this process. If all the impure blood and filth are not expelled after birth, it may hamper the formation of another egg and so reduce the possibility of a further pregnancy. As noted previously, this principle also applies following miscarriage. From Bhanu's comments above, we can also see that the pain of birth

does not cease when the child is born. Childbirth and its after effects are felt to be debilitating, and a period of rest and seclusion following the birth help women to rest and regain their health and strength. Hemkurva, whose three daughters were born in Malawi and England, describes the management of the postpartum period in India, including the method of applying external heat. She knew about this from her sisters still living in India.

In India there is a woman who comes round before the baby is born and afterward and it's so nice. After the baby's born she comes and puts oil all over you and the baby and she does massage. It's nice and helps you relax and get rid of the pain. In India, after the baby is born there's a special bed made from stuff like coconut. Under this they put hot coals, and the heat comes up to your back and then the woman gives you a hot brick wrapped up, and you put it on the stomach. It's very nice because after the baby is born there is pain, in the legs, the head, oh, everywhere and then the heat, it stops it. My sister in Bombay and all over India, they do this and then it [the blood] all goes, everything comes out nicely. Now she is like this [holding up one finger] but me, I'm like this [indicating being fat]. When I had Tara I asked the sister for a hot water bottle but she said no, no hot water bottle. In India, it's nice to have a baby. The massage is so nice for the baby. No problems with the skin, no spots or anything. (25)

Jaya, whose three children were born in England, points out that this approach differs considerably from the way in which the postpartum period is managed in this country:

Here in England, after the baby is born everyone is up straight away. But in India you don't have to do anything. No getting up or sitting because it isn't good for the legs. It makes them sore because the blood isn't strong enough. In India you stay lying down and everything is done for you. All you have to do is feed the baby, nothing else, not like here in England. You have to get up and do things, even in hospital.

Some young Gujarati women in east London would probably find it difficult to recognize their own experiences in these accounts of childbirth in India. They would, though, probably have listened to such accounts during their pregnancy and shared with others the notion that, while ridding the body of the polluted blood of birth is essential, women require a period of rest along with a dietary regime to nurture them back to health. There is an interesting comparison to be made here if we consider that pregnancy, while perceived by women

as 'normal', is seen by health professionals as pathological, or at least dealt with as potentially pathological, requiring constant monitoring and supervision. My informants on the other hand, see the postpartum period as potentially threatening if all the 'dirty' blood is not expelled and the woman allowed to rest and return to health, while health professionals emphasize a rapid physical return to 'normalcy'.

In common with practices in other parts of South Asia (Stevenson 1971:7; Blanchet 1984:113; Raheja 1988:96; Reissland and Burghart 1988:462), my informants report that during the first twenty-four hours following the birth, the mother takes only hot tea, or a hot spicy drink (*rab*) made from water, jaggery, *masala* (spices), and a large amount of ghee. This is continued throughout the postpartum period along with specific categories of food to replace the lost heat from the body with the rapid expulsion of the foetus, placenta, and blood. As far as the child is concerned, about five or six hours after it is born, a few drops of a mixture of jaggery and water, or honey and water (*galasuthi* or *galasudi*), is placed in the mouth of the infant (cf. Stevenson 1971:7; Blanchet 1984:122; Reissland and Burghart 1988:464). This is the first thing which should pass the baby's lips and is said to bring sweetness and strength during its life. It is made up and brought to the hospital by a woman's husband or mother-in-law after news of the birth has been received. Until this time there is always the possibility that something may go wrong. The mother does not give this mixture but, I was told, whoever does so, transfers their own temperament and moral qualities, and even physical appearance, to the child. Bhanu said that her FB had given her *galasudi* when she was born and, years later when she met him again after a long separation, was amazed how much she looked like him! Reissland and Burghart (1988:464) note that in Mithila it is the child's patrilineal relatives who initiate this ceremonial act. While several of my informants told me that any relative, or 'even the doctor', could do this, I could find no examples where the latter had occurred. Perhaps because of hospital stipulations as to who could visit the mother soon after the birth, among my younger informants it

was more common for the father or mother-in-law to give the mixture to the child.

I shall deal with the specifics of the postpartum diet for women in the next chapter. For now I want to note that the specificity of this diet means that hospitalization for the birth can, as one woman put it, be 'a real headache'. Difficulties with food and diet during hospitalization were raised time and again by women and men. Where possible, most women have food brought into the hospital from home. In joint households this entails the mother-in-law, or another female member, cooking the food and usually the husband transporting it. Drinks are kept hot in a thermos but food is often luke warm or cold by the time it is eaten. This provides at least one 'proper' meal a day while breakfast, and perhaps one other meal, such as a salad, may be taken from the hospital food. If a woman lives in a nuclear household, she must arrange for a female relative to cook for her while she is in hospital and have her husband collect it. Not only does this entail considerable advance arrangements, it can also put a strain on relationships with other family members, especially if such relationships are, for some reason, already tense. Jaya, for instance, was never on particularly good terms with her husband's family and, with her mother-in-law dead, she had to rely on her *jethani* (HeBW) to cook food for her. The difficulties which ensued from this were one reason why, she told me, she took an early discharge with her last child.

More generally, the logistics in arranging food to be cooked and transported to the hospital is one reason why women, whether living in joint or nuclear households, often prefer to have short-stay periods in hospital after their delivery. With Sarka and Rahina it was their *sasu* who brought food to the hospital (probably prepared by their *jethani*) although in Rahina's case, it was not done without reminding her of her good fortune to have such a mother-in-law who looked after her so well. One man told me that when his sons were born, his mother performed this service for his wife: 'my mother looked after her when she was pregnant and did all these things for her. There are no

charges made for this. Nothing is asked for in return. It is done because she is like their [his parents] daughter'. In addition to the logistics of food preparation and transportation to hospital, the attitudes and relationships between women in the joint household, or other female relatives in the case of nuclear households, was a factor noted by women in the length of time they spent in hospital after the birth.

#### 5.16) *Chaththi*: The Sixth Day Ceremony

At *panchamasi* and *simant* we saw the important role played by a woman's *nanad* who, through these rituals, protects the mother and unborn child from jealousy and the harmful intentions of others thus ensuring the well-being, health, and auspiciousness of her brother's and her own (natal) household. We shall see that this nurturing and protecting role continues after the birth of the child. News of the birth spreads rapidly among relatives and friends and there is considerable activity in the household which increases when the mother returns from hospital. The time of birth, weight, type of delivery, and sex of the child are discussed, as well as the condition of the mother. Gradually, the focus of attention begins to shift from the woman herself to the child. *Chaththi*, a ritual performed on the sixth day after birth, is also referred to as *Vidhata*, the goddess of fate, or simply *chaththi karvi*, literally 'doing the sixth'. Whether or not this ceremony is performed again depends on the tradition of the patriline. These and other rituals performed after the birth are not usually celebrated on the scale of the *kholo*, and the main participants are predominantly members of the bilateral extended family and sometimes friends.

Mother and baby are washed and dressed in new clothes. A wooden board or table is covered with a white or sometimes green cloth, again depending on family tradition. Candles are lit and placed in front of it with some betel nut, red powder, green lentils, and money. Rice, sugar crystals, and salt are variations on these items. According to older women, mother and child were traditionally kept secluded in the

darkened birth room away from the husband and other male relatives. On the sixth day, they emerged to experience *surya darshan*, 'looking at the sun'. If a child was born in one of the inauspicious divisions of the day (*janmotri*), the father's first sighting took place via some kind of reflection - a mirror, a bowl of water or, more commonly, a highly polished plate. By looking directly at the child, the father took upon himself and the rest of the household the inauspiciousness of the baby which could result in some calamity in the future (cf. Parry 1979:161). To counteract this, he looked at the child via a reflection on the plate which was then taken to the temple. This accords much more with what Raheja (1988:101-102, 107) found in Pahansu, in that this inauspiciousness is absorbed by Brahmans who 'take away' the 'faults' of the child transferred through the plate. However, my informants told me that this was no longer a common practice and is only done now among very 'religious' people in England.

Among my informants, the mother or a woman's *nanad* (HZ) takes the baby in her arms and turns it seven times to face the light of the candles, taking care to shield its face as some say this can cause blindness or cross-eyes in the child. The point that women make is that this is an auspicious act. Prayers are said to the goddess for the future well-being of the child and the board is left overnight in the woman's bedroom with a blank sheet of paper and a red pen. Red is considered an auspicious colour and is used when sending invitations or writing letters which contain good news. Around midnight, I was told, the goddess Vidhata comes to invisibly write down the child's fate (*lekh*) (cf. Stevenson 1971:9-11; Raheja 1988:96-7) (26). The next morning, the board is dismantled and the money, rice, betel nut or whatever is taken by the woman's *nanad*. Raheja (1988:98-99) observes that in Pahansu, the *nanad* takes away any inauspiciousness from the child and from its patriline by removing these items. My informants, though, all noted that the items left on the board are auspicious omens for the child's future and are given to the *nanad* to thank her for her part in the ritual.

Although some women are still in hospital, female relatives may organize the paraphernalia of the ritual and the ceremony is performed at the hospital bed. In this case, the board containing the auspicious items and the red ink is taken home and left overnight in the woman's bedroom. Because of the organization involved, and the hospital environment, others said that they had omitted the ceremony altogether. When I asked women what happened, then, if the ceremony was not performed, if Vidhata did not write down the fate of the child, they invariably shrugged their shoulders and said that this was what happened here in England. It did not seem to be the cause of any moral conundrum, although I was told that more women are now 'doing these ceremonies' in hospital because the staff were more cooperative. The numbers who are able to participate in the ritual on the sixth day depends to a considerable extent on the proximity of relatives. If *chaththi* falls on a week day, the exigencies of urban living may preclude a visit and the ceremony itself may be quite small. However, a woman's *nanad* - real or classificatory - is expected to attend, and other female and male relatives may take the day off work. The men are not essential in the performance of the ritual but do partake in the meal afterward. If the ceremony has taken place in hospital the meal is served at the woman's *sasara*. Gifts are also given to the child - money as well as clothes - by those who attend, including and particularly by a woman's *nanad*.

#### 5.17) *Namakarana*: The Naming Ceremony

The use of astrology as a guide to naming is commonplace among Gujaratis in east London. The essential pieces of information required in the process are the exact time of birth and the day on which it occurred. Each day, beginning at six in the morning, is divided into one and a half hour periods (*janmotri*), the divisions of the day. When taken together with the day of birth they are more or less auspicious. Knowledge of the days and the divisions of the day is common among older women and, if a child has been born at a time which is popularly thought to be inauspicious, efforts may be made to 'fudge' the birth time by household members as this can be a bad omen for the child's

future and for the family as a whole. The information of the time and day of birth is then sent to an astrologer in India, or in the local area, and the information is used to determine the first letter of the name (*rashi*).

The naming ceremony can take place anytime after the twelfth day although, I was told, it could take place earlier if the information arrives from the astrologer. This is given to the husband's sister who, in theory, always names the child. In practice - and particularly for the second and subsequent children - it is often the parents who choose the name in consultation with the *nanad* and the help of a book of names. Relatives and friends are invited to the ceremony but, again, the size of the gathering varies. Mother and baby bathe and put on new clothes. Before the ceremony, the *kul devi* is worshipped by the mother and father (and other household members if joint). A large white or green cloth - the same as was used in the *chatthi* ceremony - is spread on the floor and the baby, together with some green lentils, betel nut, and money placed in it. As in the other rituals, these items can vary according to the tradition in the family. Four children, older siblings or children of relatives ('cousin-sisters' or 'cousin-brothers'), each take a corner of the cloth. If the child is a boy, four boys hold the cloth and if a girl, then four girls. With the cloth now in the shape of a hammock, the children and the *nanad* swing the baby up and down to the chant:

*Oli jholi pipala pan  
phoiba padayun [.....] nam* <sup>(27)</sup>

At the appropriate moment, the husband's sister says the child's chosen name. The children are given jaggery and coconut and food is served to the guests. The money, green lentils, and betel nut are given to the *nanad* to thank her for taking part. The mother places red powder (*kunkum*) and uncooked rice on the forehead of the participants and the child. The ceremony is called *nam padun*, 'give the name', or *nam phoiba padun*, *phoiba* being the child's father's sister. As well as the chosen name, the child takes on the name of its father, for example, Shobhana Dilip Doshi. Here, Shobhana is the chosen name with

Dilip Doshi being her father's name. For a woman, this changes at marriage when she drops her father's name and takes on the name of her husband to become, for example, Shobhana Rajesh Mehta, Rajesh Mehta being her husband. (28)

The *nanad* gives gifts to the mother and child and it is not uncommon for these to be sent from India or East Africa if the husband has other sisters not living in Britain. When Mira was born, Hemkurva received two saris from Dilip's sister in Gujarat plus £20, a sari from Ruxmani, Dilip's FZD, and one from her mother-in-law. These were not 'everyday' saris but costly confections of red, green, and gold thread. She also received 'blouse-pieces' to go with them. Mira received all manner of clothing and toys and a lesser amount were also given to her older sisters by Ruxmani. Dilip's married sister in Gujarat also sent money for Mira as well as gold nose studs and ear rings for when she was older. According to Hemkurva and Prabha, Hasmita, Jasvanti, and the women at EL, this does not occur at any particular time or with any ceremony. Bhanu told me that a woman's married *nanad* - who is 'the most important person' as far as the naming ceremony is concerned - gives the mother gold and a new sari: 'she doesn't have to be there if she can't. When my brother's wife had a baby boy [in Kenya], I sent a drawing of a cradle and a sari for my *bhabhi* (BW) and some money'. The *nanad* in return receives gifts for her part as the ritual officiant - sometimes jewellery or money and/or saris and 'blouse pieces'.

A woman also receives gifts from her *pihar* after the birth of a child - boy or girl. Sets of clothing - 'baby-grows', dresses, or trousers, depending on the sex of the child, jumpers, cardigans, socks, winter tights and so on - as well as toys are given to the child, and saris, 'blouse-pieces', and money for the mother. When one man received flowers from an English friend after the birth of a child, he was rather disparaging of this custom pointing out that they will soon die and wither away, whereas gifts 'are always remembered'. The birth of a child is also an occasion for gift-giving in the neighbourhood. It was a common occurrence at UP and LC especially for

sweets to be distributed to all those present when a *vahu* had given birth. Traditionally, I was told, *penda* was distributed only when a boy was born but now this has changed and the birth of a girl is also celebrated in this way by many people. This did actually occur on several occasions but, instead of *penda*, another sweet called *jalebi* - made not from milk but from a grain-based flour, fried and soaked in sugar syrup - was, from my observations, often given at the birth of a girl. This, however, was not universal. Nita told me that when her daughter was born she distributed *penda* to relatives, friends, and neighbours. Jasvanti too, told me that when her daughters were born *penda* was given. It is not so important now, she told me: 'girl, boy, so long as they are healthy. It doesn't matter'. Neighbours and friends also give money to the child. When Mira was born, Hemkurva received anything from one to five pounds from many of her neighbours - not only Gujarati, but her Sindi and Muslim neighbours as well. Similarly, she gives money when she visits neighbours following a birth in the household or of a married daughter or sister.

#### 5.18.) The First Outing

*Namakarana* brings to an end the list of *samskara* which relate directly to pregnancy and childbirth as given by the Brahman priests. One further rite, *niskramana*, the child's first outing, is noted in other literature (Inden and Nicholas 1977; Carter 1982). It is also one of great importance among my informants. Whereas other life cycle rites may be omitted according to the tradition within a particular patriline, the first outing of the child to the temple appears to be done by all. The period of pollution following childbirth is said to last for six weeks, during which time a woman should remain indoors and refrain from any worship. With each *samskara* performed after birth, the degree of pollution lessens as she is gradually reincorporated into the household and her normal duties. In practice, for women living in a nuclear household, without the help of female relatives, it may not be possible to observe such a lengthy period of seclusion particularly if there are other children to care for. Others note that, once the blood flow after childbirth has ceased and they

have regained their strength, it is no longer necessary to remain confined, although they do continue to refrain from worship. Pragmatic considerations are also evident in a further way. Health visitors have a statutory obligation to visit all new mothers in their health district but, unless there are major problems in the household, the mother is encouraged to take the child to the health centre. The first visit to check on the child's progress and the health of the mother takes place around the fourth week after the birth and, in my experience, Gujarati women are fairly punctilious in attending.

The first 'official' outing occurs in the fifth or sixth week when the baby makes its first visit to the temple. The mother and baby again bathe and put on new clothes with the child wearing two gold bracelets (*pochi*) given by the *nanad*. At the Shri Nathaji temple in Leytonstone, it is possible to see numerous families arriving first at the image of Ganesha to give thanks for a happy conclusion to the birth, and then moving on to the other images, including Ambajimata, to ask blessings for the child's future and to give the baby its first *prasad* from the temple Gods. The first outing to the temple, rather than the health centre, marks the end of the period of pollution and seclusion for the mother and her re-incorporation into the social world. She re-enters the normal household food cycle and the daily worship at the household shrine. She is also free to resume sexual relations with her husband, although, I was told by several women at EL, that formerly this did not take place until she returned from her *pihar* some three to four months after the birth. At *chatthi* and the naming ceremony, the child is ritually and socially incorporated into its patriline through women related to the child patrilaterally. The first outing to the temple, on the other hand, introduces it the wider social and religious world which it will inhabit.

#### 5.19) Conclusion

My informants in east London utilize biomedical health care both to control fertility and to manage pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum, but this is informed by cultural notions of femininity,

procreation, and motherhood itself. While each individual has a naturally hot (*garami svabhav*) or cool temperament (*thandi svabhav*), there is a notion, especially evident in the rituals performed before and during pregnancy, that maleness is associated with coolness. While not explicitly stated, the symbolic elements of the *be lota* and *kholo* ceremonies, and the drinking of the milk concoction after intercourse, suggest the constitution of maleness in the body of the mother through 'cooling' substances. Attitudes toward some forms of contraception give support to the obverse notion that heat is associated with female sexuality which, as I have suggested, women themselves seek to control.

I have also suggested in this chapter the possibility of several different theories of procreation which can be used contextually. This is an area which requires further research in Britain but two points can be made here. First, the idea that the male seed is transcendent in the creation of a child's identity (cf. Delaney 1986) was not widely supported by my informants. Male and female informants did, however, agree on the significance of maternal nurture and, moreover, on the far greater role of the mother in the moral fashioning of the child through her own moral qualities (*guna*), and through her mind (cf. Savage 1991:84 who makes<sup>a</sup> similar observation among her female English informants). Second, the idea that married women remain tied by blood to their natal patriline has important, but hitherto undervalued implications in terms of the way in which patrilineal identity and membership is constituted. I mean by this that when we consider those members of the patriline who create a child's ritual and social identity, we are talking not only of its parents, but also of women related to the child patrilaterally. In particular, we are talking of the husband's married sister.

It will be recalled (4.9) that there are two major calendrical festivals which celebrate the brother-sister relationship - *divasni rakhadi* and *bhai-bij*. In some families, the 'knot' which unites a man and his wife at their marriage ceremony is given to his married sister, who then removes and keeps the contents as payment for her

part in the ritual. In other families, this 'knot' is taken back to the priest at the *kul devi* shrine in Gujarat. On the wedding night, it may be the married sister who leaves the 'cooling' drink for her brother and his wife after sexual intercourse, with its implications of creating maleness if her brother's wife conceives. Prior to the birth of her brother's child, she protects his wife and unborn child through the rituals she enacts and, after the birth, she continues to be one of the major ritual officiants in all postpartum rites. When considered as a whole, in many of these rituals the married *nanad* ties threads, or places bracelets around the wrist of her brother, his wife and his children. From an outsider's perspective, one could suggest that this ritual binding creates protective boundaries which ensure well-being and auspiciousness for her brother's household.

At the naming ceremony it is the married *nanad* who confers a social identity on her brother's child. What is particularly striking is that it is not a member of the *kutumb*, defined in terms of a group of agnates, but a man's married sister who empowers the child with a social identity. When I asked informants why the *nanad* named the child, two responses from men and women were invariably given. First, the close relationship (*nikatano sambandha*) which exists between brother and sister, which both men and women held so important; and second, the idea that having helped in all the rituals this was a way of honouring and thanking the *nanad*. In return for her part in these rituals, she receives gifts of money and other items which, informants point out, are auspicious. She also gives gifts to the mother and child. This suggests not only that women continue to participate in the religious life of their natal household. As a married sister, a woman is essential to the well-being and auspiciousness of her brother's household. After her marriage, a married sister returns to her brother's household as a major officiant at rituals which create fertility, maleness, and thus, the continuation of her natal patriline.

A final point to note is the pre-eminence of women in enacting rituals, of the specific Gujarati form they take, and of the autonomy

of women in their practice. It is women who organize and perform the life-cycle rites and the many other domestic rituals I have noted. Men acknowledge the role of women in this and their knowledge of the rituals, and both sexes perceive the importance of women in transmitting this aspect of their culture to the next generation. At the *kholo* ceremony in particular, women celebrate the auspiciousness of motherhood and help create this desired state in another woman. In the enactment of rituals, women enjoy a level of autonomy which is evidenced perhaps in no other area of their lives. Through these rituals they empower themselves and others. Women nurture and create auspiciousness for their husbands, children, brothers, and households, and thus protection for themselves at various stages of their domestic cycle. But they also create and recreate notions of femininity and womanhood as ultimately subordinate to men.

CHAPTER SIX

FOOD, GENDER, AND WELL-BEING : GOODNESS, POWER AND PURITY

## 6.) Introduction

This chapter examines the way in which women care for the health, and moral and spiritual well-being of the household through food and feeding practices. It links some of the themes previously noted in a discussion which focuses on the way in which evaluations of goodness, power, and purity in food are related to the construction of cultural notions of femininity, masculinity, and identity. The highly complex regulations governing the handling and preparation of food and food transactions in Hindu culture; the principles which govern commensal relations between castes organized in a hierarchy of relative purity; and the classification of food according to a series of elaborate codes, is extensively covered in the anthropological literature (see, for example, Mayer 1960; Dumont 1970; Marriott 1968 & 1976; Beck 1969; Mandelbaum 1972; Khare 1976a & 1976b; Parry 1979 & 1985; Cantlie 1977 & 1981; Appadurai 1981; Daniel 1984). Notions of commensality and classification are also themes of this chapter. My starting point, however, is the way in which my informants evaluate food in terms of its goodness, strength, and purity.<sup>11</sup>

All food in the Gujarati diet, I was constantly told by women and men, is good food (*saro khorak*), but within this broad category numerous discriminations are made. *Saro khorak* can refer to food which promotes and maintains health (*tabiyat*) through a balance of elements in the body and environment, which is easily digestible and light (*halke*), and which is nutritionally good food (*paustik khorak*). Good food is also evaluated in relation to its abundance and taste. Sweet food is associated with happiness and celebration, given out at the birth of a child, to conclude marriage arrangements, and sent with the bride to her conjugal home. It is also an important food at Divali, the celebration of the Gujarati Hindu New Year. Finally, good food is evaluated as pure (*shuddha*) food. The food of fasts (*pharali*) purifies the mind-soul in order to receive grace and blessings from the deities. A further discrimination is based on the moral properties inherent in food itself which affect not only the body but also the mind of the eater. *Satvik khorak* is pure food which promotes good

conduct, calmness, and tranquility. *Tamsik khorak* on the other hand, excites the passions and emotions. These notions of good food are also associated with the creation of pure blood distilled from the goodness of food in the process of digestion. Finally, notions of power (*shakti*) and strength (*takat*) are used contextually to describe certain categories of food, persons, and relationships between individuals and groups.

Evaluations of the goodness, power, and purity of food can, I suggest, be examined in three different contexts or domains - what I have called the humoural, the Gujarati, and the Hindu. In the humoural domain, the treatment of food is concerned with promoting and maintaining health through a balance of predominantly hot (*garam*) and cold (*thanda*) elements in the body and environment. Its primary focus is the domestic arena, where food is evaluated according to one's individual disposition; one's bodily state - for example, in illness, pregnancy and postpartum - and one's age. The restoration of health entails a restoration of bodily and environmental elements. The Gujarati domain is concerned with the 'gastro-politics' (Appadurai 1981) of food in domestic and extra-domestic affairs. The evaluation of food in this domain is a vehicle for expressions of amity and conflict, identity, rank and prestige, within and between households and kin, the local neighbourhood and wider society. Health and well-being in this domain rests primarily on the reputation and prestige of the household, and properly ordered social relationships. The festival of Divali is both an expression of this social and moral well-being, as well as a celebration of the return to order in the cosmos. In the Hindu domain, the treatment of food is concerned with religious beliefs and practices which create spiritual and moral well-being. As Cantlie (1981:41-3) and Parry (1985:613) have observed, in Hindu South Asia, bodily substance and moral disposition are created from food. Food is imbued with moral qualities which are internalized by the eater in the process of digestion. As Parry puts it, in Hindu culture 'a man is what he eats' (*ibid*), his character and temperament come from the food he ingests. According to my informants, food which has a spiritual and morally beneficial effect on the eater is pure (*shuddha*)

food. The two main categories of food which have this effect are *phalari*, the food of fasts which purifies the mind-soul, and *satvik* food, one of the *guna* (moral properties) which promotes good conduct and a calm mind.

While these evaluations of food can be analysed in contextually distinct domains, what is pervasive of all domains, and what is central to much Hindu thought and practice in the handling, ingestion, and digestion of food, is the notion that bodily substance as well as moral disposition are created from food. According to Marriott (1976) and his colleagues at Chicago, the assumed dichotomy in western philosophical and commonsense notions of mind and body is absent from South Asian Hindu thought. Bodily substance and moral code are two aspects of the same thing. Any transaction, to a greater or lesser extent, entails an exchange of bio-moral qualities which transforms the substance-code of those involved in it. Thus 'actors and their interactions are never to be separated from each other; they change together' (ibid: 112). The person, in this scheme of things, is 'divisible', constantly transformed by their interactions with others. While this model has been rightly criticised for its over-determinism,<sup>(2)</sup> the idea that the body is capable of moral transformation through ingesting certain categories of food has important implications for my informants in the cultural construction of gender and identity. Food genders the body in the sense that certain categories of food are held to have different moral effects on male and female bodies, creating desirable feminine and masculine qualities in them. Moreover, there is a notion that, through food, the feminine body is itself a medium through which cultural purity and cultural identity are maintained.

#### 6.1) THE HUMOURAL DOMAIN

While ideas relating to Ayurvedic theory provide a framework for classifying food in the humoural domain, knowledge of this highly complex theory varied considerably among my informants in east London, as indeed it does among peoples in South Asia (Nichter 1980), and

among other South Asians in Britain (Bhopal 1986; Krause 1989). Very briefly, according to Ayurvedic theory the body is made up of a modification of the five elements which comprise the material world; ether, fire, water, earth, and wind. These elements are unevenly distributed and, in some parts of the world, one or more of these elements predominate. This affects the flora and fauna of that region and thus the food and constitution of the human body is also affected (Zimmerman 1987:29-31). The five elements are consumed through food and their hot, cold, wet, and dry properties are transformed in the process of 'cooking' in the digestive 'fire' of the stomach (Parry 1985:614) into three humours; *pit* (bile), *kapha* (phlegm), and *vayu* (wind). These humours act on the constituents of the body created from food; juice, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen (Kutumbiah 1969:58-66). In health (*tandurasti* or *tabiyat*), there is a balance between the humours, the environment, and one's mental faculties. In illness, this equilibrium is upset through the 'excessive, deficient, and wrongful administration of sense objects; [2] the climatic characteristics of heat and cold; and [3] the misuse of intelligence' (Kutumbiah 1969:76).

My informants knew of, and some had consulted, Ayurvedic practitioners, but the majority had a fairly rudimentary knowledge of the theories and processes on which Ayurvedic medicine is based. However, several common themes occur which centre on the notion of an equilibrium in bodily elements, and a balance between bodily constitution and the environment to maintain health. Promoting and maintaining the health of themselves and of household members was of considerable concern to my married female informants. Good food (*saro khorak*) in the everyday diet was seen as one way of achieving this. Informants cited categories of hot and cold (*garam* and *thanda*), and light and heavy (*halko* and *bhare*) as indicators of health. A further referent is food which produces strength (*takat*) according to one's bodily state and one's age. The concern with purity and pollution here focuses on the dangers to health which arise from impure blood.

## 6.2) Balance and Health

All Gujarati vegetarian food, I was constantly told by women and men, is good food providing certain principles were followed. To maintain health in the everyday diet, *garam* and *thanda* should be balanced in the body. The value of some food items are agreed upon in a kind of 'collective experience' of knowledge. Red chilli, ginger - dried or fresh - and mustard seed, which are used everyday as part of the *masala*, are all classified as hot, while banana is invariably said to be cold. But, as I noted earlier, individuals themselves have naturally hot (*garami svabhav*) or cool (*thandi svabhav*) temperaments, and what may be *garam* for one person can be *thanda* for another. Similarly, some foods can alter their valence according to their state. For example, while some fruit may be classified as hot and heavy by an individual, the juice is cold and light. The value assigned to a food item depends on the subjective feeling it creates in the individual and this can change according to their bodily state - for example, during pregnancy and at the postpartum which I shall discuss shortly - and their mental state.<sup>(3)</sup> Women and men told me that one learns through experience - and often reflection on episodes of illness - the effect which different foods have on one's body. As Vilas told me at EL one morning 'my mother taught me a bit about it but I know when I eat it how it affects my body'.

Light and heavy (*halke/bhare*) foods differ from *garam* and *thanda* in that they have an effect on the digestive process itself. Heavy food lays in the stomach and is said to be difficult to digest, requiring a lot of the body's energy to do so. Again there is individual variation in what constitutes heavy food. Fried food especially can cause a feeling of heaviness and, while a little oil is necessary in cooking, too much can impede digestion. There is a notion that food should be digested fairly quickly to leave the stomach clean (*saph*), and as heavy food does not achieve this, there is the implication that this food becomes bad or stale (*vasi*) in the stomach.<sup>(4)</sup> *Halke khorak* on the other hand, is easy to digest. It is

good for the body and for one's health. It is also referred to as *sado khorak* (simple food) and includes liquid food (*pravaho khorak*), for example, *dal pani*, the liquid drained off after cooking *dal*. Light food finds a rough equivalent in another category, *paustik khorak* (nutritious food), which includes items like rice, green lentils, and yoghurt. *Paustik khorak*, though, takes in a wider range of foods which appear less as single items but as items which do not vary with the effect on the individual's body - lentils, grains, vegetables and particularly green vegetables, pulses, milk and milk products, fruit, salad vegetables, honey, and nuts. These groupings in fact contain most of the food in a Gujarati vegetarian diet, but such food is considered nutritious when it meets with certain requirements - that it is varied from day to day, that it is eaten when freshly cooked, that it is balanced in terms of hot and cold properties, and that it is not rendered 'heavy' by the use of too much oil.

Older women, many of my younger female informants, and the men I asked, had considerable knowledge both of the food categories themselves and of the health-giving properties of various items used in the everyday diet. Garlic assists in digesting those foods which are considered to be acidic by neutralizing the acid; coriander leaves, which are used widely in Gujarati cooking, are important for the eye sight; and myrobalan (*harade*) ensures regular bowel movements. Among the children I knew, the idea of balance of properties in food was also evident. When I was visiting Hemkurva one afternoon Tara had been home from school with a stomach upset. When I asked what might have caused this, Shobana, then aged nine, said disapprovingly that 'it's because she had a pear at breakfast. You know, you shouldn't eat it first thing like that because it's cold and she got pains in the stomach'. When I asked her, she said that her mother had told her about these things: 'that's <sup>what</sup> we do you know'.

When new food items are introduced into the diet, including English food products, they are assessed and classified by the individual according to their subjective experience. As Hansha (Appendix F) told me when I asked her about this 'it's an individual

thing. People do it even with English food. You just sort of do it automatically'. Not all English food items have a hot/cold value, with items such as bread and biscuits having no value in the classification. A further principle which is used in categorizing a new food item is by means of analogy. The food is compared with others in the existing range of the diet and a value is decided on according to similarities in texture, colour, and origin. Vilas at EL told me, during a discussion after class, that 'cream cheese and things like that are just like yoghurt, they're cold'. The other women stressed, though, that this may be revised when the actual item is eaten and the individual personally assesses the effect it has on her body.

Informants told me about the values of different foods and their own individual responses to them. However, preparing and cooking in the everyday food cycle requires little conscious effort as balance is in the menu itself. The use of *masala* in the main course, in vegetable and pulse dishes, is balanced at the end of the meal with boiled rice (*bhat*), which is cold, and with *chash*, a mixture of yoghurt and water. Particular dishes are themselves balanced in this way using combinations of light and heavy and hot and cold properties. *Aladni dal*, a *dal* made from black legumes, for instance, is said to be heavy, but this heaviness is offset by the inclusion of ginger, an agent which assists digestion. The balance of tastes is more up to the individual and their personal proclivities. Sweets dishes are not usually served in the everyday food cycle to accompany main meals but the various chutneys used can be sweet, sour, or bitter - the latter acting as an appetite stimulant. When preparing food in the household, women take account of the way in which different food items affect individuals but after a time this becomes fairly routine. The important thing, I was told, is to avoid excess in one or another category.

### 6.3) Imbalance and Illness

Imbalance of hot and cold qualities in the body was noted by female and male informants as one of (usually) several contributing

factors in numerous illnesses. As in many areas of South Asia, <sup>(5)</sup> and other parts of the world, <sup>(6)</sup> my informants attribute illness and affliction to numerous causal agents, often simultaneously. Household remedies, or home medicine as they are called, aim to restore balance and purify the blood. Often together with a visit to the GP, they are the initial treatments instigated for non-acute illness and are almost always commenced by the women in the household. <sup>(7)</sup> Men also have knowledge of these remedies but it is invariably women who prepare and administer them. This is seen as part of their *dharma* as wives and mothers to care for husbands and children. The knowledge of older women - often kin but also friends or neighbours - gained through their greater experience and episodes of intervention, is often sought by younger ones.

Remedies taken internally aim to restore balance - including eating food of the opposite category which caused the illness - and to cleanse and purify the blood. Light food (*halke khorak*) is said to be of particular value (cf. Tabor 1981:447) and has connotations of *paustik* (nutritious) food, as opposed to heavy (*bhare*) food. When we were discussing this at EL, Surbhi had the support of the other women when she pointed out that 'the body is digesting heavy food while the germs and bad things are in the rest of the body and we aren't getting better'. Decoctions are also applied externally to permeate the skin and counter-balance internal disequilibrium. <sup>(8)</sup> In addition, illness may also be caused by a disequilibrium in the three humours - bile (*pit* or *pitta*), phlegm (*kapha*) and wind (*vayu* or *vat*). Not all my informants were conversant with these humours. Vilas, Neema, and Aarti at EL, Hansha and her friend Chandrika, and Chandrika's brother, Jayesh, had not heard of them. Others, though, had a more sophisticated understanding. Jaya, who told me that her mother had been her main teacher, demonstrated considerable knowledge of these concepts. As I was talking with her in her kitchen one day, she was in the midst of preparing a decoction for herself to treat *pit-vayu*. This, she explained, as she busily ground herbs, was an imbalance of both these humours caused, in this instance, by too much cold and stale food. She described symptoms of vomiting as well as a specific

pain under the diaphragm which she had experienced before. She treated this with basil, black pepper, ginger, asfoetida, caraway, and salt ground to a powder and boiled in water until it was reduced to a few teaspoons.

A faulty diet also affects the amount and quality of the blood. Unlike the detailed explanation given by Hitesh in the previous chapter (5.2), when he noted that food becomes flesh, bones, blood, and semen, most of my female informants had a fairly simple model of how blood was constituted in the body. Yogini's comments at EL were fairly typical when she observed that:

The stomach is where the food goes. After that it makes the blood. If the blood is bad you get sick (*bimari*). Food makes the blood bad and this is why you should eat good food.

The medicinal powders (*churano*) which are taken, whether purchased or made up at home, are said to act to restore the blood to its proper condition and amount. In the case of diarrhoea, for example, food passes too rapidly through the body for it to be transformed into blood and hence, the amount and quality of the blood is reduced. Too little blood, or blood which is impure or unclean, can result in tiredness, pallor, weakness, and malaise in children and adults. Anaemia is often conceptualized as weakness due to a lack of blood or unclean blood, rather than the biomedical notion of iron deficiency due to low haemoglobin levels. A pale or white tongue was also noted by several women as a sign that the blood was 'bad' or unclean. With constipation, food stagnates in the body producing impure blood. Blood pressure (*lohinu bhramana*), or high blood pressure (*lohinu dabana*), rather than referring to the pressure on the artery walls by the pumping action of the heart as understood in clinical terms, was conceptualized as the blood whirling or flowing rapidly through the body which can produce excessive *garam*. Similarly, when informants spoke of a 'temperature', this could refer to excessive *garam* without registering a raised body temperature on a thermometer.

The concern with the state and quantity of one's blood in the humoral domain can be understood in terms of the digestive process

and one's bodily substance. From the goodness of food comes blood and, according to Hitesh, this is further refined into male semen, both of which are essential to procreation. A balance in food properties maintains the proper state of one's blood which is essential to health and life itself. Conversely, when the digestive process is not functioning properly, the goodness is not distilled from food but rather, it is clogged up and constipated with the 'bad things' polluting the blood and causing illness. It is not surprising that problems with the digestive process caused by an incorrect diet are cited as a reason for illness. There is a link then, between the goodness of food, properly functioning digestive processes, pure blood, and health, and bad food (stale, heavy), malfunctioning digestion, illness, and polluted blood.<sup>(9)</sup> An individual, of whatever age or gender, can suffer illness caused by bodily imbalance in *garam* and *thanda*. Both male and female informants reported (usually minor) illnesses diagnosed and treated in this way. It happened almost as a matter of course in daily life. For women, though, the everyday preparation of food entails a responsibility to maintain the health of family members by maximizing goodness in food through balance, and minimizing ill-effects through avoiding excess. Women care for themselves and the household by promoting good health through a balance of properties in food appropriate to individual temperaments. Good health itself implies an absence of illness and misfortune and so maintaining their own and their family's health is another way in which women create auspiciousness for themselves and for their household.

#### 6.4) Food in the Postpartum

A concern with blood, bodily strength, and balance is also evident when we consider the diet of women in the postpartum. In common with other South Asians (Ferro-Luzzi 1974; Bennett 1976:20-1; McGilvray 1982:55, 58-9; Nichter and Nichter 1983:240-1), the dietary considerations of my informants during pregnancy and in the postpartum are intimately linked to the health of the foetus and that of the neonate. My informants also share with many others in South Asia,<sup>(10)</sup>

and in other parts of the world, '11' the notion that with the rapid expulsion of the foetus, placenta, and blood at birth, and with it the stored heat, a woman's body becomes cool, debilitated, and weak. Women constantly told me of the need to replace this lost heat and restore their strength through the consumption of heating foods. In addition to this, as we saw in the previous chapter (5.2), many of my female informants perceived the stomach and the womb as contiguous (cf. Blanchet 1984:114) and full of water and blood during pregnancy. Dry food (*suko khorak*) is eaten to help expel the fluid and 'dry out' the womb.

While there is some individual variation and some differences based on family traditions, the foods utilized in the postpartum largely entail a 'collective knowledge' of agreed upon categories. These are appropriate to the woman's bodily state and to the needs of the infant. Any food which requires flour in its preparation is made from millet rather than the usual wheat, gram, corn, or plain white flour. Millet flour assists in ridding the body of the impure blood of childbirth. It also increases the milk supply, producing thick, energy-giving milk for the baby. Good foods in the postpartum diet are essentially *garam* and *suko* and they serve several purposes for both mother and child. First, they assist in ridding the body of the polluted blood of childbirth by acting as a kind of purifier to restore and clean the blood. They also produce a kind of contraction in the abdomen which assists in the expulsion of blood and helps reduce and flatten the stomach. It was noted in the previous chapter that if all this impure blood is not expelled it may impede the chance of a further pregnancy. In conjunction with this expulsion of impure blood, hot and dry foods also restore the mother's bodily balance, and hence her health, to enable her to care for her child and the household itself.

Second, *garam* food in the postpartum also produces strength (*takat*) to overcome the debilitating effects of childbirth and restore health. This strength is transferred to the child through the thick, nutritious milk it produces especially from lactation foods such as

millet flour. Light food is also stressed in the postpartum. Too much heavy food taken by the mother can upset the digestion and such problems are passed on to the infant via the mother's milk. The transference of strength and energy to the infant via the mother's milk, creates not only a physical but also a moral relationship between the two. If a woman does not eat appropriately good food in the postpartum she may be seen, often by her mother-in-law, to be the 'cause' of illness in her child. The father's moral responsibility as the economic provider, is to ensure that the appropriate food is available.

While women talked about heating and strengthening foods in the postpartum this was not always as straight-forward as the above account suggests. As we have seen, my informants attended clinics and hospitals during pregnancy, for the birth, and postnatally. Many were aware of calcium, carbohydrate, protein, vitamins and so on, through schooling, peer groups and especially, the media. At antenatal clinics, posters, as well as information and queries from health professionals, centre on what is a 'healthy' diet for pregnant women in terms of these categories. To give an example, as part of the educational programme at EL, a dietician from the local maternity hospital was invited to give a talk on nutrition in general, and specifically during and after pregnancy for the mother and child. The dietician, Parmindar, was a Sikh. Of the seven South Asian women who attended, four were Gujarati: Sarka and Rahina - both pregnant at the time - and Yogini and Monghi. Parmindar talked for a time on a 'healthy diet' and then showed a film which reinforced what she had been saying. She emphasized that 'you should eat food all the time that is good and nourishing, not just when you get pregnant'. Many Asian women she saw at the hospital, she remarked, have hip and leg pain during pregnancy caused by their poor diet.

Parmindar noted four basic food groups: milk and milk products; cereals plus bread and pasta; meat; and finally vegetables. Two things from two of the groups should be eaten every day. If a woman was vegetarian, she should have two pints of milk per day in any form.

Calcium and iron were also important. Calcium and Vitamin K, Parmindar noted, come from milk and dried fruit, nuts as well as pulses which also contain iron. 'Many ladies at the hospital say to me that the baby will be too big if they eat all of this, but don't listen to this. Your baby needs to be more than five pounds or four pounds or three pounds'. She then went on to talk about the diet of the neonate, pointing out that for the first four months it requires only the mother's breast milk. It can then have cooled boiled water or fresh orange juice. By one year, it can participate in the household diet but should have no salt before six months and no sweet things for the first year. The film which followed reinforced much of this. Two pamphlets were handed out to the women. These contained similar information to the film but in a little more detail, including the use of margarine to give vitamin D and prevent rickets in children. An alternative suggestion was to make ghee from half margarine and butter.

From the dietician's point of view, good food comes from four basic food groups which contain chemical compounds. Combinations of these eaten during pregnancy, and in the everyday diet, provide a 'healthy well-balanced diet'. My informants also strive for balance, whether in the everyday diet to maintain health, or according to their personal temperament or bodily state, through eating *saro khorak* (good food). This balance, though, is based on humoral categories of food which also purify and cleanse the blood, and in the postpartum most importantly, rid the body of impure blood. Bodily imbalance is also perceived by my informants, and by health professionals, as a possible cause of illness, but the way to correct this imbalance differs between the two. In biomedical terms, imbalance refers to either too little protein, calcium, vitamins and so on - all 'good food' - or too much sugar, salt and fats especially - 'bad food'. The way to deal with this is to give more if there is a deficiency of 'good food', and to have less if there is excess of 'bad food'. My informants, on the other hand, achieve a restoration of balance not through more or less, but through the use of a food category classified as an opposite.

Informants told me about calcium, carbohydrate, protein, vitamins, and so on and cited the use of these components in the diet to promote health, strength, and energy especially in infants and young children. These categories provide an alternative way of talking about food. More generally, some of my informants talked of limiting certain categories of food, in particular heavy food which contains a lot of oil, because of the connection widely noted in the media between these foods and heart ailments. Hasmita, Jasvanti, and Hemkurva also pointed out that the postpartum diet especially was very 'fattening', with the extensive use of ghee cited as a major cause of weight gain. They had all tried to reduce the amount they consumed after the birth but found this difficult as it is present in so much of the postpartum diet. But recommending women to use margarine when making ghee is not unproblematic for, as we shall see, ghee is considered a 'pure' food which affects the moral character of the eater. Advising women to take two pints of milk a day during pregnancy - for South Asian women in the culturally more acceptable form of yoghurt - is also problematic. Sarka told me when we were discussing the film later that, for her, yoghurt was hot and she had stopped taking it now that her pregnancy was advancing. Some foods, as we have seen, alter their value according to their state and whereas yoghurt may be classified as hot, *chash*, made from yoghurt and water, is cold.

Some younger female informants, faced with a mother-in-law on the one hand and a health professional on the other, felt that they were in a constant dilemma because of the conflicting advice they received. I was talking with Hasmita at her home one day about her youngest son's latest cold. She was worried, she said, because:

He always has these colds. I don't know what to do now. Everyone says something different you know, and yesterday I was giving Rajesh some orange juice. My mother-in-law was here and she was telling me that this will make it worse, it just makes more mucus. But what can I do? When I go to the health centre the nurse says that he has to have the orange juice because it's good for him. It has vitamin C and someone told me that this stops the colds coming. But he has these colds all the time and now I don't know what to do. My mother-in-law says one thing and the nurse says another thing.

Hasmita said she was confused in her own mind as to what was the best

course of action. After some discussion, she decided against using the orange juice, mainly because she did not want to give her mother-in-law yet another reason for saying that she was neglecting the children. Similarly, reference by the dietician to low birth weight babies caused by an inadequate antenatal diet, not only reinforces the anxiety felt by women like Sarka and Rahina that they too will suffer this fate. It offers them no way of dealing with a mother-in-law who, in their case, held most of the cards. Sarka told me that her mother-in-law would think she was not showing respect if she came home and told her that what she was eating was bad. In any case, she did not feel she would have the courage to do it.

When Hansha (Appendix F) described the situation in her household after her *bhabhi* (eBW) had a baby, she explained that the health visitor and her mother were giving conflicting and confusing advice. Hansha interceded on her *bhabhi*'s behalf, suggesting her mother leave her sister-in-law alone for a while to 'work it out'. She continued:

My mother is fairly liberal but that isn't always the case, and she didn't tell my sister-in-law so much what to do. But others think that because they aren't doing these things that they don't respect them anymore. It's a real problem for our families because then the younger ones want to go off and live by themselves to get away from the in-laws.

With these examples we return to a familiar theme of respect as a relationship of power and as a sanction on behaviour. While in the context of the clinic, categories of what constitutes 'good food' is based on biomedical classifications legitimized by health professionals, the utilization of these categories among some of my younger informants in the domestic arena is contestable, and open to negotiation. It is not that many of my older female informants at EL, LC, and UP were unaware of these categories - they also cited them in our discussions of food. Rather, in the domestic arena they are expressive of power relationships, especially between senior and junior women.

## 6.5) Infant and Child Health : Food and the Environment

At various points in the study so far I have noted the way in which informants contrast life in England with India or East Africa. This was perhaps nowhere more emphasized than in relation to food and illness, and accords with the notion that bodily constitution is affected by the 'natural life-environment' (Zimmerman 1980:101) of the individual, and by the seasonal cycle.<sup>(12)</sup> The cold especially is felt to be unsuitable to the Gujarati constitution. In children this gives rise to coughs, colds, flu and bronchitis. Germs and viruses are also noted as causes of these illnesses which 'go around' in the winter months. In adults, I was constantly told, it is rheumatism and arthritis which predominate. The effects of the English climate on children in particular was a source of considerable anxiety (*chinta*) among male and female informants. Parents were concerned to give food which produced energy and strength (*takat*) in the child's body to overcome its natural deficiencies in relation to the climate in England. As well as the sex of the child, its birth weight was constantly referred to either in terms of being '*bahu fine che*' (very fine or good) if it was *moti* (big), or with worry, or at least some concern, if it was *nani* (small). The initial reference point in making these evaluations was invariably an English neighbour's child or English women whom they had met whilst in hospital. In addition to this, there is a prevalent view held by female and male informants that English babies are bigger than Gujarati babies and that they do not suffer colds, coughs, flu and chest complaints to the extent that their own children do. Mukhta's comments were typical of many other women and men when she told me that 'my son weighed 6lb 12 ozs, nearly 7lb, but he isn't as big as English babies. They are 8, 9lb'. This perspective has implications for my informants in relation to what is considered to be 'good food' for their children.

Most of my informants said that they began by breast feeding their babies. Although attitudes among some women, like Mangala, Hasmita, and Jasvanti, were changing, the majority were reluctant to put the child to the breast until the 'proper' milk has arrived after

two or three days. <sup>(13)</sup> Colostrum, like the blood of childbirth, is considered *kacharo*, or *gandun*, another term which implies filth and dirt, and which is harmful to the child. Colostrum is also said to be *kachun*, raw and sour (cf. McGilvray 1982:61; Blanchet 1984:113; Reissland and Burghart 1988:463). There is no clear idea expressed as to how the milk arrives in the breast but external heat may be applied to get rid of the colostrum and so begin breast feeding. A midwife at the maternity hospital explained to me that staff tried to 'fit in' with the notion that South Asian women did not feed colostrum to their babies for the first three days or so 'because they think it's dirty', and with the idea that the 'baby is not just for the mother but the whole family'. An awareness of these 'cultural factors', she said, 'helped the staff to improve health practices among the women'. However, in isolating 'cultural factors' from the cultural context, staff fail to appreciate the wider picture.

While noting that the child is for the 'whole family', visiting in the evening is limited to the husband only. In western terms, this can be viewed as a mechanism to 'bond' this triad of mother, father and infant. <sup>(14)</sup> In Gujarati - and other South Asian - terms, however, this triadic 'bond' is downplayed. In particular, as we have seen, it is the child's patrilineally connected female kin who are so important in creating its social identity. We have also seen that it is not the mother who ceremonially feeds the infant *galasuti* after its birth. Informants explained their reluctance to feed colostrum to the infant because it is sour and dirty. As we saw in the previous chapter, women themselves point out that immediately after the birth they are in a debilitated state - pain continues, they are *thanda*, and their blood is 'weak'. They need an initial period of rest and heating and dry food, to allow their body to recover enough to care for the child. As Reissland and Burghart (1988:463) observe, this all forms part of a 'pattern of minimal, tentative contact between mother and child during the first day postpartum'. This serves to re-inforce the notion that the child is not exclusively for the mother - or father for that matter - but is a member of a larger patrilineal group.

There is some emphasis placed on breast feeding for an 'ideal' period of nine months (cf. McGilvray 1982:62), but the duration and pattern of introducing bottle milk varied considerably among my informants. <sup>(15)</sup> For some women, bottle feeding began abruptly after a few weeks. Others reported using bottle feeds initially to supplement breast milk before changing to it exclusively, while others again did not introduce it for six to eight months after birth. <sup>(16)</sup> When I asked women when and why they had commenced bottle feeding, or discontinued breast feeding altogether, two main reasons emerged: first, they did not have enough milk; and second, the baby was not putting on sufficient weight. In terms of the former, a mother perceives that her milk is inadequate by the responses in her baby. If an infant is crying it is not left but picked up, nursed and fed 'on demand'. If it continually cries this is seen as a sign that it is not getting enough milk. Some informants told me that a woman's milk may not be sufficient because she has not yet recovered her health and strength after the birth. Bhanu told us at EL one morning that Rahina's *sasu* expected her to recommence her household duties too soon after the birth of her baby. She had not recovered her own strength and health and her milk had 'dried up'. Bhanu kept in touch with Rahina, who was no longer attending classes at EL, and this explanation came from Rahina via Bhanu. It is perhaps not surprising that Rahina's grumbles were directed at her *sasu*, given the subordinate position she held in the household. But deflecting the blame to her *sasu* did not find universal favour at EL. Yogini and Kanta expressed the view that Rahina was too 'free', and did not take enough notice of her *sasu's* advice.

If she does not feel that her own health has recovered after the birth, a woman may visit her GP and/or discuss this with the health visitor. She may also utilize various home remedies to restore her health and increase the quantity and quality of her milk. But if she, or her mother-in-law, perceive her milk supply is still inadequate, that she is unable to produce rich, nourishing milk, this is then supplemented with bottle feeding. This is not necessarily a moral problem, for the woman may be judged to be anaemic and insufficiently

recovered after the birth. But in some cases at least, a woman may also perceive her continuing debility to lie with relations in her household - especially if she occupies a sole or subordinate position. On the other hand, it may be the child who is felt to be ill, or at least not thriving. The GP is almost invariably consulted and home remedies and health tonics commenced (cf. Reissland and Burghart 1988:466). As a matter of course, infants are started on a preparation called *phaki* almost as soon as they arrive home from hospital. This powder - containing items such as caraway, cloves, mace, aniseed, and asafoetida - is available pre-packed from South Asian shops. It keeps the stomach clean (*saph*), prevents constipation, and increases the appetite and thus, the amount of milk consumed. If this fails, other remedies are sought.

As far as Hemkurva, Prabha, and Dilip were concerned, Mira's failure to put on weight indicated that she was unwell. Along with home remedies and numerous trips to the GP, a private paediatrician was consulted who assured them that she was not clinically ill. Hemkurva felt that her own diet was not the problem. She was now eating good food which gave strength - various types of gourd, vetch, and green leafy vegetables - which she said also had a lot of iron. Prabha felt that Mira's problem may have been caused by a failure of the fontanelle (*pocho bhag*) to fully close. In this case, the child experiences difficulty in swallowing and, with reduced intake does not gain weight. One of Hemkurva's sisters in Leicester located a woman who specialized in treating this illness by manipulating the bones of the skull to their correct alignment, and by body massage to assist the circulation of blood and increase strength in the body. When I asked women what happened if the child did not respond to these treatments, the mother's own behaviour also came under scrutiny. It may be that she is eating the wrong food - not enough *garam*, too much heavy food - or, from older women, not taking her mother-in-law's advice and being too 'modern'. As we saw in the previous chapter, it may also be because a woman failed to perform some ritual or to honour the Mata.

In terms of the second factor, the introduction of bottle feeding can also be seen to relate to the weight of the infant. Where the birth weight is considered to be 'normal', or even 'big', breast feeding is continued. But where it appears to be lower, bottle feeding may be started, if not immediately then certainly within a few months. Another variation is where the birth weight is 'big' or 'normal', but where the child fails to put on weight at an acceptable rate, bottle feeding is introduced. What, then, does bottle milk have that breast milk does not? A healthy, cared-for child is one who is not overtly fat, but is plump and 'not thin'. Among my informants, the perception that a child is not growing at an acceptable rate is based not only on the mother's interpretation - and often that of her mother-in-law - of the infant's continual crying, but also on comparisons which are continually made with English babies, who are regarded as bigger and stronger. In addition, the anxiety that the infant is failing to thrive is heightened by health professionals, such as doctors and health visitors. If they express concern over the infant's growth rate and weight, this adds to the mother's own concern that her milk is inadequate. This is especially the case if the baby suffers from coughs and colds. This was a factor reported by Hemkurva and one of her Gujarati neighbours, by Hasmita, and with Jasvanti when she had her last daughter. One woman, whose health visitor had expressed considerable concern over the weight of her child, explained 'I just don't have enough milk and she gets hungry all the time. That's why she's crying all night and gets these colds. SMA has vitamins to help with the colds'. Bottle milk is seen as a kind of 'vitamin booster' to breast milk, and beneficial to the baby in providing strength to grow and overcome the coughs and colds associated with the English environment.

Solid food is introduced gradually, often on the suggestion of a health visitor at the clinic, if not before.<sup>(17)</sup> Women are aware of the range of commercial infant food products available and these are often used in conjunction with Gujarati food cooked at home. Health visitors give samples of commercial food to mothers at health centres, women see them advertized on television, and they are talked about in

peer groups and in the household. By about the first year, children participate fairly freely in the household diet. Again there is some concern to balance the hot and cold properties in food without excess of either but, if anything, diet veers toward heating and light food. Within the framework of individual temperament, children are generally felt to be not so much cold as cool, especially as infants and toddlers. Cold and heavy food is difficult for them to digest, clogging up the stomach and producing too much gas, whereas heating and light food keeps the stomach clean (*saph*). The major concern which is expressed in relation to the diet of infants and children is to provide food which promotes health, energy, and strength (*takat*).

Just as the birth weight of infants is compared, often unfavourably, with that of English children, so too is the growth rate and weight of young children. This was not an occasional comparison. Time and again parents expressed concern that their children were either not growing at what was seen as an appropriate rate, or that they were too thin in comparison with English children. The invariable reason given for this difference centres on the diet of English children - that is they eat meat. For children, meat is *shakti khorak*, powerful food which produces heat, energy, and strength needed for growth and weight increase. It is seen, moreover, as appropriate food for the colder climate in Britain. When I went to Hansha's house one evening for dinner with her friends, Chandrika and Jayesh, in the course of our conversation she told me that 'meat is an English food; it's suited to the weather here. I don't know if it makes any difference but people think it does and they give it to the kids'. Jasvanti also pointed out one day when Jaya was visiting that 'in this country it is too cold, not like India where it's hot and so we eat meat sometimes because people in this country eat meat and it makes them healthy'. When I was talking about this at EL, Kanta observed that:

We eat meat because if we don't there is too much sickness, too many colds, coughs, flu all the time. The children are sick all the time. I don't eat things like beef or anything but here in England it's much colder and kids need it.

The others, old and young, agreed with this without hesitation. As Kamla put it very simply, 'you don't want your kids sick all the time so you give them meat'.

Mothers sometimes begin introducing meat into the diet as soon as the baby starts on solids, sometimes picking up samples of baby food such as rice and lamb or beef and vegetables from the health centre when they attend for periodic checks. It is particularly when their children suffer recurrent colds and coughs, or when it is perceived that they are not putting on sufficient weight, however, that many women start to introduce meat into the child's diet. I also know of several cases where GP's, themselves South Asian, advised parents to give their children meat as a means of overcoming constant colds and chest complaints. Hasmita said that her (South Asian) GP had told her that the lack of meat in her young son's diet was the reason why he 'looks so pale all the time'. He told her that 'he should have meat. It's better for him and so he has baby food, you know, with meat and things'. Dimesh was in full agreement with this decision:

He [the doctor] says that meat is good for the children because they need it in this country. Most people now are giving their children meat. They get it at school in their dinners but then we have trouble getting them to eat veg food, you know, Gujarati food.

Hemkurva and Dilip, Jasvanti, Nita, and Sadhana had experienced similar encounters with their GP.

Some informants said it was when they started school that they began to eat meat. Chandrika told me that she began when she arrived in England and had school dinners:

We [she and her brother Jayesh] used to have meat there because otherwise it was just vegetables and they were terrible. And then, I don't know, just gradually we seemed to have things like hamburgers and then started cooking things like sausages at home. It happened over a period of time, just gradually.

In some cases it was their parents who insisted they include meat from the school dinners in their diet. Bharti told me that her father was quite insistant about this when she arrived from Kenya at twelve years of age:

My dad said to me when I was at school, "look you just have to get used to eating meat here, it's the food you eat here. People eat meat". I suppose you have to eat meat because of the climate, you know, it's different here in England and everybody eats meat.

The preparation and cooking of meat and fish for their children presents many Gujarati women with some very pragmatic problems, not only because of their lack of knowledge of the types and cuts of meat available - many had never been to a butchers or bothered to look at meat cuts in supermarkets - but also in its preparation. This is resolved in the majority of cases by giving meat in the form of pre-packed items such as frozen hamburgers, 'fish fingers', sausage rolls, pasties and so on which simply need to be heated up. Presentation of this food, though, can be a source of considerable difficulty. I visited Hemkurva one afternoon not long after she returned with Mira from the health centre. Mira had been suffering from constant colds and recurrent bouts of 'flu which had caused considerable anxiety in the household. The health visitor suggested that Hemkurva give the child some tinned fish, explaining that this contains vitamins and protein which would help prevent these illnesses and help her to grow. On the way home, Hemkurva stopped at the corner shop and bought some tinned sardines. When I arrived she was trying to tempt her unco-operative daughter to eat the sardines straight from the can. The health visitor assumed that Hemkurva would know how to present the food to her child in a palatable manner but the only fish she had bought before came pre-cooked from the fish and chip shop. It was not surprising that she was at a loss what to do with the tinned variety and became increasingly frustrated when the child refused it, concluding, therefore, that her daughter did not like any fish at all.

The other major problem which a non-vegetarian diet presents to my informants concerns the purity of the kitchen. I shall discuss this, however, when we come to the Hindu domain as feeding meat to children *per se* is not seen by informants in terms of impurity, but in terms of dealing with the environmental conditions in England. Meat gives energy and strength (*takat*) essential to growth and it is this with which parents are concerned.

To summarize, in the humoral domain, notions of goodness, power, and purity in food are largely concerned with promoting and maintaining health according to individual temperaments, bodily states, and one's age. Good food gives strength to women weakened in the postpartum and rids the body of polluted blood, restoring them to health to enable them to care for their child. This strength is transferred to the infant through the mother's milk. For infants and children especially, the cold environment in England is felt to affect their bodily constitution adversely and requires food appropriate to the region. Meat, perceived as English food, is powerful (*shakti*), providing the heat necessary for growth and strength to combat the illnesses of the region. Health, and the restoration of health, is achieved through a balance of predominantly hot and cold properties, and a balance of one's bodily constitution with the environment; through creating pure blood from the distillation of good food in the process of digestion, and through cleansing, purifying, and restoring the blood to its proper condition during illness and the postpartum. While these ideas have some common themes with Ayurvedic theories of health and illness, in practice they belong to a more simplified set of shared beliefs based predominantly on thermal notions of balance and blood. When acute or chronic illness occurs other, often more specialized forms of treatment are sought. This domain is largely concerned with the domestic arena in which women have a moral duty to care for the health and well-being of its members. Good food is one way of achieving this and success, through the health of women and their household, contributes to the auspiciousness of the household.

#### 6.6) THE GUJARATI DOMAIN

For my informants, like so many others from South Asian (Mayer 1960; Parry 1979; Appadurai 1981), and other cultures (Young 1971; Goody 1982; Tapper & Tapper 1986), food is an index of identity, status and rivalry, solidarity and competition, and intimacy and distance. While regional variations exist among informants in terms of their cuisine, the idea that Gujarati food and food practices express something of their Gujarati identity was a common theme in discussions of food.

Maintaining these practices was seen as an important element in maintaining informants' Gujarati identity in England. The Gujarati domain describes commensal relations and evaluations of food as indices of their culture, of kinship relations, economic status, and prestige. Notions of power here lie less in the food itself than in food as an idiom of expression in relationships between men and women, between kin, and in the well-being it brings to the household in terms of status and prestige. Similarly, notions of good food refer predominantly to its plentitude in the household on public occasions although, as we shall see, taste, in the form of sweetness, is important on certain festival occasions.

#### 6.7) Caste Commensality and Ritual Purity in East London

Commensal relations in Hindu South Asia have long been seen as an index of caste status and difference based on a hierarchy of relative ritual purity (Mayer 1960; Dumont 1970; Parry 1979). In order to maintain relative purity and rank, transactions with those of inferior castes are regulated by a series of elaborate rules, particularly concerning food transactions. However, as Khare (1976a:255) observed some time ago, commensality and dietary practices in India have become more secular, especially in urban areas. In pointing out that more people, young and old, men and women, now buy and eat commercially cooked food, he notes that 'orthodox ritual scruples about cooking and eating within one's own *jati* group are on the wane'. Cooking and eating are 'now gaining as a non-sacred, social art, activity, and entertainment' (ibid). More recently, Beteille (1990:498) remarks that there are now 'thousands, if not millions, of Indians who ignore or repudiate the traditional code both in principle and practice' - although, as he remarks, this 'certainly does not mean that they have given up caste'. Even in rural areas, as Mayer (1989:213) recently observed of his fieldwork village of Ramkheri, there has been a relaxation of commensal rules and behaviour between groups.

Life in a modern, urban and to many, alien milieu, has also brought changes in food practices to my informants in east London.

Farb and Armelagos (1980), as well as Goody (1982), note the many changes in food production, the influence of the mass media, increased travel, the availability of different foods, and the appearance of restaurants specializing in cuisines from many different cultures. More recently in western countries, there has been a movement away from adulterated and artificially preserved foods among some sections of the population, toward 'whole foods' or 'natural foods', with their connotations of healthy living (Farb and Armelagos 1980:211-18). These are all factors which have impinged to a greater or lesser extent on the food practices of my informants. Many young people, as well as some of the older (usually male) generation, eat out at restaurants - not only South Asian but, especially among the young, at Chinese, Italian, south-east Asian, and a variety of other cuisines. Just as popular, and more so among many of my informants, are the 'take-away' and fast food services, offering, for example, fish and chips, pizzas, and hamburgers. Saturday shopping trips for young families often culminate with a meal at such places. Children's birthday parties, which older informants told me were traditionally never, or rarely observed, are often celebrated at chain hamburger restaurants complete with birthday cakes, hamburgers, and milk shakes. These changes in the work and leisure activities of my informants have contributed to dietary changes outside the household which involve a wider range of commensal participants, a variety of food items and menus, and a notion of commensality, especially among the younger generation, which has little to do with caste hierarchies based on relative ritual purity.

Similarly, inside the household, notions concerning the ritual integrity of the household in relation to the purity of the kitchen are attenuated in many homes. The kitchen, as many writers note (Mandelbaum 1972:197; Pocock 1972:9-12; Khare 1976a chapter 2; Parry 1979:96; Cantlie 1981:49; L.Bennett 1983:42), is the most sensitive area of the Hindu home. Traditionally, it is kept ritually pure and spatially separate by excluding outsiders, from visiting affines and women of the lineage (Cantlie *ibid*:49), to members of unclean castes (Parry *ibid*:96). It is often divided into two sections - the area

where food is consumed, and a smaller section where it is prepared and cooked. The latter is the object of more stringent rules aimed at maintaining the purity of the household in matters of food. Pocock (1972:9) observes that this distinction is maintained among rural as well as urban Patidar in Gujarat. The Gujarati kitchen in east London varies considerably from the space allocated for the preparation, cooking, and eating of food in India, especially in rural areas. The siting of the kitchen depends upon British house and flat design and, while in some cases cooking and eating areas are separate, in others the kitchen is the area where food is prepared, cooked, and eaten. Much social interaction takes place in the kitchen, as indeed it does in many English homes, and for women especially it is the hub of activity during the day. Visitors who come to dine may enter the food preparation area to wash their hands before and after eating and to rinse their mouth under the tap. If it is an informal meal, women from outside the household may assist in the cooking of chapatis or *puris* - both forms of bread (*rotali*) - and help with laying the table and washing the dishes. As we have seen, menstruating women may enter the kitchen while food is being cooked, sometimes taking on these tasks themselves.

As well as this pragmatic response to building design, informants suggested that notions relating to food and the ritual integrity of household members are no longer as relevant in this country. Bharti remarked:

I know my mum told me about some of these things, and they used to do it, you know, not letting anyone in the kitchen and things. But young people here don't worry about it now. They're more worried about getting a nice kitchen, you know, a micro-wave and a split oven and things like that. It's just not important here.

Similar observations were made by Mangala, Bhanu and many women at EL, Nita, Hansha and Chandrika, Indu, Hasmita and Dimesh, and Hemkurva and Dilip. However, not all were in agreement with this. Two Brahman households maintained the observance of at least some spatial separateness, with the cooking area itself made into a kind of cul-de-sac. Sectarian membership can also occasion stricter rules in terms of ritual purity in the kitchen (cf. Barot 1980). This can, though, be a

source of friction and dissent if not all in the household belong to the sect. This was the case in Jasvanti's household where her mother-in-law's membership of the Pushti Marga sect was not shared by herself, her husband, or her father-in-law. Jaya was telling me one day about 'these Shri Nathaji people' who could cause a 'lot of trouble', not least in relation to food. On a recent occasion she had gone to visit Jasvanti, who was cooking a batch of *sev* (vermicelli fried in oil) when she arrived. Jasvanti's mother-in-law angrily demanded that Jaya leave the kitchen, despite her protests that as a Brahman she was not 'unclean' and would not therefore pollute the kitchen area. There were many reasons why Jasvanti's mother-in-law eventually left to live with her own daughter, not least of which, according to Jasvanti, was her *sasu's* unreasonable behaviour in trying to impose her dietary practices on the whole household. Ideas concerning the ritual integrity of the kitchen thus provide a point of difference among some of my informants - whether to assert orthodoxy or sectarian membership.

As we have seen, however, where rules of purity are maintained by all members of the household is in approaching the shrine to perform *puja* to the deities. Similarly, when preparing the daily food for the deities, women - for it is predominantly they who do so - must be in a ritually pure state. Like all worshippers, they must first perform ablutions to ritually purify themselves and, as noted previously, menstruating women are excluded from this. Whatever their other practices in relation to commensality and the kitchen, notions of maintaining ritual purity where the *ghar mandir* was concerned was observed in all my informants' households.

#### 6.8) The Everyday Food Cycle

While considerable changes have occurred in terms of the food items and cuisines of many informants when outside the household - especially among younger men and women, and some older men - a similar change in these practices is not reflected to the same extent in the household itself. Older informants especially, and some younger married women

who are not employed outside the household, tend to maintain Gujarati food items and menus. Among the younger generation, particularly men and women who work outside the household, English foods are often utilized for convenience. Breakfast cereals and toast, or a combination of these with Gujarati items, such as pickles and chutney, may constitute breakfast. Lunch is variable and often a mixture of Gujarati and English items for both school children and working parents. For those who remain at home, lunch may consist of chapati with some form of vegetable curry (*shak*) or pulses (*kathola*) and salad. Rice is not usually prepared for lunch and the food served is less elaborate than in the evening.

There is considerable variation in the food which is served at the evening meal but a general pattern includes some form of *rotali*; one or two vegetable curries, which may include a variety of vegetables in one dish or a vegetable plus a dish of pulse; some form of *dal* made from green (*mag*), or black legumes (*alad*), gram (*chana*) or the *tuver* variety of lentil, or a combination of these, plus a salad consisting of chopped cabbage or lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, and grated carrot, as well as onion if allowed. Sweet dishes are not usually included in the evening meal mainly because, I was told, of the preparation and cooking time involved, and the expense. Chutney and pickles are served which include sweet (*mithun*) and sour (*khatun*) varieties. Boiled rice (*bhat*) is considered to be a 'second course', and is eaten at the end of the meal with *dal* or *shak* mixed in and perhaps *chash* poured over it. *Chash* - yoghurt and water - often with coriander and cumin sprinkled on it, may be drunk at the end of the meal. Fresh fruit is sometimes included or eaten later in the evening. There are numerous variations on this scenario and thus, to speak of a 'traditional' Gujarati diet at the level of food items is somewhat problematic. One can, though, speak of a meal format which largely follows the above pattern. (19)

The evening meal is the time when the whole family tries, where possible, to eat together. In the overwhelming majority of my informants' households it was also the one meal of the day which

consists of Gujarati food laid out in an appropriate meal format. The rudiments of table manners - eating with the right hand, using *rotali* to pick up the food with the tips of the fingers, for example - are taught to children from an early age and are reinforced continually when young. David Pocock (1976), in his discussion of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottan Sanstha, a branch of the Swami Narayan movement, observed that the meals served at the temple in Britain on Sunday contain no English elements. He concludes that this 'strengthens the notion growing amongst the young, that Gujarati food is not merely special weekend food but religious food' [emphasis in the original] (ibid:358). In the light of the discussion above, I suggest that these remarks remain premature, both in the notion that among young people Gujarati food is regarded as some kind of special 'weekend' food, and especially, that it is also seen as religious food.

The extent to which English and other 'foreign' food items are utilized in the household varies considerably from one to another and within the household itself. This also provides a major point of difference between members of the household in terms of the everyday food cycle. Older women especially, and some older men like Hitesh, two Brahman priests, and Arvind, Rekha's husband, maintain a Gujarati diet however defined. Younger household members on the other hand, incorporate other kinds of food items. In particular, it is school age children who demand tinned baked beans and spaghetti, potato chips, sandwiches and spreads, biscuits and tarts, which they have eaten at school or seen advertized on the television. Apart from 'pre-packed' items, such as breakfast cereals, biscuits, bread, and cakes, non-Gujarati foods are often combined into the diet using cooking processes and flavourings - the *masala* - to render them culturally acceptable, both in taste and appearance. Pasta sauce, for example, is given taste by adding *masala* and, while items such as jacket potatoes or chips may be served at home, chilli powder is sprinkled on top. In the household then, 'foreign' food is often transformed into culturally recognizable forms. But it is difficult to conclude from this that young people have come to regard Gujarati food as food

associated only with special occasions or religious activities. While English food items may be incorporated into the food cycle at various times during the week, or at certain meals such as breakfast, in the great majority of households among my informants, Gujarati food continues to be prepared and eaten, particularly at the evening meal. The menu itself also follows a culturally recognizable pattern and appropriate table manners are observed. Changes in work and leisure activities outside the household have certainly entailed a change in food practices among many of my informants. Among the majority, however, within the household itself Gujarati foods and menus are largely maintained. What is interesting is the way in which these food practices, noted by informants as an expression of their Gujarati identity, are also accommodating other influences by transforming foods into culturally appropriate forms.

#### 6.9) Commensality and the Household

In large joint households a fairly traditional sequence of feeding pertains, with children and then men being fed first and women eating last (cf. Appadurai 1981:498). Sarka and Rahina, for example, reported that this was the pattern followed in their households. Women prepare and cook the food and wait on male members before eating themselves, confirming their own subordinate status in relation to them. In smaller joint households, with one or two grandparents, plus husband, wife and children, families usually eat together. In this case, as in larger households, which of the women serve the meal - and perhaps continue to cook *rotali* - depends to a large extent on relations between the women in the household. Sarka and Rahina always waited on their mother-in-law while sharing with their *jethani* (HeBW) the task of serving each other. Surbhi cooked during the week and waited on her mother-in-law and *jethani*. In Hemkurva's household, she and Prabha always waited on Dilip, but among themselves they had no fixed routine. Sometimes Hemkurva would serve her mother-in-law and the others, sometimes Prabha would take on this role. These patterns very much reflect the position and relationships among the women themselves (Chapter Three). But there are ways in which women can attempt to

negotiate their subordinate position, both in relation to men and other women in the household. The most extreme form is to refuse to cook at all. One informant reported that this was what her 'cousin-brother's (FZS) wife did before (temporarily as it turned out) leaving her husband. But there are other more subtle ways of making one's discontent known. Prior to their move to a council flat, Kanta and her husband lived with their son and daughter-in-law. There was considerable friction in the household which, Kanta said, centred on her 'modern' daughter-in-law. One of Kanta's complaints was her daughter-in-law's lack of respect. She did not, for example, cook 'good food' which Kanta and her husband liked. From her daughter-in-law's perspective, this was one way in which she could express her own discontent with relationships in the household.

A further point to make here takes us back to a previous discussion on family tradition (4.13). It was noted that in-marrying women learn, among other things, the particular ways of preparing and cooking food in the household according to its tradition. I noted the possible ways in which women could resist complete incorporation through worship of their natal *kul devi*. Similar arguments could also be used concerning food. The possibilities for women in nuclear households would seem greater here than those in joint households. Although the majority of my informants lived for a time with their parents-in-law, with increasing numbers of young women wanting and attaining nuclear households after marriage, there are obvious possibilities for them to continue their natal culinary practices. On the other hand, as noted earlier (3.3), cooking food which a husband especially likes is also a means of showing 'love'. Food, as Appadurai (1981) observes, is a medium for the expression of powerful emotions and, moreover, for the expression of relations of power and hierarchy as well as discontent and disunity.

Similar factors can also be said to operate when one considers household hospitality. In Jasvanti's case, for example, her mother accepts no food in her married daughter's conjugal home and insists on paying for even a glass of water. The family tradition of her

husband's patriline demands maintaining the inequality between wife-givers and wife-receivers. In Hasmita's household, this distinction was maintained in a slightly different way. Dimesh told me that if his parents or his older brother and family came to visit - whether to dine or not - Hasmita would wait on them all. Both he and Hasmita would defer to them, and especially his parents, because they were 'superior [to us]'. Hasmita somewhat reluctantly agreed with this. If, on the other hand, any of Hasmita's family were guests, he, Dimesh would 'treat them well' but he did not defer to them because 'when I married Hasmita it puts them in a lower position'.

There are, however, other more subtle ways of expressing equality and hierarchy, and closeness and distance between kin through the medium of food. In Hemkurva's house, her *nanad* (HFZD), Ruxmani, and her husband, sons, their wives and children, were frequent visitors. This was considered to be a particularly close relationship and commensal relations between the two families were marked by informality. The male members of Ruxmani's family would often spend time sitting and talking in the kitchen with the women, and her daughters-in-law would help with serving food and washing up afterwards. Commensal relations were similar to those in a large joint household with children fed first, followed by the men and then the women. Ruxmani was always waited on by her daughters-in-law, or Hemkurva, while Prabha took on her usual role of trying to serve everyone. On the other hand, close relationships may also occasion formality and the observance of inequality. Jasvanti said that they were particularly close with one of her father-in-law's older brother's sons and his wife and children. When they came to visit at her house 'I do everything because they are guests'. The criterion of a guest, as Appadurai (1981:497) points out, is flexible; a 'gastro-political decision' (ibid:497) as he puts it.

While the range of commensal participants outside the household is considerable for many of my informants, inside the household commensality and hospitality generally takes place with kin and (usually) Gujarati friends. The latter is not always the case,

especially among the young, but this pattern applied in most informants' households. Hospitality, in the form of comfort, drink, and often food, is accorded to visitors who call, if only for a short time. When guests are invited to dine at the house, food should always be plentiful. Dilip told me, for example, that 'if you go to someone's house and they don't offer you seconds, they would be talked about. We would talk about them and say how mean they are'. He went on to tell a story which occurred in Malawi when he and a 'cousin brother' were invited to dinner by an 'uncle and aunty' (I do not know which). His 'cousin brother', he said, had a really big appetite but he also liked to play tricks. He just kept eating more and more chapati and his aunty had to keep cooking it until she eventually ran out of ingredients. 'He was a bit naughty but my uncle should never have invited us to dinner if he could not supply the food'. I am not too sure of the authenticity of this story, nor of the relationships involved, but the point is clear enough in terms of the generosity of the host. It also shows one way in which guests can demonstrate their disaffection with their host. One may not want to sever relations with kin by withdrawing from commensal relations, but the medium of food provides a vehicle for expressing a variety of dissatisfactions or slights perpetrated by the host, or to deflate his or her sense of pride and superiority.

#### 6.10) Feasting

All of these factors are especially important at feasts. The major times for feasting among my informants are at life cycle rites - especially at marriage and, for some, the *kholo* ceremony - and at religious festivals. Of all the times in the year, the celebration of the Gujarati Hindu New Year at Divali is the time for ostentatious display of food. The Hindu New Year is celebrated at different times in different parts of India. For Gujaratis, it covers a period of five days, the first three of which take place on the last three days of the month of *ashvina* (September-October). It is regarded by my informants as an important expression of their cultural identity in England. *Dhanateras* is to honour Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, when

all accounts should be settled and debts paid (cf. Stevenson 1971:336). The house is cleaned and food, especially sweets and dried snacks, are prepared - although most women have usually begun this several days before. The following evening is *kali chaudash* or *kali ratri*. Traditionally, witches, ghosts, and other malignant spirits are said to leave their normal abode and lie in wait for the unsuspecting, and so this is a time to stay indoors (cf. Stevenson 1971:337). Apart from the fact that the exigences of modern urban life preclude this for some, many of my informants said that beliefs in witches and such were 'old-fashioned superstition'. However, many also said that no unnecessary visiting takes place in the evening. The third day is Divali which is actually the last day of the old year.

While celebrated on a small scale at women's groups and social 'functions' I attended, in contrast to the public celebrations in India and elsewhere (J.Kelly:1988:44), among my informants in east London the primary focus of Divali is the household. Divali night celebrates Rama's triumphant return from banishment following his defeat of the demon Ravana, and the imminent arrival of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune. It is Lakshmi who is invoked at *chopada puja* (worship of the account books). In most homes, a new diary is opened in front of the *ghar mandir* or on a covered table set up for the ceremony. The word '*shri*' is written in red<sup>(20)</sup> on the opened facing pages of the diary, and the goddess's blessings for good fortune invoked for the coming year. Many households buy jewellery, especially gold, at Divali which is then offered to Lakshmi.<sup>(21)</sup> This combination of celebration, good fortune, and wealth is evident in the foods associated with the festival and the hospitality and generosity on display.

In the home, the food served at Divali is festive food *par excellence*. Large quantities of snacks (*nasto*) are made or bought, to keep on hand for visitors, and soft drinks are often bought in bulk. But it is sweet foods in particular which denote the auspiciousness and hospitality of Divali. Sweet shops have queues stretching out the door at this time of the year but, while some people buy sweets and

snacks ready-made, women take considerable pride in preparing and cooking at home food which takes account of family traditions and the likes and dislikes of family members. Sweets, as Rekha told me 'are the sweetness of God'. As we have seen, they are given out to relatives, friends, and neighbours when an engagement is announced or a baby is born. They not only celebrate an event but are said to bring auspiciousness to the recipients. When we were talking about Divali one day at LC, Shanta said that sweet foods are especially important at this time of the year because 'they make you happy and kind. When you eat this food at Divali it means that any problems between you are finished'. Sweet foods are also expensive, not only to make - in terms of money as well as time - but also to buy. When I went with Bhanu to a local shop to buy a quantity of sweets for her to distribute at EL, she had set aside £30 to spend - which she managed without difficulty. In well-to-do households like Bhanu's, boxes of sweets may also be sent or ordered for delivery to relatives in other parts of England. Such largesse is indicative of one's prosperity. While sweet foods may bring auspiciousness to the recipients, it also brings status and prestige to the donor.

The main meal is served on the evening of Divali. The food is a more elaborate version of the normal evening meal cycle and is marked by the abundance and variety of dishes presented. Usually three, four, or more vegetable and pulse dishes are prepared, as well as *dal* or *kadhi* (a kind of thin soup with the addition of yoghurt). *Puli*, bread made from wheat flour and deep fried, is eaten rather than the more everyday chapati. A great variety of pickles and chutneys often made especially for the celebration are differentiated according to taste and include not only sweet but sour (*khatun*), bitter or acrid (*kadavun*), pungent (*tikhun*), and savoury or salty (*kharun*). Boiled rice is served at the end of the meal as in the normal meal cycle. But unlike the everyday food cycle, the food of Divali is marked by the inclusion of often elaborate sweet dishes such as a 'centre-piece' special version of *dudh-pak* - a kind of milk pudding - or a large bowl of thick mango juice. There are many variations on this and households 'ring the changes' in different years. The basic point is that the

food should be abundant and, unlike the everyday food cycle, include sweet dishes. It should be served on the best plates, trays and dishes, and everyone present should be coerced to eat as much as humanly possible.

The fireworks display which takes place at the end of the meal, not only celebrates, in religious terms, the triumphant return of Rama to his kingdom, it is also a celebration in a sense of the prosperity, status, and auspiciousness of the household itself. At Hemkurva's house, this is the time when some of Dilip's work colleagues - not all Gujarati - call in to watch the display and, of course, have food pressed upon them. Over the past few years, neighbourhood friends of Shobana's - girls and boys - have also attended. The gold and other items, including new clothes and sometimes furniture, are noted by those who attend. Through the food which is served, men and women of the household together maximize the relationships created and affirmed, the wealth displayed, the auspiciousness and well-being of the household, and its status and reputation among kin and within the neighbourhood.

Just who calls on Divali, and whom one visits, are also indicators of current social relations. Most men are at work but women are active in the local neighbourhood, calling on or receiving visits from neighbours - all of whom are given drinks, snacks, and especially sweets. No one who calls on Divali should be sent away without having some food and, from experience, the pressure to do so is considerable. Friends also try to visit. Men like Dilip and Girdhalal who are effectively self-employed may take boxes of sweets to Gujarati, and often other South Asian customers. If men take the day off work, as some do if possible, their visits to friends, and especially relatives, are an affirmation of relationships in the coming year. Similarly, who attends the Divali feast has implications in terms of the closeness of kin relationships. I have only ever been to Hemkurva's house at Divali and here, Dilip's 'cousin-sister' Ruxmani, her husband, their two married sons and their wives and children are always the main attenders. Other informants also confirmed that it was

close (*najik*, *nikat*) kin who celebrate together. Hasmita, even when going through considerable strain after moving from her in-laws' house, always returns for Divali. Jasvanti alternated houses but basically the group was the same, mainly her *jeth* (HeB) and *jethani* (HeBW) and their children who live nearby.

There were a few of my informants, though, who did not celebrate Divali with other extended kin. Mangala told me that her Divali during my fieldwork was 'quiet' - just herself, her husband and the children. 'We don't celebrate much now. My parents and Neil's [her husband] are both dead and we don't have many relatives here'. Bhanu, although buying large amounts of food for the women at EL to celebrate, told me that her Divali had just been Hari and the children. Bharti and Girdhalal also do not celebrate Divali with relatives. The first year after they moved next door to Hemkurva, when they had no children, they came for the 'dinner' but left soon afterwards to attend a party with some of Girdhalal's friends. Since then they have stayed on for the fireworks display and chatter afterwards. Bharti told me that neither of their families were 'big on Divali', although a few years ago said she really must begin to teach the boys about 'these traditions and things otherwise they won't know about their culture'. Although they were exceptions among my informants, it was probably just such households which older women had in mind when they told me, in the words of Ujam, that 'younger people don't care anymore. They think Divali is like your Christmas. This is the whole problem for us, teaching the children about our culture'.

The day following Divali is *besatun varsa* (New Year), the first day of *karittika* (October-November). In the temple, large amounts of food are served (cf. Stevenson 1971:264; P. Benett 1983) and some informants told me that they had attended. In the household, the day begins with everyone taking part in the morning *puja*. Junior members, including children, pay obeisance to their elders - bowing and touching the forehead to the feet of one's elders - 'to show respect' (*man*). Elders, in turn, confer a blessing for happiness on their juniors. Wives similarly bow before their husband. The day is then

taken up with a fairly exhausting round of visiting other senior relatives where this pattern is repeated. The second day of the year is *bhai bij*, discussed in Chapter Four, when brothers visit married sisters bringing gifts of money and cloth. As Fuller (1992:123-4) points out, Divali celebrates return to order in the cosmos with the return of Rama to his throne and kingdom. On the first day of the New Year, my informants also re-establish the social and cosmological order. They ritually cleanse themselves, worship, and feed the deities at the *ghar mandir*, re-affirming the hierarchical relationship between themselves and the Gods. Similarly, in the social world, relationships of respect (*man*), power, and hierarchy are re-affirmed between seniors and juniors and between men and women. It is also worth noting, once again, that this celebration concludes with the re-affirmation of the importance of the relationship between a man and his married sister at *bhai bij* (4.11).

The treatment of food in the Gujarati domain, then, is a vehicle for expressions of social competitiveness based on notions of household honour (*ijjat*) and respect (*man*). Food is a medium through which household and kinship unity and identity, economic and social well-being, prestige and reputation, find expression. But it is also a medium through which relationships of power - between the sexes, between generations, and between host and guest - are both expressed and contested, where conflict, disunity, discontent, and hierarchy, as well as expressions of close and distant relationships, are negotiated, re-aligned, or re-affirmed. Notions of power in this domain reside in the relationships which food creates rather than in the actual food itself. The goodness of food is expressive of ordered relationships and amity, especially through the medium of sweet food. Ingesting the 'sweetness of God' manifests itself in human happiness, kindness and sharing. This, as we have seen previously (Chapters Three and Four) is what relationships between kin and neighbours should strive for. But in this context, the 'sweetness of God' also maximizes happiness and auspiciousness, not only for the individual recipients of sweet food, but for the donors in the form of household prestige and reputation.

Appadurai (1981) suggests that in Hindu South Asia, food encodes social messages of 'two diametrically opposed sorts' (ibid:507). It serves to construct relationships which are 'characterized by equality, intimacy, or solidarity; or it can serve to construct relations characterized by rank, distance, or segmentation' (ibid). I would argue that in the Gujarati domain, a similar process is at work among my informants. Given a notion of the unstable, weakly bounded person, constantly prone to bio-moral transformation in transactions with other persons (Marriott 1976), Appadurai argues that in a cultural universe which stresses heterogeneous persons, groups, forces, and powers, food always 'raises the possibility of homogenizing the actors linked by it' (ibid:507). While the homogenizing capacity of food to increase intimacy, equality, or solidarity, is perceived as desirable in certain contexts, heterogeneity in the form of rank, distance, or segmentation, is the desired result in other contexts. The tension between these elements is present in the three domains of 'gastro-politics' Appadurai isolates,<sup>(22)</sup> but he suggests that certain distinctions are more apparent in some domains than others (ibid:508).

Such distinctions are more difficult to isolate among my informants but one could suggest, as he does, that 'gastro-politics' in the household are characterized by a tension between intimacy and distance, where bio-moral intimacy is great but role distance is essential to maintain. In some cases, inter-household commensality and feasting among my informants shares a similar tension between intimacy and distance, but it also includes a tension between equality and rank, where host and guest manoeuvre and manipulate situations and relationships to both express rank and subvert it. Finally, if we consider commensality between the 'gastro-politics' of the household, and that of the wider society in which my informants live, there does seem to be a tension between what Appadurai terms 'solidarity and segmentation'. Food practices and commensality in the household were said by informants to be expressive of their Gujarati identity (even when 'foreign' food is culturally transformed). Extra-domestic food practices, on the other hand, express segmentary identities - for

example, sectarian identities, those who maintain orthodox practices based on relative ritual purity of castes, generational identities and, to a lesser extent here, gender identities, and those who accommodate 'foreign' food items and culinary practices. One could suggest, too, that a further segmentation is that of class identities, but this is an area which requires further research. What this implies in terms of the person as constantly transformable by food transactions with others, is that the greater the intimacy or closeness of the relationship, the greater the possibility of homogenizing the persons involved in it. Thus, the tension between this closeness and the maintenance of distance. This, as we shall see in the next section, has considerable implications for my informants in terms of food and the construction of gendered bodies.

#### 6.11) THE HINDU DOMAIN

The notion that food affects not only one's bodily substance but also one's spiritual and moral disposition (cf. Cantlie 1981; Parry 1985), is central to the treatment of food in the Hindu domain. It is based on a set of religious beliefs and practices which afford Hindus a means of creating a spiritual relationship with the deities, <sup>(23)</sup> and of creating in themselves morally beneficial qualities. According to my informants, food which has this effect on the eater is pure (*shuddha*) food. Two main categories of pure food have this effect. *Phalari*, the food of fasts - as distinct from everyday food - purifies the mind-soul in order to receive grace and blessings from the deities. Through this food, one acquires merit (*punya*) and spiritual power (*shakti*). *Satvik* food, one of the two *guna* (spiritual or moral qualities), promotes good conduct and a calm mind and temperament. In this domain, the treatment of food among my informants is especially marked by gender distinctions where, as we shall see, food itself is a vehicle for constructing feminine and masculine bodies.

## 6.12) Pure Food: The Food of Fasts

At almost any gathering I attended during fieldwork - rituals, social functions, women's group meetings or just sitting about chatting in kitchens - at least one or more women would, more often than not, be observing a fast. While some men can and do observe fasts, the ubiquity of this practice among women of all ages was striking. Here I want to look at what fasting entails in terms of the food eaten and excluded, and the implications of this for women's relations with the Gods and with their own households. In previous chapters, when discussing *vrats*, I mentioned in passing that one element of the *vrat* entails a fast (*upavas*). Among my informants, and in Hinduism generally, fasting does not entail an abstention from all foods but rather, it entails an avoidance of particular categories of food (Stevenson 1971:289; Katona-Apte 1975:319; Khare 1976a:130-1; Parry 1985:613). Khare (*ibid*) and Parry (*ibid*) note several distinctions between the food which goes into the everyday domestic food cycle in northern India, and the food of fasting (*pharali*) (cf. Stevenson 1971:289 n1; Khare *ibid*; Parry *ibid*:628 n1, who refer to these foods as *phalahar*, 'food of fruits'). As the name suggests, *pharali* consists of 'fruits' - uncultivated food - and excludes all cultivated grains and cereals, the 'plough produced' food raised after ploughing the fields.<sup>(24)</sup> Khare (*ibid*) also points to distinctions in the cooking ingredients; rock salt is substituted for common sea salt; ghee is used rather than oil; and no normal spices or aromatics, apart from black pepper, are used.

These are largely the rules which my informants expressed, but it is important to note that the severity with which they are followed is very much a matter between the individual and the deity. In practice, this means that not only is there considerable variation in the foods which are eaten, or felt to be acceptable, but also in the amount eaten, with some individuals abstaining from all but water and perhaps fruit. Some women use oil to cook with providing it is clean - that is, it has not previously been used - while others reject this as impure. Pre-packed food is used by many working women. Potato crisps,

for example, are eaten throughout the day but not only are these cooked in oil, some have common salt added. Some women, too, only eat food in their own home which they have prepared there for the fast. However, for those who work or attend college or school, this is only attainable if they forego any food and sometimes drink during the day. Unless particularly stringent in their practice, many women explain that, while one tries to eat the correct food, it is not always possible. Taste, or lack of taste, is an important element in fasting foods in terms of differentiating between sweet (*mithun*), sour (*khatun*), bitter (*kadavun*), and salty (*kharun*) foods, and in the inclusion or exclusion of aromatics and other seasonings. Women describe fasting food as being tasteless, but just how tasteless depends on the individual woman and the severity with which she chooses to observe the fast. There are also variations according to the particular traditions within a family which must be taken into account, as well as the likes and dislikes of a favoured guru or deity. There is, then, considerable room for individual manoeuvre, both in the severity with which the fast is observed and in the foods which are included and excluded. What is important is that the fast is kept to the best of one's ability and this is between the individual and God. In other words, it is individual intention which is central.

The fasts which are part of the *vrats* women undertake to a particular deity associated with days of the week (5.9) are generally *ektanun*, one meal a day fasts. After bathing and putting on clean clothes, prayers are said to the deity associated with the *vrat*, and readings are taken from a holy book or books which describe the stories of the *vrat*. Either water or milk, or tea or coffee for some, is taken in the morning as well as fresh fruit, although some may forego this if they chose to observe a strict fast. On Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, rock salt may be either included in one meal or used throughout the day; the decision is up to the individual. Potato and tapioca boiled with rock salt and black pepper (*sapji* or *sabji*) is eaten at lunch time, although some women also include turmeric and a little green chilli to give taste. While green chilli is felt to be acceptable, red chilli is considered to be much hotter.

Women in paid work often substitute potato with several bags of potato crisps and fresh fruit. The evening meal has no restrictions and reverts to the normal domestic food cycle. Friday (for Santoshima) is also *ektanun* but all sour food is excluded throughout the day. Fruit must be sweet, such as banana, rather than sour, such as lemon or orange. Lunch may consist of a salad with lettuce and carrot but should exclude tomato and onion, both sour foods. Similarly, if a vegetable dish is prepared, no tomato, tamarind, or other sour items are used. The evening meal is again part of the normal food cycle, but it still excludes sour foods and includes a sweet dish such as *dudh-pak*, or *kir* (sweet rice). Tuesdays and Sundays (the Mata's days) are both days which exclude salt completely and here there is no exception. Fruit and nuts are eaten during the day. The evening meal reverts to the normal food cycle but with the continued abstention from salt and the inclusion of some form of sweet. Which foods are included or excluded in the weekly fasts are dictated by the likes and dislikes of the deities with whom they are associated.

As well as forming part of a *vrat*, fasts are also undertaken at times during the Hindu month and year. The eleventh day of the lunar fortnight (*agiyaras*), said to be an auspicious (*shubha*) day, is not an *ektanun* fast. That is to say the food pattern does not revert to a normal food cycle in the evening but rather, fasting foods are eaten throughout the entire day. Dried nuts, fruit, yoghurt, and potato are the mainstays of this fast. Dry snacks are made from potato flour rather than flour made from grains - cultivated food - and likewise, sweets made from milk can be eaten but they must exclude any grain based flour. Again, the amount of food eaten during the day depends on the individual, with some women restricting themselves to fruit in the morning and then nothing until an evening meal. If *agiyaras* occurs at the same time as a life cycle rite or other ritual, both fasting and festive foods are served. At one hair cutting ceremony where this was the case, as well as the festive foods served to celebrate the event, *sabji* was served for those observing the lunar fast - that is, all the women present. *Chevada* - dried snacks usually made from groundnut, cashew nut, sultana, salt, sugar, turmeric, chilli, rice flakes and

one of the *dal* pulses - was made from nuts, sugar and small slivers of potato cooked in ghee, to make it acceptable for those observing the fast. Fasting is also a feature of some of the major calendrical festivals which are celebrated in the Hindu year. *Janmasthanami* (the birthday of Lord Krishna) and *ravanami* (the birthday of Lord Rama) both entail a period of fasting followed by festive foods. *Janmasthanami*, which occurs during the month of *shravana*, itself a month of fasting for some, is the most rigorously observed by my informants and is the one fast in the Hindu year which, women told me, many men also observe.

From the many conversations I had with female informants concerning fasts, it emerged that the food of fasts is above all pure (*shuddha*) food. Through the fasts they undertake, women seek the grace and blessings of the deities but, for the person to be in a fit state to receive this, the body and mind-soul must be pure. Bhanu's remarks at EL one morning were typical of many other women when she told me, in English, that fasting 'purifies the soul; it shows God that you're willing to give up foods for him so you get merit from God and a pure soul'. Purifying themselves through the medium of food, establishes a spiritual relationship with the deities to receive grace and blessings from them. In giving up certain foods for the deity, women can be said - like ascetics - to renounce aspects of the material world. Fasting offers women an opportunity to transcend the 'limitations of their daily existence' (Kurin 1983:323) and enter into a spiritual relationship with the Gods. My informants did not refer to this food as *thanda* (cool) - this classification was reserved for the humoral domain - but I think this can be implied by the lack of aromatics, *masala*, and other heating foods. The state of blessedness and purity, and the merit (*punya*) acquired from the deities through fasting, empowers women to fulfil a variety of aims: longevity for one's husband (*jaya parvati vrat*); protection for one's children (*shitla satam*); fecundity; a cure for an illness or alleviation of misfortune; or for auspiciousness of the household at various times in the Hindu month and year. As Shanta said during a discussion with some women at EL, 'we fast to thank God for his blessings'. On the one hand then,

fasting is a means whereby (predominantly) women create a spiritual relationship with the deities, purify their mind-soul and receive grace and blessings from the gods. Women acquire individual merit (*punya*) through the austerity of the fast and the purity of the foods. They are empowered with the blessings from the deities and are the vehicles through which women empower others with this divine grace and blessedness. This implies that women have considerable spiritual power (*shakti*) which they use beneficently to protect and nurture household and other family members.

On the other hand, from an outsider's perspective, one could argue that their spiritual power is limited by the material relations of power between the sexes and between generations of women. Fasting, I was told on many occasions, is done for discipline (*shist*), to show strength of purpose and humility to God. This, in turn, creates self-discipline and humility in themselves. The fast which young girls undertake to protect their brothers and/or ensure a good husband (4.7) was described as 'good training' for the longer and more arduous fast of *jaya parvati vrat*. The self-discipline, self-control, and self-denial of the fast creates in young girls those ideal characteristics of femininity in adulthood - passivity, humility, and self-discipline. It is the *dharma* (moral duty) of women to care for, protect, and nurture well-being and auspiciousness of their household. In contrast to men, it is 'normal' for them to do so as women. Fasting among my female informants creates and re-creates notions of femininity and of *dharma* and *seva* to husband, children, and household. As we have already seen, explanations of illness or misfortune in the household and family may be attributed to women who fail to perform these rituals. Some women can and do achieve a considerable reputation in the local neighbourhood for their knowledge of rituals, and also for the self-discipline and humility they demonstrate to the Gods. But this empowerment through rituals, even for the most successful is, in a sense, constrained by the 'limitations of their daily existence'. In the ubiquity of fasting among my female informants, I suggest that one can locate another aspect of their unconscious 'gendered subjectivity'

which permeates a woman's childhood and adult cultural milieu (Kandiyoti 1988:285).

### 6.13) *Satvik/Tamsik*

In Hinduism, a further set of food categories which have a moral and spiritual effect on the mind and temperament of the eater are based on the three spiritual qualities (*guna*) (cf. Khare 1976b:83-4; Cantlie 1981:44; Parry 1985:613). A *satvik* temperament is inclined to goodness and tranquility; *rajsik* toward passion and violence; and *tamsik* toward darkness and sloth (Cantlie 1981:44). Character and temperament thus come from the food one eats which is made part of oneself (Cantlie 1981:41-2). Among my informants, only a Brahman priest mentioned the three *guna*. Others I asked, predominantly women but also Dilip, Dimesh, and Hitesh, mentioned only two - *satvik* and *tamsik*. They had not heard of *rajsik* but rather, what writers above note as *rajsik*, my informants refer to as *tamsik*. Like the food of fasts, *satvik khorak* is not only good food, but it is also pure (*shuddha*) food. Women also told me that it is *sado khorak* (simple food), while Yogini, Kanta, Bhanu, and Sachana at EL, and Rekha, and Hemkurva, noted that it is also *halke khorak* (light food). It includes milk and milk products, rice, green lentils, and other legumes, most vegetables and especially potato, and *rasa*, the juice of vegetables and fruit. It is boiled using little if any ghee and limited aromatics and spices.

Like fasting food, this is not classified as *thanda* but the implications of coolness are apparent in the foods themselves. Unlike the food of fasts, however, which are confined to ritual contexts and which create a spiritual relationship with the deities, *satvik khorak* is a broader category which can be utilized in the everyday diet to achieve calmness, serenity of mind, and good conduct. Jaya described it as being 'good for your health but it also makes your heart and mind nice and quiet, calm. When you eat this food you have *saduvatran* (good conduct)'. When I asked what the latter entailed, things like 'kindness for others', 'love between people', 'happiness', and 'sharing' were invariably mentioned. Rekha and her husband, Arvind,

also stressed the notion that *satvik khorak* makes the blood clean (*saph*) and pure (*shuddha*), an idea noted by Hemkurva and Prabha, and several women at LC and UP. There is a notion that if the blood is cool and pure, so too are one's actions and thoughts. As Cantlie (ibid:43) points out, the moral and spiritual refractions of different food categories are imparted through blood which, as we have seen (6.2), is the distillation of good food after digestion has taken place.

*Tamsik khorak* on the other hand, includes all foods proscribed in a vegetarian Gujarati diet - meat, fish, eggs and alcohol. It also includes categories of food within the Gujarati vegetarian diet - stale (*vasi*) food, and what is called *tikho*. The latter category refers to heating food, but whereas *garam* expresses a feeling of warmth or heat in the body, *tikho khorak* refers more to what an English person would regard as hot, as in spicy hot. Women told me that the phrase *tikhun tamatamatun* is used to describe this feeling of pungency which, Bhanu said 'makes your eyes water it's so hot'.<sup>(25)</sup> From my own observations, and from what informants themselves told me, men and women do eat *tikho khorak* - and stale food for that matter - but I was also told that this should not be eaten in excess and should be balanced with cooling food, implying that *tamsik khorak* is also heating. Not all my female informants were conversant with *tamsik* and *satvik* food categories. Aarti and Vilas, two young unmarried women at EL, did not know either of them. While there was agreement among the rest of my informants as to what constituted *satvik* food, some, and especially younger married women such as Hemkurva, Jasvanti, Savita, Hasmita, Hansha, and Chandrika, felt that *tamsik* food was simply anything which was outside the Gujarati vegetarian diet. However, their individual comments confirmed what the women at LC told me one afternoon, when they noted the deleterious effects *tamsik* food has on a person's moral being. Rekha observed that *tamsik khorak* is not only bad for one's physical health, but 'if you eat meat and things you become like an animal. It makes you bad tempered and excited. You have no love for other people'. Ujam agreed, adding that it 'gives bad thoughts'. My conversations with Hitesh ran along similar lines when

he noted that *tamsik khorak* 'excites the physical side of your nature too much. It leads to violence and aggression'.

It was especially meat, however, which was cited by female informants as creating 'bad thoughts', 'anger' and strength. While the Brahman priests I spoke with, and two older men (Hitesh and Arvind) viewed *tamsik khorak* in similar terms to my female informants, from my observations and from what women themselves told me, men eat such food including eggs, fish, and meat with little, if any, adverse comment. Children, too, are encouraged to eat meat to provide the heat and strength necessary to overcome the colder environment in England. Two major questions arise from these observations: the first picks up an earlier point concerning meat in relation to the purity of the household; and the second focuses on the differences between men and women in relation to the eating of fish, eggs, and especially, meat.

While not all Gujaratis are vegetarian, almost all my married female informants said they did not eat meat, fish, or eggs. Variations in the eating of meat ran along a household and extra-household dimension, with differences according to religious observance, age, and especially gender. Among my informants, a minority - comprised of an orthodox Brahman family and several households belonging to the Swaminarayan sect - allowed no meat inside the house and maintained a strict vegetarian regime inside and outside the home. In the 'middle range', which constituted the majority, household members, especially men and children but also some unmarried women, ate meat outside the home at work, school or college. Shading into this group are those who bring meat into the home but do not cook it in the kitchen. 'Take-away' and fast foods such as hamburgers, fish and chips, fried chicken, pizzas, and sausage rolls to some extent resolve the dilemma of actually contaminating the cooking area with meat. Those who eat meat only outside the home, or who bring it pre-cooked into the household, invariably pointed out that they do so out of respect for older members who find it distasteful.

While freely admitting that meat, fish, and eggs are part of the diet of their children and husband, as far as women are concerned a sensitive area is whether or not meat, a polluting substance in the Hindu vegetarian diet, is cooked in the kitchen, and whether they ate it themselves. It was not until I had known some women for several months that they told me they cooked meat at home for their husbands and children. A Brahman woman, for example, said that while she maintained a vegetarian diet herself, she cooked meat for her husband and children. However, if other women knew of this they would consider her 'low', particularly in view of her Brahman status. In fact this was almost the 'norm' among most of the women I encountered. While pursuing a vegetarian regime themselves, they often cooked meat for their husband and children using separate cooking pots and utensils, or shared the actual cooking with their husband. Jasvanti, who found handling meat and the smell of it quite distasteful, remarked that:

I let my husband cook what he wants and if he wants meat, I let him and I let the children have it too. I don't eat anything like that or fish or eggs but if my husband and children want it, I let them have it. I don't want them to get sick.

Bhanu observed that while 'in principle' women do not eat meat:

in practice women prepare the food for their husbands and kids and finish up eating it too because they don't want to prepare two different types of food each day.

Bhanu herself said she did not eat meat and of my informants, Bharti was the only married woman who freely admitted to cooking meat for her husband and eating it herself at home. Bharti explained that:

In Africa hardly anyone ate meat. It was thought dirty somehow if you ate meat, you were low. It had a real stigma attached to it but it's different here.. Girdhalal cooks steak when he feels like it, he does it with cream. We have English food about twice a week, meat and boiled vegetables and things but I still have to cook Gujarati food for my mother-in-law. She won't eat it [English food].

Girdhalal was 'used to eating meat' and he did not object to Bharti continuing her own practice of meat-eating after the wedding.

In contrast to the earlier discussion concerning the utilization of English or 'foreign' food items in the household (6.9), in terms of

meat a much sharper distinction emerges, not only between generations but between the sexes. In ideal terms, meat should not enter the household, but variations exist where concerns of ritual purity are juxtaposed with pragmatic concerns for the health of children. For them, meat is *shakti khorak* and is positively valued as strengthening, nutritious, heating food which promotes health and energy in this particular environment. It is married women, and some older men, who maintain a vegetarian regime inside and outside the household while at the same time encouraging their children and grandchildren to eat meat. Some of my female informants said they had never eaten meat. Others, unlike their male counter-parts, gave up eating meat either in late adolescence or, especially, when they married. Indu began eating meat when she started school in England. When she was sixteen she gave up this practice not, as she explained, 'for religious reasons', but because she was against the killing of animals for human consumption. For others who eat meat prior to marriage, there may be some pressure for them to return to a vegetarian diet when they marry. I was told that this may be because their mother-in-law wishes to keep the home a 'meat-free' area, or because their husband insists on traditional practices being maintained. Whereas men eat meat outside or inside the household, there is an ideology and very often a practice of adolescent girls and married women doing neither.

#### 6.14) Sexuality, Power, and Purity

The moral and mental effects which meat, fish, eggs, and alcohol create in the mind and body of the eater are those of passion, lust, physical aggression, strength, and power. As sexually immature people, children stand outside these considerations. Older men who maintain, or revert to, a vegetarian diet may well be trying to free themselves as a householder of the sexual desire of their youth (see Basham 1954:158-9 on the four stages of life). For sexually mature men and women, however, the effects which these foods create in one's mind and body are intimately linked to notions of masculinity and femininity, power and purity.

In discussions with predominantly female informants, it was very often the connotation of female sexual passion which was stressed as being an undesirable effect of eating this food. As Bhanu put it, 'this *tamsik khorak*, this meat, it makes you sexy'. Jaya explained:

if you eat *tamsik* food like meat then you should fast. You know, this food isn't good. It isn't especially good for women. It makes her angry, and if you eat this then you should do some fasting because this helps to stop the anger.

The implications of this return us to a familiar theme - a construction of femininity as passive, quiet, submissive, and the way in which women themselves control their own emotions, sexual desires, and power, in this case through food. For men, however, this was not the case. When I was plying Bhanu with questions one afternoon, she said to me, rather mischievously but with some exasperation:

You want to know why Indian men like to eat this *tamsik* food? There are two reasons. One is because in a hot climate like India, it's good to perspire a lot. You know that, don't you? But the other reason is because it provokes feelings in them.

Meg: What kind of feelings?

Bhanu: Well, these feelings, passionate feelings. They want to have these feelings because it makes them feel like a man, you know, strong and this, and so they eat this *tamsik* food. Wine does this, and meat and things like that. But women say they don't eat these things because it isn't nice for a woman to feel like this. But actually they eat it too because they cook it for their husbands.

The image of masculinity which this implies is one of strength, power, sexual desire, and potency. By maintaining or reverting to a vegetarian diet in adolescence or at marriage, women control and cool their own emotions and desires, their power, and their conduct. For an unmarried woman, the implications of uncontrolled sexual desire and aggression is of unlicensed sexual behaviour, which would bring *sharam* to the woman and damage to household honour; and for a married woman, accusations that she was no longer chaste, with the same consequences for her and her conjugal household. That some women themselves acquiesce to requests or demands by their husband or mother-in-law that they follow a vegetarian diet, can be seen as another example of the bargains they make to maintain household honour and reputation in return for protection and social acceptance.

The ideology, and sometimes the practice, of adolescent girls and married women maintaining a vegetarian diet also has the implication that, in a sense, women maintain their 'cultural purity', as the following remarks by Hansha suggest. When I asked her why she had given up eating meat in her teens she said:

I suppose it has to do with religion, you know. Lots of women start wearing saris again when they get married too. <sup>(26)</sup> They are supposed to be more pure and keep up the Hindu and Gujarati customs more than men. When you go to these ceremonies and things, it's always women who do it. The men just stay in the background.

While many women observed that *tamsik* food contains meat, fish, eggs and alcohol, as noted previously, it was also pointed out by some younger women that *tamsik khorak* is anything which is outside the Gujarati vegetarian diet. In this sense, *tamsik* food could be said to be associated with the outside, the 'foreign' and, especially in this context, with western life, with its perceived lack of morals, open sexuality, and lack of religious values. By maintaining a vegetarian diet, the 'purity' of the culture is maintained. Women are, in this context, 'more pure' than men, but they are also more pure than other women - English women and, it could be suggested, other South Asian women who eat meat.

In the Hindu domain, a set of religious beliefs and practices provide a means for all individuals to enter into a spiritual relationship with the deities through food, and to promote morally beneficial qualities in themselves. Among my informants, however, these practices also create gender distinctions in the social world. The ubiquity of fasting among female, as opposed to male informants, is seen as part of their *dharma* to nurture and protect the spiritual and moral well-being of husbands, brothers, children, and households. Fasting is perceived as a means to purify the mind-soul. Through their purity and *seva* to the deities, women acquire merit (*punaya*) and spiritual power (*shakti*). This state of blessedness and empowerment can be used benevolently to achieve their own wishes, and it can also empower others, for example, to overcome illness, achieve prosperity or success, regulate relationships, or provide progeny. But through

the austerity of the fast, and through *satvik* food, women also create in themselves feminine characteristics which control this power, their emotions, and their sexuality, which may threaten honour and reputation. Through *tamsik* food, men create in themselves masculine attributes of power, strength, and virility. In the Hindu domain, notions of goodness, power, and purity among my informants, are concerned with the construction of gendered bodies and are inextricably linked with notions of *man*, *sharam*, and *ijjat*. One could also argue that by excluding *tamsik* food, women also make themselves 'more pure' to protect and care for their own culture and identity in an alien environment. We are left, however, with a problem, implicit and explicit in many of the comments made above - namely the public pronouncements on the undesirability of women eating *tamsik khorak*, especially meat, and the private picture which is hinted at, and sometimes made overt, that in practice, this is not always the case. In conclusion, then, I want look at some questions which arise from this concerning public and private notions of legitimacy and control, and of the gendered body.

#### 6.15) Conclusion

The idea that the body is an image or metaphor for society at large, has a long history in anthropology (for example, Mauss 1973 [1936]; Douglas 1966 & 1973). Douglas, for instance, argues that the physical experience of the body is always modified by the social categories through which it is known and this maintains a particular view of society (1973:93). She suggests that the dangers and powers existing in the social and cosmological world can be represented in miniature through the body (1966). In particular, she is concerned with beliefs surrounding the dangers of pollution, which she sees as inherent in phenomena seen in society as disordered or marginal. The control of bodily boundaries goes hand-in-hand with control of social boundaries. There is a concordance between bodily and social control (1966:96-7). Similarly, bodily diseases have been used to express metaphorically the moral, economic, and political state of society. Sontag (1983), for example, looks at the way in which cancer - as an

uncontrolled, chaotic, malignant growth of cells to be excised and cut out of the body - expresses ideas about undesirable individuals in society, and about unregulated, abnormal, incoherent economic growth in late capitalism in the West. Martin (1992) locates in the language of immunology a body imagery of AIDS with two co-existing bodies: one which is 'organized as a global system with no internal boundaries and characterized by flexible response, and a body organized around nationhood, warfare, gender, race, and class' (ibid:129). The external boundaries of the body are 'wavering' while the cells within the body have become invested with agency. The moral evaluations of these different cells are legitimized by the scientific language of immunology, and reflect societal attitudes toward the morally disordered and undesirable in an era of 'flexible accumulation' in American economic and political life.

Jonathan Parry (1989a) suggests that Hindu society 'is organized on a war footing *against* the body and its natural processes' (ibid:492-3, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, it has:

often seen itself as engaged in an endless battle against impending chaos and disintegration, of which the ever-present danger of a disintegration and degeneration of the actor's own person is the most immediate and apprehensible manifestation. Constant vigilance is required to hold the balance of the body; decay and death result from involvement in disequilibrating transactions (ibid:513).

The concern with balance, and the restoration of balance, is also apparent among my informants. Dis-equilibrium threatens well-being. Humoural imbalance in the body, and an imbalance between one's bodily constitution and the environment, threatens health and can cause illness. Food which is not properly transformed fails to nourish the body and pollutes the blood. Disturbed social relations threaten household reputation and kinship unity, and the proper relationships between the generations and the sexes. The annual Divali festival restores social order and celebrates the return of cosmological order. Rampant female sexuality, which threatens household honour, is controlled through food which cools female desires and power. Dis-equilibrium threatens chaos in the body itself, and in the social and cosmological order.

Among my informants, however, it would seem to be the feminine body which contains within it the seeds of dis-equilibrating forces, and embodies moral evaluations of what is threatening from both 'inside' and 'outside' the culture. The self-control and self-discipline which women practice to control their own sexual desires, their power, and their emotions - which appears absent from sexually mature male practices - implies that they are in a way 'naturally' sexually licentious, powerful, and emotionally uncontrolled. This threatens chaos not only in their own feminine bodies but in the 'body-politic'. The feminine body is itself a thing of *sharam*, more 'open' to physical and moral pollution. These moral imperfections in the feminine body are also reflected in many of my informants' attitudes toward English society, with its perceived 'open' sexuality, lack of religious and moral values, and disregard for the family. Many informants perceive a considerable risk to their own culture and identity by virtue of their life in England. Female as well as male informants also perceive it as women's responsibility to transmit this cultural identity to the next generation. The creation, through food, of desirable feminine attributes controls these threatening and dis-equilibrating forces, ritually purifies the mind-soul and establishes a spiritual relationship with the deities, and cools the emotions and the blood. This effects a kind of return to balance in the social order which is publically controlled by cultural notions of *man*, *sharam*, and *ijjat*. One could perhaps suggest that it effects a kind of 'symbolic closure' (Herzfeld 1986b) of the feminine body itself, and of the culture which is, in a way, what my informants aim for when they talk about maintaining their cultural identity.

But as Herzfeld himself points out, the 'sense of systematic solution is...one that *they* [his informants] aim to achieve; and it is as comforting and yet illusory as the dream of a perfect ethnographic analysis' (1986b:118). What we are left with, as far as my data are concerned, is the problem of public legitimacy and control of the feminine body, and what actually happens in private. I am referring here to comments made by informants that while married women say publically that they do not eat meat, privately, as several comments

made clear, some women actually do so in the privacy of their home. On the other hand, not all young men I encountered ate meat, fish, and eggs, and drank alcohol. One of the many criticisms of Douglas' approach is that in assuming that society governs the way in which the body is perceived and regulated, the notion of society itself is reified (Jackson 1983:329; Herzfeld 1986b:118). It does not consider that power is itself 'relational' (Foucault 1981) and contestable. Martin (1992), for example, notes the powerful social control which the scientific language of immunology exerts on images of what is morally desirable in the era of 'flexible accumulation' - rapid response, flexible production and workers, specialization, innovation, adaptability to new markets - and what is perceived as morally undesirable and undermining - homosexuality, one-parent families, and the underclass of blacks, the unemployed and the destitute. But she also notes the way in which people both resist and bend ideas to accommodate the era of 'flexible accumulation' and of the body as 'unbounded'. For my own informants, this implies, for example, that a difference exists between public and private expressions of sexuality, legitimacy and control. It raises the possibility that notions of the body itself are being transformed - that it is in some contexts, more 'heterogenized' (pace Appadurai 1981) through food transactions with a wider commensal circle and accommodating a changed environment. It also raises questions concerning notions of femininity and masculinity, of other subordinate but emerging identities which challenge cultural notions of *man* and *sharam*, *dharma* and *seva*, and the relationships of power they entail. These are some of the questions I shall address in the final chapter in this study.

CHAPTER SEVEN : CONCLUSION

Early on in this study of domestic religious worship among my Hindu Gujarati informants in east London, I asked why it was that different categories of women care for the well-being and protection of husbands, children, brothers, households and patriline. This has led to an examination of the way in which gender defines cultural constructions of responsibility and to a consideration of gender inequalities created through interpretations of *sharam*, *ijjat*, and *man*. I have attempted to show that numerous voices of individual women, at different stages of the domestic cycle, living in different household situations, from a variety of castes with varied marriage practices, with diverse migration histories, and economic and educational attainments and achievements, collude with, negotiate, and resist, in various ways and degrees, their own subordination. Individual women's coping mechanisms vary; they take different routes, choose different options, but there are a variety of structural, material, and cultural factors which both constrain actions and contain within them potential empowerment to care for themselves and their families successfully. I propose, then, to summarize my findings by looking first at the constraints within which women operate, and the way in which, within these constraints, women can achieve, create well-being and auspiciousness, and celebrate their lives in east London. From a woman's perspective, I consider what successful caring entails and what this might mean in terms of a 'good life'. Finally, I return to the married *nanad* to speculate on her role in patrilineal identity and Gujarati culture.

#### 7.1) Gender, Power, and Well-Being

One of the limitations of this study is the paucity of male voices and perspectives. I recognize that, like women, men are also constrained by structural, material, and cultural factors and that they, too, manipulate, negotiate, and resist forms of domination. I have argued, however, that an ideology of male dominance does exist among my informants which is recognized by both sexes. From a series of 'listening posts', Strathern (1987 & 1988) has recently taken issue with various theories of gender and social action in which she locates

a western bias in presupposing permanent relations of dominance. From my understanding of her work, she examines the notion of difference in relation to western understandings 'of a material world mediated by industrialization' (1987:280). Strathern argues that concepts of difference have been framed by western notions of encompassment based on a commodity economy of value. These relations 'constantly reduce to a hierarchical form [and] makes it difficult to conceptualise "difference" in a non-hierarchical manner' (ibid:280). In social terms, this leads to 'difference being synonymous with inequality' (ibid: 281). Hence, she locates a bias in gender relations of presupposing that one sex ultimately appropriates the powers of another. Lisette Josephides (1991) has recently criticised several aspects of Strathern's theories. What is relevant here relates to the notion of male domination and social action. Josephides (ibid: 149) points to the problem of conceiving social action in terms of the cause and effect of another gender. If women bring out the effects of men's actions (and vice versa), are they then the 'cause' of men's violence toward them? Josephides highlights the difficulties which Strathern herself recognizes when it comes to talking of things 'on the ground', where men dominate 'when they can override particular interests of others by reference to categorical, collective imperatives'. Among my informants, these 'imperatives' are concerned with ideologies of patrilineality and patrilocality, respect, shame, and honour, and the construction of gender which defines cultural notions of responsibility.

Parminder Bhachu (1988) has recently written of the impact of cash and women wage earners on relations of power and the gendered division of labour in the domestic domain among Punjabi Sikhs in West London and the Midlands. She takes issue with the findings of anthropologists such as Sharma (1980, 1984) and Standing (1985) which, she argues, represent Asian women as passive victims of the power of patriarchy and all-dominant men who define the parameters of women's existence (ibid:76). Bhachu argues that, in Britain, Punjabi Sikh women's 'ability to develop more self-defined roles has been aided by their increased access to cash, which has allowed them to invest and

consume in their own interests and for their own benefit' (ibid). She maintains that with women's control over their earnings, an increasingly bilateral and loosely organized kinship structure, the establishment of nuclear households, and a 'move away from the stronger patrilinearity prior to migration' (ibid:96-7), women are making 'a significant impact on the household and on culturally defined notions of masculine and feminine roles, ie. on the very kinship structures that appear from the outside to be repressive and static' (ibid:76). This, however, is 'not to suggest that women have equality within the community, because they do not: men remain dominant' (ibid:78). Furthermore:

this is not to say that there has been a radical shift in perceptions of what is "feminine" and "masculine" or that there has been a reversal of roles, but rather there has been a revision of male and female roles, which have resulted in men being more involved in the household because of women's move into the labour market (ibid:79).

It is largely younger women in nuclear households who have effected this change toward a more equal relationship within the household vis-a-vis their husbands (ibid:93).

Bhachu's analysis of Sikh women in England contrasts with certain aspects of my own data. I shall begin this summary, then, by looking at specific as well as more general points of convergence and divergence. Unlike Sikh women, most of my female informants were not wage employed. Those who did want to work outside the home faced constraints with which women in the market economy at large are confronted - a depressed labour market, lack of part-time, flexible employment, and lack of childcare facilities. Lack of education and language skills were considerable handicaps for some. That women did not use State-run employment agencies is perhaps indicative of the fear of racial prejudice they may have encountered there. Others who did want paid employment were constrained by a family tradition in which women were confined to domestic labour. But for those who were employed in the labour market, the notion of women's control over their earnings needs, I think, to be treated with some circumspection. Standing (1991:88-9) refers to the work of Pahl (1983) in her

discussion of the relationship between wage employment for women and economic autonomy. Pahl distinguishes between '"control", which concerns major intra-household decisions of a "policy-making" kind; [and] 'management', which puts policy decisions into action' (quoted in Standing *ibid*:89). As Standing points out, the distinction between control and management is important, not only when looking at women's relationship to wages, but also to other forms of property such as land, housing, and forms of savings. She notes that '[c]ontrol here signifies a capacity to enforce rights of direction and disposal over property against competing claims' (*ibid*).

Among informants who were wage employed, control over their earnings varied from those who had little or none - where wages were handed over to the mother-in-law, for instance - to those who could dispose of it at their discretion, which in general meant that it contributed in various ways toward the economic betterment of the household. Despite the additional burden of work for many, women did find a sense of personal satisfaction and worth in paid employment. With higher levels of education for their daughters, and expectations that they will be wage earners before and at some time after marriage, it is possible to argue that in the future there will be greater dependence on women's economic contribution to the household which, in turn, will increase their say in how it is disposed of. But control over cash is only one form of wealth. Whether wage employed or not, while women may manage various forms of household wealth, when placed in the broader framework of Pahl's argument, women's economic independence is considerably limited in terms of their ability to dispose of land, jewellery, and other wealth. If women manage but do not control wealth this contributes to their continued dependence on marriage and children for their future security.

When compared with older women, fertility rates as well as perinatal and neonatal mortality have declined among younger informants. Motherhood, however, continues to be of central importance in the lives of female informants. With motherhood, women fulfil their *dharma* to provide progeny for their husband's patriline. Children

continue to provide a means whereby women as mothers can acquire authority, social prestige, and auspiciousness, as well as protection for themselves in the future, especially with the birth of sons. The extent to which married women were able to extend care to elderly parents depended to a large extent on seniority, household composition and marital relations, and the family tradition of inter-personal relations in the conjugal household. Relations with brothers and sisters, as well as other natal kin, may be supportive and frequent, while relations between natal and conjugal kin may be characterized by less formality and rigidly-ordered hierarchical relations (cf. Vatuk 1972). But data suggest that an ideology of patrilocality which claims married women's domestic labour constrains women's choices and actions in relation to their natal kin. Several voices in this study suggested, though, that from a female perspective, the transfer of responsibilities at marriage was not accomplished without subsuming their own feeling and loyalties to those kin. Paradoxically, the two women who could be said to control their economic situations were Nita, a divorcee, and eventually Vimla, a young widow, both of whom had children and who relied on social welfare provided by the State. Such control, however, needs to be set against general socio-economic conditions - a lack of public housing provision and their own prospects for employment - as well as their own individual situations - the absence of natal kin in England for Nita and, for Vimla, the relationship with her brother and his wife.

The second point I want to make is that, unlike some of Bhachu's informants, for the great majority of my female informants marriage entailed several years at least of joint household living. Subordination to men in the household is offset by the control older women are able to exert over younger ones. There are certain points in the domestic cycle, particularly as a senior woman of a large household or as a wife and mother - preferably of at least one son - in a nuclear household, when women can manage material resources and exercise considerable authority over other people. But relations of power, especially between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, shift over the domestic cycle and according to household composition and

marital support. Older women vie for the affection and loyalty of sons who will protect them in old age. Wives compete with them and other wives in the household or *kutumb* to gain their husband's support and security for themselves and their children. A move to a nuclear household, which informants observe is occurring earlier among some young couples - perhaps made possible by the the higher earning power of younger men and some women - does enable a source of escape from the day-to-day subordination to mothers-in-law. But if this move takes place without a division of the patrimony, there are very good economic reasons why seniors may continue to exert considerable authority over juniors. Moreover, as we have seen, notions of *man*, *sharam*, and *ijjat*, remain powerful cultural sanctions on the ordering of relationships and behaviour, which extend to nuclear households within the *kutumb*, even when there has been a division of the patrimony. The patrilocal three-generational household remains a powerful cultural ideal among my informants (Kandiyoti 1988). A fiction of agnatic solidarity, which is recognized by some informants at least, contributes to the maintenance of this ideal.

The third point concerns Bhachu's discussion of femininity and masculinity. It is rather difficult to understand what she is getting at when, on the one hand, she insists that feminine and masculine roles have been 'revised' but, on the other hand, notions of masculinity and femininity have not altered. If some men are now changing their baby's nappies and feeding them (ibid:93) and, presumably, cleaning up faeces and vomit, this suggests the possibility of different notions of masculinity and, indeed, of femininity. This, at least, seems to be the case among my informants where what emerges is a patchwork of variant and emerging feminine and masculine identities which both collude with and challenge dominant ideologies. My data suggest that it is through the cultural notions of *dharma* (moral duty) and *seva* (selfless service) that women's work in caring for the household is appropriated and rendered 'invisible' by attributing it to what is 'normal' or natural for women to do. Both of these notions contribute to the construction of powerful stereotypes of femininity as passive, selfless, self-denying, and self-sacrificing

on behalf of others. Wage employment among married female informants in general had little effect on the gendered division of domestic labour (cf. Standing 1991). The idea of men as the primary economic providers, and women as economic dependents, is reinforced by the 'invisibility' of women's domestic work and the way in which, publically, women's economic contribution through wage employment is rendered secondary to that of men. But there were ways in which individual women publically colluded with this image while privately negotiating and manipulating the situation to their own advantage. There were also a few exceptions among men who were taking on 'feminine' domestic tasks, or publically expressing affection for their wives which challenged stereotypical images of masculinity and marital relations.

Women themselves responded in a variety of ways to the 'naturalness' of housework and child care and to these images of femininity. To an outsider, it is possible to argue that those women who claim these feminine attributes and responsibilities for the care of the household, do so because of a lack of viable alternatives. But individual women themselves raised voices of protest to deny their social and personal value lies solely in their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, and who strive within these constraints to construct alternative identities. The friendships which women create outside kin and caste groups are represented by them as a personally and emotionally valued means to create other identities and to offset constraints imposed by natal as well as conjugal kin. In a hierarchical world, constantly threatened by competition from others, some are successful and some are not. But the implication among older women that friendships which existed in East Africa have been maintained and are nurtured in England, is an arena which deserves further study. Within the local neighbourhood and community, alternative prestige structures also exist within which some successful women exercise authority and empower themselves and other people. A *bhui*, through her *seva* to the Mata, can acquire a local, or even regional reputation, whose powers of intervention with the Goddess are sought for a range of misfortunes - illness, household or

family problems, infertility or sub-fertility, the lack of a son, and so on. Other women, through their knowledge of ritual procedures or religious lore, or through acts of charity (*dan*), acquire reputations for their religiosity. . Women's groups, voluntary organizations and caste associations provide an arena where women can acquire positions of power and influence within the political arena of the local neighbourhood and caste.

Finally, my data do not suggest that the ideology of patrilineality has been undermined by material and structural changes in household composition. What it does suggest, and what it confirms from other ethnographic sources, is that when placed within the context of a cosmology of 'practical kinship' (Bourdieu 1977), agnatic and affinal relations, as Overing (1985:157-8) observes of her Piaroa informants, become 'subsumed under broader metaphysical principles', such as similarity and difference, and closeness and distance.

Membership of the *kutumb*, as we have seen, varies according to context. In some situations, it defines a group of related agnates, their wives and children, but excludes married sisters and daughters as belonging to their husband's *kutumb*. In other contexts, especially ritual ones, married sisters and daughters are included in the *kutumb* by virtue of their shared blood. Depending on the context, then, women are both different from, and similar to, members of their natal household. The ideology of patrilineality not only obscures the essential role women play in actually creating relationships between groups of agnatically related men but, as Sharma (1981) points out, has led anthropologists themselves to neglect it. In particular in this study, I have attempted to show the continuing role which married women play in the religious and ritual life of their natal household, and the way in which this contributes to their own well-being and the well-being of their natal household. I shall discuss this in more detail shortly. In the world of practical kinship, both men and women can manipulate kin relations and use them situationally to enhance the status and reputation of their own household. The moral conditions of similarity and difference, or closeness and distance, defines whether

common substances, especially blood, exist. These can establish a caste or patrilineal identity. But they can also be manipulated, for example, at marriage, perhaps through adoption; or when it is socially advantageous to foreground a relationship as close - which may have little to do with genealogical or spatial closeness - when it can benefit the prestige and status of the household. Bilateral kinship ties are utilized by women and men to enhance well-being for themselves and the household. The morality of practical kinship would also seem to contest the ideology of patrilineality when it comes to theories of procreation. I have only been able to suggest possible avenues of contextual variation in this study, but it is obviously an area which requires further research among Hindus in Britain.

At marriage, women are expected to give up their natal practices and take on the 'family tradition' of their husband's patriline. This involves, to a greater or lesser extent, changes in ritual practices, conduct, food practices, and inter-personal relationships, which are all said to be informed by the *kul devi*. These are individual to each patriline and provide it with its own specific identity. That this knowledge is passed down through affinal women makes the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law crucial to the continuation of this knowledge. It also provides senior women with a powerful means by which they can impose authority on junior women who can be blamed for all manner of misfortune if these practices are not carried out. Women can, though, resist total incorporation into their husband's household and patriline. I suggested (pace Harlan 1992) the possibility that women may continue to worship their own natal *kul devi* in various guises, or continue natal food practices in nuclear households. This is obviously an area which deserves further research among Hindu women in England as it raises many questions concerning patrilineal identity, the notion of 'family tradition' as an idiom of power relations, and the possibility of incorporating natal ritual practices into conjugal domestic worship.

When we come to women's role in social reproduction one of the themes which emerges from my data is of women's control of their

own and other women's sexuality. What is it, then, about female sexuality and fertility which causes such concern? The value of female virginity at marriage - and of chasteness afterward - is associated with household and patrilineal status and cultural notions of *sharam* and *ijfat*. Control of female sexuality and fertility ensures that a woman's natal household have a say in where the wealth of her dowry goes to enhance their own social position, and that they maintain their honour and reputation by gifting a virgin; and in her conjugal household that her fertility is at her husband's disposal to ensure that his blood, and that of his patriline, is passed to the next generation, and his honour maintained through her chasteness. What can be implied from the data - especially Chapter Six - is that women are 'naturally' prone to emotional instability and uncontrolled desire. It has been observed, for example, that when female deities are accompanied by male consorts, the goddess becomes an inferior wife whose power is checked and controlled by her divine husband. Shiva and Parvati, Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita, for example, exemplify this relationship. Single, unmarried goddesses, such as Kali and Shitala, on the other hand, are represented as fierce, dangerous and destructive if not worshipped appropriately. Their power is associated with the accumulated heat of unreleased sexual desire and energy (Babb 1970; Hershman 1977; Wadley 1977; B. Tapper 1979). In the social world, this is represented as a powerful female sexuality which is dangerous if not controlled by a male (Wadley 1977; Allen 1982).

I have suggested in this study that cultural constructions of *man*, *sharam*, and *ijfat* are idioms through which relationships of power are expressed. As Rushdie (1983) so graphically observes, *sharam* is also a powerful emotional construct. The feminine body is itself a thing of *sharam*. Notions of *sharam* constrain bodily deportment, behaviour, relationships, and what can and cannot be said publically. From observation, and from what older women told me, restrictions on movement among female informants have greatly diminished. The great majority no longer veil, they are not confined to the household, they can shop alone, some participate in women's groups or local voluntary organizations, and some are employed in a variety of positions in the

market economy. Some younger mothers try at least to prepare daughters for the onset of menstruation with more information. While not unproblematic, many women have access to a wider range of sources of information on conception, pregnancy, and contraception. But *sharam*, I suggest, permeates the unconscious 'gendered subjectivity' of female informants' early socialization and their adult milieu. Women themselves learn to control their own and other women's sexuality through cultural constructions of femininity which emphasize self-control and self-denial; through the maintenance and restoration of balance in bodily elements; through the food they ingest to 'cool' and control their power, their emotions, and their desires; and through the self-discipline and self-denial of the fast itself. The notion of *sharam* is both internalized as a powerful emotion and externalized as a relationship of power, and both of these constrain expressions of female sexuality among women themselves. Accusations of being shameless (*besharam*) can act as powerful sanctions on behaviour.

It is the female silence on talking about sex itself which is notable. Taboos, as Douglas (1966) reminds us, are about danger and morality. Why, then, is this so dangerous to women themselves? Like myself, Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989) also found it difficult to obtain information from informants about sexual relationships (ibid:261 n12), although there is an implication that the two male ethnographers had better success with men (ibid:259 n70). What they do note is that in nuclear households 'the husband has the right of sexual access to his wife at times when he decrees: she should neither take the initiative nor refuse him' (ibid:29). That sex is about power is graphically demonstrated as this passage continues: '[m]any men in Dharmnagri and Jhakri were explicit that sexual intercourse involves the exercise of power over a woman who is degraded by it. An essential component of a husband's rule is sexual power over his wife' (ibid:29). That some women at least, do talk about sex is shown in Vanaja Dhruvarajan's (1989:83-87) research in Karnataka. Dhruvarajan found that she could not discuss sex at all with men but got much further than I did with women. She found that 'most women enter marriage without knowing the details of the sex act' (ibid:85). But,

despite ill-treatment by some husbands, she notes that 'all married women believed that there is absolutely no excuse for a woman to refuse a man's rights [to sex]' (ibid:86). It is also considered very damaging to a woman's reputation if she 'does not treat her husband properly in bed. A woman should not be frigid, nor should she make demands on her husband. She should always be a willing partner but should not take the lead' (ibid-84-5). All of this suggests that some women do talk about sex and, what is more, talk about it in some considerable detail. My own status as an unmarried woman contributed, I feel, to the difficulties I experienced with even close friends when it came to discussing sex. The notion of *sharam* as a powerful emotional construction is also certainly part of this.

Dhruvarajan's data, though, raise questions as to what extent these are public or privately expressed sentiments. Who, for example, damages a woman's reputation by revelations that she is not treating her husband 'properly in bed'? Not the woman herself presumably. Perhaps her husband, although, as Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon note, men would seem more likely to publically affirm their virility and control over their wives rather than their wife's 'improper' behaviour - and perhaps, conceal their own impotence. But, while sex may be perceived by men as an expression of their power over wives, sex also empowers women. It is through the sexual act that a woman's hymen is penetrated and her fecundity made manifest. It is through children that women are able to acquire a measure of authority and power in the household. But the sexual union of husband and wife also threatens older women who strive to maintain the loyalty of their sons (cf. Gray 1982:231). The taboo on talking about sex between these women could be seen as a means whereby older women, through idioms of *man* and *sharam*, attempt to control their daughter-in-law's potential power to displace this loyalty to create security for themselves. Between mothers and daughters - and sons - the taboo on discussions of sex conceals the mother's identity as a sexually active person. As a mother, she is essentially a nurturer and protector of her children. On the other hand, for those women who have reached the menopause, this taboo also conceals their own loss of fertility and its associated

auspiciousness. That the silence on sex among female informants is expressed in terms of male-dominated idioms of *sharam* and *man*, could be seen, from an outsider's perspective, as concealing their dependence on men where culturally successful female identities centre primarily on a woman as a virgin, a *ssubhagyavati*, and a mother.

Notions of *dharma* and *seva*, *sharam*, *ijjat*, and *man* are cultural constructs which constrain the way in which my informants act and react in their bargains with patriarchy and form part of female informants' 'gendered subjectivity'. But as I have noted in various parts of this study, there are variant, subordinate, and emerging feminine and masculine identities which challenge gender stereotypes and dominant ideologies. Transformations in socio-economic conditions challenge what is 'natural' in gendered differences. Discrepancies exist between public and private expressions of sexuality. As Scott (1990) observes, it is the day-to-day repetitive actions which challenge, modify, and transform dominant structures such as *sharam*, *ijjat*, and *man*. This is not a smooth transformation and, as Kandiyoti (1988:186) points out, sometimes women make paradoxical bids for increased control by men. One could perhaps consider the way in which the feminine body is made 'pure' in relation to the threat of moral disintegration from 'outside' the culture in this light. But there are those women and men who contest this; who engage in everyday transactions through which other Gujarati identities emerge which both accommodate and resist dominant power structures and raise the possibility of their transformation.

## 7.2) Domestic Religious Worship : Celebrating Well-Being

While relationships with kin and the duties and responsibilities these entail may be onerous at times, the structure itself provides women with a means of attaining considerable authority and power within the household and extended kin networks. Others have noted the role women have in marriage arrangements (Sharma 1980; Bhachu 1985), and in ceremonial gifting (Raheja 1988; Shaw 1988; Werbner 1988, 1990) where it is women who control the transfer and collection of gifts. In

this study, I have focused on the arena of domestic religious worship. Domestic here does not refer to a particular location. Sered (1988:516) characterizes domestic religion, or the 'domestication of religion', as a particular mode of worship which personalizes the ultimate concerns of life, suffering and death. Men are not excluded from this form of worship but, among my informants, it is women who are the acknowledged agents with knowledge of domestic rituals and worship. It is here that female informants enjoy a level of autonomy and empowerment which is recognized and acknowledged by both sexes. Indeed, the Brahman priests I spoke with about life-cycle rites acknowledged that their wives were the ones who knew what actually happened 'in practice'. One of Parry's (1989a) Brahman informants puts this rather well:

In my whole life I have only performed two or three *sraddhas* (mortuary rites) according to the *Shastras*. I emphasize *lokachar* (the popular tradition). What the women of the family say, that's the truth. Blowing our conch shells, we Brahmans throw dust in people's eyes.

The rituals which my informants enact take place in living rooms and kitchens of terraced houses, in front of *ghar mandirs* set inside a cupboard or on top of a refrigerator, in community halls, temples, class rooms or social clubs. These rituals 'safeguard the health, happiness and security of particular people with whom they are linked in relationships of caring and interdependence' (Sered 1988:506). Within the broad diversity of Hinduism, the different features of these rituals focus on the family traditions of a particular patriline. But this feature is itself part of a regional pattern of religious worship which, taken together, are seen by male and female informants as an essential aspect of their Gujarati Hindu identity in England. As Tapper and Tapper (1987:72) and Sered (1988:517) point out, there is no *a priori* reason why women's domestic religious 'work' should be considered marginal or peripheral to the wider religious tradition with which it interacts.

In Hinduism, *shakti* embodies the female principle of the universe (Babb 1970; Wadley 1977). Goddesses can use their *shakti* for both

beneficent and maleficent purposes. Among my informants, *shakti* accrues to women through their self-sacrifice, self-denial, and self-control. In the rituals they enact, women create and re-create these images of subordinate femininity, but these rituals also empower women and other people. Husbands, brothers, children, households, *kutumbs*, and women themselves all benefit from the auspiciousness and well-being which different categories of women create. Women call upon other women to create maleness in their bodies; to protect unborn children, themselves, and infants from the harm of other humans; to sit through the night long vigil to protect their husbands; to join together to ask for the Mata's protection for themselves and for their household; to ask for her blessing of fecundity; or to ask for the deity to bestow her grace for a boy. At many of these ceremonies, women are representations of the Mata herself and her sisters; they are 'like' the Mata and are honoured as such.

Illness and misfortune among my informants are attributed to numerous causal agents, often simultaneously. Biomedicine, home remedies, and numerous folk and specialist treatments are sought. A child's cough, for example, may be attributed to an imbalance in *garam* and *thanda* in the diet, to the cold climate in England, to a lack of strengthening and heating food such as meat, to a virus, and/or the failure of a mother to give the proper attention and care to her child. As I have noted, illness and misfortune among my informants needs to be set within the context of the moral relationships within and between households and patriline. Domestic religious worship is an arena in which women can empower themselves to care for and protect (*rakhavi*, or *sambhala rakhavi*) the well-being of husbands, children, brothers, households and patriline. Caring for others entails notions of solicitude or concern (*chinta*), compassion (*dya*), responsibility (*javabadari*) and *seva*. What is apparent in so many of the rituals which women perform, though, is the notion of protection. In order to create auspiciousness and well-being, protective measures are taken to eliminate knowable sources of danger and inauspiciousness. These also reveal those most likely to be at risk and those most likely to be blamed (Douglas 1992:36). Women who do not

invite the Mata into the house to ask for her protection, who do not properly care for the well-being of the *kul devi*, who do not perform *jaya parvati vrat* to protect husbands, or *shitala satam* to protect children, or who perform *puja* or attend rituals while menstruating, risk being blamed for their infertility, for problems with interpersonal relationships, with the early death of their husband and their loss of status as a *saubhagyavati*, illness in their children, or catastrophe for the entire household or even the *kutumb*.

Alternatively, not to place protective bracelets (*rakhadi*) on the wrists of brothers, sisters-in-law, or brothers children, puts these people at risk of harm from other jealous humans. The goddesses themselves are not perceived as dangerous and destructive but rather, it is women who 'cause' misfortune in their failure to care properly for the deities. But, it would seem, some women are more likely to be blamed than others - which has a great deal to do with everyday relationships in the social world. In the face of knowable sources of inauspiciousness and misfortune, some women are, then, more successful than others. On the other hand, there are sources of misfortune and inauspiciousness which are unknowable. One's fate (*lekh*), while invisibly written down by the goddess Vidhata, can be also understood, as Fuller (1992:251) observes, 'as the outcome of impersonal forces exerted by the planets'. The deities themselves may, for some unknown reason, fail to respond to one's hopes and wishes. *Shakti* empowers women themselves as well as other people on whom they rely for their own well-being. But success in what can be achieved is adjusted to individual hopes of what is more probable (Douglas 1985:81).

One of the themes to emerge from this focus on domestic religious worship among Gujarati Hindus in east London is the way in which women empower themselves to protect and empower others. Through their rituals they create auspiciousness and well-being for specific categories of persons in relationships of care. From an outsider's point of view, it is possible to argue that successfully caring for and protecting others on whom one depends is a way of caring for and protecting oneself. From a woman's perspective, though, one can ask

what is successful caring and what, moreover, does this mean in terms of their own expectations of a 'good life' for themselves? For my part this is a speculative journey. But I feel that it is important to raise the point for further research for, if so much of what caring entails is about women empowering themselves to protect and empower others, their investment in this in the future will be one of the factors which contributes to what of Gujarati Hindu culture is passed on to future generations in England.

Archana Srivastava (1992) has recently examined patterns of aging among Sikh and Gujarati women in London. Among her Gujarati informants, some women refer to the notion of *santosh* (satisfaction) to convey a sense of security. If a woman feels satisfied with her situation in life there is little to feel threatened about and this, in turn, ensures a secure old age. The absence of feelings of satisfaction is a major reason for feeling insecure and dissatisfied (ibid:13-14). Other women feel that security comes from some kind of support (*sahara*), in particular a loyal son who provides a home and a sense of 'belonging' (ibid:14). *Sanskar*, the idea of 'living properly', is one way in which my informants expressed the notion of a morally good life as one of a united, happy, healthy, loving family, divinely protected and socially respected. Prabha, who was *ba* to my 'fieldwork family' and to myself, died last year. Her granddaughter told me that she was very happy in her life. She had a son who loved and cared for her, a daughter-in-law who looked after her with love, and grandchildren to teach and to laugh with. She loved her house, and especially her garden - where weeds were treated with uncharacteristic ferocity, and path-edges neatened by hand. She could hang the clothes up in her own particular way and she had 'magic' with the pressure cooker. She rose everyday at five-thirty to bathe, pray, and read from the holy books. She undertook fasts, performed domestic rituals, was often called on the phone for advice on ritual procedures, and visited neighbours to massage away pain and discomfort. In the crowded kitchen before her funeral, the stories women told of Prabha were of a woman whose own happiness, unselfishness, humility, and humour were invariably transferred to those around her. She liked to see other

people happy, laughing and talking together, while she bustled around doing things for others. She died at home with her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren around her. She had a good death<sup>11</sup> which reflected the goodness in herself and the care she gave to others. I cannot help but feel that Prabha indeed had 'good *sanskar*' and, through her successful caring, had achieved at the end of her life security - *santosh* and *sahara* - love, and happiness to prove it.

### 7.3) Well-Being, Care, and the *Nanad*

I want, finally, to return to the *nanad* who has played such an important role in so many of the rituals described in this study. While some studies have noted the ritual link between brothers and sisters celebrated annually at *divasni rakhadi* and *bhai-bij* (Mayer 1960; Gray 1982; Bennett 1983), and while others have examined the contextually different ritual roles of the married sister (Raheja 1988), and the ritual prestations at life cycle rites (Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989), I have argued that the implications of the married *nanad* in the religious and ritual life of her brother's household has not been fully explored by anthropologists. A woman, given as a *kanyadan* at marriage, creates auspiciousness and prosperity for her husband and his patriline - through the wealth she brings and the children she bears. But it is also with her own marriage that a woman becomes one of, if not the most, important ritual officiant in her brother's household, for which she receives payment in the form of *neg*. In cases where one has no 'real' brothers or sisters, classificatory brothers and sisters ('cousin-brothers' and 'cousin-sisters') are sought out by both men and women, and a close relationship (*nikatano sambhanda*) established. Far from being cut off from the religious and ritual life of their natal home, married sisters are crucial to its well-being and auspiciousness. If, from a woman's perspective, creating auspiciousness and well-being, and successful caring, are concerned with empowering other people, the married *nanad* seems to exemplify this role.

From the perspective of the wife, her married *nanad* is as essential to her own well-being and that of her children as is her husband. The annual rituals which the *nanad* performs at *divasni rakhadi* to protect and care for the well-being and prosperity of her brother, from the wife's perspective, also afford another ritual source to protect her own status as a *saubhagyavati*. On the evening when she and her husband consummate their marriage, it may be her *nanad* who leaves the 'cooling' drink which creates maleness in her body. Her *nanad* ensures that her first pregnancy - which is crucial to her social well-being - receives divine protection. At *panchamasi* in the fifth month, when the *jivatma* (life-soul) enters the body of the foetus, and at the *kholo* in the seventh month, when the foetus is fully formed, her *nanad* ties threads or places bracelets on her wrists, which both create auspiciousness and protect her and her unborn child from jealous intentions and harm from others. After the birth, the married *nanad* continues to ritually protect her child and, as its *phoiba* (FZ), is the child's own link with the cosmos. On the sixth day, the goddess Vidhata is invoked to invisibly write down the child's future fate after it is first instilled with auspiciousness. The child receives its name and social identity from its *phoiba* who is its link with affines who form part of its extended kinship group. Prior to its first visit to the temple, where it is introduced to the divine world, the *phoiba* again ritually protects the child with a *pochi* (bracelet). From the married *nanad's* perspective, the ritual care of her brother provides her with a measure of protection in her social world - both material and cultural - should misfortune befall her. As the major ritual officiant in the life-cycle rites of her brother's household, the successful married *nanad* empowers her brother, his wife and their children to continue her own natal patriline.<sup>(22)</sup> While as affinal women, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law care ritually for the *kul devi* and the traditions of the patriline, it is consanguineal women, as married sisters and daughters, who ritually empower affinal women to successfully create auspiciousness and care for the well-being of their natal patriline. When her brother's daughter marries, she then takes over this role in relation to her own brother.

Empowering oneself and empowering others with well-being, auspiciousness, health, and prosperity, would appear to be a crucial element in what informants talk about when they speak of maintaining and transmitting their culture to the next generation in England. If, as I have suggested, the successful married *nanad* appears to exemplify this role, the subject of another study perhaps, could be how much of what is Gujarati is passed on through her.

FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER ONE

1.) There has been a renewal of interest in recent times concerning the ethnographic present and past (Fardon 1990; Sanjek 1991; Rapport 1991; Okely & Calloway (eds) 1992). This has been partly in response to the post-modernist movement in anthropology during the eighties, which questioned the nature of the ethnographic enterprise (cf. Sanjek 1991:609). Several issues are raised in recent discussions which focus on the use of fieldnotes, on validation, on the reflexivity of the anthropologist, and on the use of tenses when 'writing up'. Hastrup (1992:127), for example, argues that 'the ethnographic present is the only narrative construction of time which gives meaning to the anthropological discourse'. Davis (1992), on the other hand, traces the variety of tenses used in ethnographic writing and concludes that 'the ethnographic present is not in fact a single voice, but several - it could be as many as eight, each with their own significance and use' (ibid:217). It will be noted in this study, that while written largely in the past tense, the present tense also appears at various points in descriptive passages.

2.) I shall note some of this criticism in the next section, but of relevance here is the ethnocentric assumption that a.) the proper locus of power lies in the public domain with men, and b.) that power is conceptualized as material (Hirschon 1984). N.Tapper and R.Tapper (1987:72) observe of Muslims 'that it is wrong to assume *a priori* that women's religious "work" is less important or peripheral to that of men. Not only do women too practice the central, day-to-day rites of Islam, but in their performances they may carry a religious load often of greater transcendental importance to the community than that borne by men'.

3.) This has also been recently explored among Pakistani women in Britain (Shaw 1988; Werbner 1988, 1990)

4.) See Stevenson (1971 [1920]) for an early account of domestic rituals among Brahmans in Gujarat which is replete with references to the married sister in the life cycle rites of her brother's household.

5.) While I would agree with Bennett that in some ritual contexts daughters and sisters are valued and honoured by fathers and brothers, it will become clear in the next section, and in the body of the study, that in other contexts both 'patrifocal' and 'filiafocal' relations can constrain the choices and actions available to women.

6.) Some writers, for example, point out that the generality and ahistorical usage of the concept renders it problematic. Rubin (1975) takes the position that it should be confined to 'the Old Testament-type pastoral nomads from whom the term comes, or groups like them' (ibid:168). Rowbotham (1983), argues that its contemporary usage implies a universal and historical form of oppression which 'either produces a kind of feminist base-superstructure model to contend with the more blinkered versions of Marxism or it rushes us off on the misty quest for the original moment of male supremacy' (ibid:209).

Many other feminists in the West (Walby 1989), though, and especially Marxist feminists, (Eisenstein 1981; Mies 1986), despite reservations, argue for its retention because it expresses 'the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect women' (Mies 1986:37), and because it denotes the historical dimension of such relations. At one level, their arguments centre on whether it is patriarchy in the sphere of family relations and the domestic mode of production (Delphy 1984), or capitalism in the market economy (McDonough and Harrison 1978; Hartmann 1981), or an articulation between the two (Eisenstein 1979; Mies 1986) which accounts for female subordination. I have considerable misgivings with these essentially reductionist arguments (extremely simplified here!), but feel that the notion of 'bargaining with patriarchy' does have the virtue of taking account of cross-cultural variations in gender inequality, and of recognizing differences between women themselves, especially in relation to class, caste, race, and ethnicity (cf. Parmar 1982).

7.) As Sharma (1980) points out, when the dowry is transferred at marriage, a bride does not gain control over this property 'in the way that a son gains control over land on the partition of his father's estate' (ibid:49). While some of the dowry is allocated to the couple - rather than the bride herself - the bridegroom's parents may well redistribute a proportion of it to a wide circle of kin.

8.) Notions of what constitutes the 'family' and 'household', of kinship and non-kinship relations outside the household, of women's contribution to the domestic economy, their access (or not) to its resources, and their role in production in the market economy, are all complex issues which feminists have taken seriously and to which they have contributed important theoretical insights (see, for example, Papanek 1979; Yanagisako 1979; Harris 1981; Whitehead 1981; Sharma 1980 & 1986; and Standing 1991).

9.) It is arguable that migration itself has enabled women to control and generate resources. Studies carried out in north India, including rural Punjab (i-Rahat 1981), point to the important role of women in creating and generating resources to perpetuate reciprocal relations, principally among kin. Shachu (1988:96) herself implies something of the kind when she notes that increased female earnings has not led to the abolition of traditional values, reflected in the expansion of the dowry system in the case of younger women, and an 'increase in gift exchanges and ritual elaboration, through the re-establishment of non-compulsory ceremonial activity, which is almost entirely women-focused in the case of older earning women'. With older and younger women's entry into the labour market in Britain, what women have is the ability to generate more resources. My data agree with Werbner (1990:281) who, in her discussion of Pakistanis in Manchester, notes that despite higher earning capacity among women 'there is little evidence that among British Pakistanis the importance of the joint family has been undermined by the change in the labour market'. Other questions which arise from Shachu's account of feminine and masculine roles will be discussed in the Conclusion to the study.

10.) cf. Morsey (1978:138-9), Yanagisako (1979:191), Early (1980:116), Cesara (1982:6-7), Joseph (1983:3), Burton (1985:chps 2 & 3), Strathern (1984), Herzfeld (1986a:232-233), and Moore (1988:21-4).

11.) Such 'leaders' of voluntary or other groups are not necessarily representative of a 'community'. See John Eade's (1989 & 1990) work among Bangladeshis in east London, and Iris Kalka (1991) on Hindu Gujaratis in north London, for illuminating discussions on this point.

12.) The Newham Community Renewal Programme was begun in 1971 by members of a group of churches in east London. The aim of the organization is to assist in the setting up of groups and activities in response to community needs and to provide accommodation for meetings. The groups and associations are then encouraged to take over their own management and organization. It encourages inter-faith and inter-cultural traditions to exist side-by-side in the community (Annual Report 1983:7-8). The centre at Harold Road has some sixteen groups from various cultural backgrounds which utilize the facilities each week, that is around one thousand people per week. The co-ordinator of the English language scheme works from this centre which houses the Ladies Club.

13.) These Gujarati castes and relations between castes will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

- 1.) During fieldwork, the Newham Health District covered the borough of Newham as well as St. Andrews Hospital at Bow and the Aldersbrook Hospital at Wanstead, both of which are outside the borough.
- 2.) Information concerning the history of Newham is drawn largely from **Newham: Background to the Borough, Local History Publication No 1**, London Borough of Newham 1972. This publication draws on local documents, pamphlets, maps, prints and books to record the history of the area from Roman times.
- 3.) Unless otherwise stated, these and subsequent figures are based on the 1981 Census.
- 4.) The term 'New Commonwealth' covers countries which were former British colonies and includes the East African states of Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Malawi, as well as other former Africa colonies, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Mauritius; Caribbean states, such as Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana; and South Asia, including India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh but excluding Pakistan. While Pakistan was re-admitted to the Commonwealth in 1989, I shall continue with the usage of the term 'New Commonwealth' current during fieldwork.
- 5.) I have included here East Africa (the majority of whom trace their origin to India and Pakistan) (3%), as well as those born in India (10%) and Pakistan (3%).
- 6.) This survey gives an indication only. The report itself - **Population Statistics on Ethnic Minorities: Survey of Asian Names on the Register of Electors 1984** - draws attention to several problems in the methodology. Firstly, it considers only the people on the Register of Electors, that is, those over the age of 16 years and 8 months. Not all South Asians eligible to vote will necessarily be on the Register. Secondly, the South Asian population is younger than the population as a whole in the borough. The 1981 Census shows 62.7% of the borough's residents living in households where the head of the household was born in India, Pakistan or East Africa, were aged 16 years and 8 months or over. Of the total population, 75.7% were of that age or over. Thirdly, while the report notes the difficulty in categorizing certain Asian names, for example Gill, it fails to recognize that holders of the common Gujarati surname Patel, for instance, can be either Hindu or Muslim which can lead to a distortion in these respective categories.
- 7.) It is possible to note some changes in the South Asian population in the borough when these figures are compared with a similar survey carried out in 1975. There has been, as previously noted, an increase in the population of all South Asian groups with the exception of those from North and Central India, but this increase has been most marked among the South Indians where there has been a rise of some

197% (419 in 1975 to 1246 in 1981). The Gujarati population has increased during this time by 51.3% (4154 in 1975 to 6284 in 1981).

8.) But see Twaddle (1990:149-163) for a careful examination of South Asian migration to East Africa, which highlights problems with earlier accounts and raises several questions for further study. Articles in Clarke, Peach & Vertovec (eds.) (1990: Part 1) examine South Asian migration world-wide.

9.) This Act ends the automatic entitlement of wives and former wives of citizens of the UK and Colonies to obtain citizenship by registration. Instead, a non-British spouse is required to obtain citizenship by naturalization. For a discussion of the difficulties this may cause women who originate in the Indian sub-continent, see Wooldridge (1981:239).

10.) As well as Gujaratis from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi, I number one informant who was born in Mozambique.

11.) As we shall see, however, the distinction between 'Africans' and 'Indians' is not an absolute one.

12.) This similarity is noted when comparing East Africa and India to Britain. In other situations, distinctions are made between India and East Africa.

13.) This is an ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) temple at Letchmore Heath near Watford. For a discussion of the Hare Krishna movement in Britain see K. Knott (1986) and S. Carey (1987a).

14.) Of the Muslim Gujaratis, Bharati points out that the three largest groups were the Shia Isma'is, followers of the Aga Khan, the Ithna Asharis, followers of the eleventh Imam and the Bohras. This thesis is concerned primarily with Hindu Gujaratis.

15.) Based on approximate figures, Clarke, Peach and Vetovec (1990:19) note that of Britain's 1,271,000 South Asians, Muslims account for 41%. Two-thirds of these are Urdu-speaking Pakistanis. The remainder of South Asians comprise mainly Bangaldeshi, Gujarati and Punjabi Indians in roughly equal numbers. Of the 30% of British South Asians who are Hindu, more than two-thirds are Gujarati.

16.) The focus of my research does not include a detailed account of caste, nor the great variation in marriage practices among Gujaratis, and this discussion is necessarily brief. The reader is referred to studies such as Pocock (1972), van der Veen (1972), Michaelson (1979 & 1983), Barot (1980), Tambs-Lyche (1980a), and Knott (1984) for further information. For differences between Lohana, Patidar and Oswal Jains, see Michaelson (1979 & 1983).

17.) The Leva and Kadva are divisions within the large Kanbi caste of agriculturalists in Gujarat. Enthoven mentions several other endogamous divisions among the Kanbi, including the Matia (1922, Vol

2:134). I encountered one person during my fieldwork who referred to himself as a 'Matia Patel', but I was unable to question him in any detail. Enthoven implies that some Matia Kanbis became Muslims (ibid:150), and it is possible that this man was a Muslim.

18.) In his study of Kampala Hindus, Barot (1974:62) points out that, in answer to the question 'What is your jat?', the reply given was 'I am Patel', and not 'I am Patidar'.

19.) *Norta* is a common Gujarati term for *Navaratri*, the festival of 'nine nights' which honours the *Mata*, or mother goddess, in many of her various forms. It will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

20.) Mayer (1967:11) suggests that when examining caste in overseas Indian communities, it is necessary to look at the position of the India community in relation to the total society in which they live. Perhaps one reason for the growth of caste associations among Gujaratis in Britain is that they provide access to status and power to those who wish to pursue it, in a society where such opportunities for South Asians on the whole, are limited in the wider political arena.

21.) To endogamy, Michaelson (1983:124) adds that 'a measure of ritual and occupational specialization exists'...'a ritual hierarchy exists with Brahmans at the top, Vaniyas in the middle, and artisan castes occupying the lowest ranks'...'commensality in private life is largely hypothetical and occurs only among people of the same overall ranks and then only amongst the richest and most westernized..' and ...'there is a degree of 'corporateness' exhibited in caste associations'. It will become obvious in this study, that particularly in terms of hereditary occupations and commensal relations, my data differ from that of Michaelson.

22.) The named *gotra* among Audich Brahmans is not the same as the *atak* or 'surname' group. Several Audich Brahman informants said it may be possible to marry someone of the same *atak*, providing the *gotra* was different, while others said, in effect, that both were exogamous groups.

23.) I think that the relevance of either caste or class in future marriage patters is somewhat misleading. My data suggest that caste remains an important aspect of identity among younger informants, which would imply that endogamy will continue to be salient in the future. On the other hand, the class position of a future spouse is obviously an important factor. In addition to factors noted in the following discussion, a further point of relevance here concerns the availability, if you like, of potential spouses of the same class within different 'second order' (Shah 1982) divisions. Within the numerically larger castes in Britain, especially Lohana and Kathiawadi/Charotti Patel, there is a considerable 'pool' of future spouses who also share similar class positions. Among those smaller castes, and this includes some of the Brahman castes of my informants, the numbers in Britain, from their anecdotal accounts, are relatively small. Immigration restrictions also limit the 'pool' of potential

spouses considerably. Several Brahman informants pointed out that where this is the case, marriages are taking place between spouses of similar classes but of different caste divisions, for example, between Audich and Shri Gaur Brahmans.

24.) Parry (1979:133) points out that in Kangra, while in theory all those of the same clan worship the same deity, he found that 'although few people were aware of it', different segments of the clan often worship different deities. Parry worked in a local rural area where it was possible to trace such discrepancies. While a similar situation may occur among my informants in so far as the lineage goddess is concerned, locating such discrepancies in urban areas of Britain, where kin are spread so widely, is a more difficult task and one which I did not undertake.

25.) I did not make the kind of systematic study of kinship terminology which Vatuk (1969), Parry (1979) and Kolenda (1982) have carried out, focusing as they do (pace Dumont (1970) on distinctions between wife-givers and wife-takers. It is clear, however, that my Gujarati informants follow a north Indian pattern in which, as Vatuk (1982:58-60) observes, there is contextual variability in terms of the range of inclusiveness, variability created by behavioural strategies or tactics, and the phenomenon of customary usage of genealogically inappropriate kin terms in reference and address. I note this variability where relevant, in footnotes or in the text.

26.) Other aspects of kinship closeness and distance are discussed at various points in the study, but especially in Chapters Three, Four and Six.

27.) For a discussion of women, including Gujarati women, and the relationships which exist among them on the shop floor of a clothing factory in the Midlands, and between them and the management, see Westwood (1984).

28.) See Westwood (1984) who notes similar attitudes among white and Asian working class women in a hosiery factory in England.

29.) Various aspects of Divali, the celebration of the Hindu New Year among Gujaratis, will be dealt with in Chapters Four and Six especially.

30.) The notion of fasting is examined at various points in the study but especially in Chapters Five and Six.

31.) While differences do occur in Gujarati regional speech forms (Pandit 1969) - and because of the influence of Swahili on East African Gujaratis (Knott & Toon 1982:20) - language as well as dietary and religious practice are expressed by my informants as diacritical markers of Gujarati cultural differences. See P. Logan (1989) on language and mother-tongue teaching among Gujaratis in Redbridge, the neighbouring borough to Newham.

### CHAPTER THREE

- 1.) These two young women referred to both their natal and conjugal households as 'traditional'. In other contexts, individuals and households may be referred to by others as 'traditional', for example, but those very individuals and households may perceive themselves to be 'modern'. These terms then, as noted in the previous chapter, may be 'other-imposed' or 'self-imposed'. They are evaluative terms used contextually to negotiate different identities in different contexts.
- 2.) I shall discuss the notion of *sharam* in greater detail in the next chapter in particular.
- 3.) The food of fasts is discussed in Chapter Six. I discuss other *vrats* which women undertake at various points in the study, especially in Chapter Five.
- 4.) The worship of Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva, is of central importance in this ritual. As Fuller (1985:774) observes, the goddess is perceived as a wife, not a mother, and the relationship with Shiva is normally emphasized at the expense of motherhood.
- 5.) Informants were uncertain as to the significance of the right big toe in this and other rituals - for example, the *simant* ritual in the seventh month of pregnancy (Chapter Five). They noted that it was 'for religious reasons' to show 'respect'. Stevenson (1971:117 n1, 398) points out that the great toe on the right foot represents the sanctity of Lord Shiva.
- 6.) cf. Kennedy (1986:127-8) who makes similar observations on friendships among rural Greek women. Sarah Uhl (1991) has recently examined female friendships in Andalusia, and makes the important point that these friendships 'link women and consequently households all over town and sometimes beyond. This case suggests that female comity is more intense, extensive, and important than has been thought' (ibid:102). While it was not possible for me to follow up friendships with women in other parts of London or England, it was obvious from casual conversations with women, and from passing comments, that such friendships did exist. A more extensive study of female friendships among Gujarati women - or indeed other South Asian women - is required to examine the kinds of connections and linkages which these relationships create in this country.
- 7.) cf. Werbner (1988:178) who observes that women-centred networks among Pakistani women in Manchester, provide a 'basis for the achievement of status and reputation within the neighbourhood locality'.
- 8.) I never heard of a woman in this context being referred to as a 'bad woman' for withholding religious knowledge. Older women, it seemed to me, saw the transmission of such knowledge almost as a duty in passing on cultural values to the younger generation.

9.) Gifts given as *dan* - which should not be returned (cf. Parry 1986) - differ from gifts given as *lena dena*, or *vartan bhanji*, where the gift returned should always exceed the initial value (Elgar 1960:125). I did not make a systematic study of such neighbourhood gifting, but see Naveed-i-Rahat (1981) on *bhanji* relationships in a Punjabi village, and Werbner (1988) and Shaw (1988:112-133), on Pakistani women in Manchester and Oxford respectively, where they show the strategic role women play in creating and maintaining *bhanji* relationships between households and neighbours. In the Chapter Five, I shall discuss the role of the *nansd* (HZ) in ceremonial exchanges at life cycle rites.

10.) This particular form of *vrat* is called a *badha*, which I shall discuss it more fully in Chapter Five.

11.) It should be noted that the term *bhanej* (ZD, ZS) also refers to one's HZD and HZS, as well one's own and one's husband's classificatory sister's daughters and sons.

12.) This contrast with western society, as Caplan (1985) and Copley (1981:24-5) point out, has a long history in India but has recently become more important with, on the one hand, a need and desire for modernization, scientific development and technology, and on the other, with a desire to maintain traditional values, including religious and family values.

## CHAPTER FOUR

- 1.) cf. Mayer (1960:218), Luschinsky (1963:645-6), Jacobson (1974:136), Caplan (1985:93), and Skultans (1987:662) in South Asia; (Litman 1974:504; Gould-Martin 1976; Chrisman 1977; Sargent 1982:52; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984:197-8; Green 1985:258) in other cultures, including Britain (Hughes et al 1980:26; Pill and Stott 1982; Graham 1984:153).
- 2.) Sylvia Vatuk (1982:97) has also observed that within Hindu-speaking families in urban India, there is a widespread tendency to utilize 'genealogically inappropriate kinship terms for senior members of the extended family'. More specifically, she notes that genealogical grandparents are addressed by terms that, in a referential context, would be used for the genealogical father and mother only. I would agree with Vatuk that this terminological usage is related to cultural notions of parenthood. She observes that these habitual modes of address, at the level of social conduct, background the relationship between genealogical father, mother and children to assure an 'ongoing joint family life' (ibid). What will be of interest in future research is the influence of western ideas of maternal and paternal 'bonding'. Patricia Caplan (1985:76-7), for example, notes that in middle class families in India itself, fewer children are seen to need more care than the more numerous children of previous generations which, she points out, is partly due to the influence on women of western psychological notions of 'maternal deprivation'.
- 3.) Dube (1988:170) looks at the way in which lullabies and nursery rhymes emphasize the inescapability of marriage, and the inevitable departure of women from their natal home to the harsh environment of their conjugal home. I did not do so, but it would be of considerable interest to examine the extent to which such lullabies and nursery rhymes continue to be told to young girls in Britain.
- 4.) Notions of honour and shame as idioms of political and economic power are pervasive in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean anthropology (see, for example, Peristiany (ed) 1965; Bourdieu 1977), and in parts of South Asia (Jeffery 1979; Sharma 1980; Thompson 1981 & 1984).
- 5.) cf. Gough (1955), Yalman (1963), Wadley (1980) in south India; Winslow (1980) and McGilvray (1982) in Sri Lanka; Bennett (1976) and Fruzzetti (1982) in north India.
- 6.) Wadley (1980:168 n10) argues that Deborah Winslow (1980) has made a 'grievous error of fact' in her claim that 'puberty rites occur throughout South Asia. Only by acknowledging the lack of puberty rites in northern India can we understand southerners'. Wadley attempts - unsuccessfully to my mind - to link these different practices to the different kinship systems and marriage practices which exist in north and south India. Whatever the merits of the argument, however, the literature itself reveals a regionally varied picture in north India where puberty rites are practiced in some areas. Fruzzetti (1982:96) points out that in Bengal, the menarche is ritually observed with a three day period of seclusion while in Nepal, Bennett (1976:10) notes

a twelve to twenty-one day period of seclusion at the menarche - called *gupha basne* or 'sitting in the cave'.

7.) My informants did not explicitly link heat (*garam*) with women and cold (*thanda*) with men, but there are many pointers to this which will be noted in this and other chapters. McGilvray (1982:31) observes that '[a]t the most abstract metaphysical level, Hindu thought links the male principle with coolness, form and transcendence, while the female principle is linked to heat, energy and worldly action. The male and female aspects of the universe should theoretically operate as a balanced unity, but there is nevertheless a widespread andocentric preoccupation in South Asia with containing and controlling female energy'.

8.) I shall discuss these and other categories of food in more detail in Chapter Six.

9.) Delaney (1988:78-9) also notes that among Turksih women, information concerning the management of menstruation is exchanged across generations.

10.) The vows which women undertake are discussed more fully in the next chapter.

11.) The *katha* concerns two wives in the same house. The younger wife was cooking on *randhalo chatthi* (see below) when she fell asleep while feeding her child, leaving the hearth alight. Shitala came to the house and fell into the ashes and was burnt. As a punishment, when the woman woke next morning, she found her child dead from the burns. She asked her mother-in-law what to do and she was told to take the child to the Goddess to restore it to life. Along the way, she encountered a pond from which no one would take water, and two bulls who constantly quarrelled. The woman agreed to also take their problems to Shitala. Finally she came upon an old woman who asked her to look for insects in her hair and, when the woman complied, she revealed herself as the Goddess and gave the child back its life. The woman then told the Goddess about the ponds and the bulls and the Goddess told her how they could remove their sins. When the woman returned home with the child, her older sister-in-law was very jealous and the next year, she sat up with the hearth still alight. Again Shitala came and rolled in the ashes and was burnt, and this time placed a curse on the older woman's son. This woman also went to seek out the Goddess, and also met the two ponds and the bulls, as well as the old woman. But instead of helping them, she continued on her way and never found the Goddess and thus, never had her dead son restored to her.

12.) On the death of her husband a woman wears a white, or at least a pale coloured sari, a minimum of jewellery if any at all, and no longer places red powder (*kunkum*) in her hair parting or on her forehead. No one I knew ever practiced head shaving which women reported was common in the past.

13.) Financial and welfare provisions by the State in Britain, mean that widows like Vimla and Kamla - and one can add divorcees like Nita - do not have to rely entirely on the goodwill of their conjugal or natal kin for economic support. By the end of my fieldwork, for instance, Vimla had moved into a council flat of her own with her children. But while such provisions may enhance their ability to make choices as to their future, these women also face other considerable constraints, not least of which is that the lack of a male 'protector' in the household leaves them open to gossip and innuendo, even when their behaviour is scrupulously modest and 'correct'. On a personal level, as Nita often pointed out, she had never envisaged a time when she would lack this protection, and found it difficult to cope with the unwanted attentions of men who saw her, as she put it, as 'easy game'.

14.) The Hindu New Year is celebrated at different times in different parts of India. For Gujaratis, the celebration covers a period of five days, the first three of which take place on the last three days of the dark half of the month of *ashvina* (September-October) - the last day of which is *Diwali*. The first day of *karttika* (October-November) is New Year (*besatun varsa*). The second day of the year is *bhai bij*, described in this chapter. Chapter Six looks in more detail at *Diwali* itself.

15.) As with other life cycle rites, the first hair cutting ceremony (*bal mavara* or *mavarana*) also differs according to family tradition. The age at which it takes place can vary from about one year to around five years of age. In some cases, only a lock of hair is cut while in others, the whole head is shaved. In some families, it is not confined to boys alone but can be done for girls as well. The disposal of the hair also varies. At one *bal mavara* I attended it was simply thrown in the dust bin. Hasmita said that she was supposed to throw it in a river but whenever she (infrequently) mentioned this to Dimesh, he said that this would (environmentally) pollute the river. It is still at the bottom of her wardrobe. One woman had to make the journey back to the *kul devi* shrine in Gujarat and present the hair to the priest at the shrine. This, she wryly remarked, made it 'a very expensive haircut'.

16.) Especially Hemkurva and Prabha, Bhanu, Jasvanti, Bharti, and Hasmita.

17.) The potential of women to maintain their natal religious practices, and the strategies they utilize to resist total assimilation to their conjugal household, is another area for future research among Gujarati and other South Asian women in Britain.

18.) I seemed to spend a lot of my time helping with the washing up after group meetings. However, many of the conversations I had then were a kind of commentary on the more public discussions which took place during the meeting, and were often revealing in their divergent and privately expressed views.

## CHAPTER FIVE

- 1.) Burghart (personal communication) found that in Mithila, men use this as a euphemism for sex.
- 2.) Other women referred to this illness as *pichchotti*. Savita suggested that *pichchotti* is a 'Cutch word', while *amboi* is a 'Kathiawadi word'. This seems a likely explanation, for the illness as described to me had identical sets of causes, symptoms and treatments in both cases.
- 3.) Massage is one form of treatment employed to realign the umbilicus to its true position. Reshma at UP, in the company of Mani, Lali, Jayshree, and Nandhu, told me of another treatment, variations of which came from Shanta and several women at EL. The afflicted person lies down with their arms outstretched behind the head with palms upward. A piece of string is tied around the calf and the area around the navel is massaged with oil to soften it. A candle is placed under a glass, and this placed over the stomach and moved around until the navel is properly realigned. The string around the calf is released after tying another thread around the big toe. After half an hour or so, the string is released. It was explained that the string is placed around the leg because the veins are connected to the umbilicus and the suction effect created by the upturned glass then draws it back into position.
- 4.) I did not encounter any women during fieldwork who told me that they were attending fertility clinics for infertility or sub-fertility. However, initial procedures at these clinics seek to establish the fertility status of male and female partners. It would be of interest to know the way in which diagnosed male infertility at these clinics is dealt with among my informants. In view of the considerable changes in reproductive technology since my fieldwork, it would also be of interest to elicit South Asian perspectives on this (cf. Jan Savage's (1991) work among English women).
- 5.) Some women did not know, or were uncertain, what the period of death pollution was in the case of stillbirth, or if it affected other members of the family. They did point out, though, that the child received no name and was buried rather than cremated. Carter (1982:129) observes that in Maharashtra, the absence of death pollution and the burial of small children is carried out because the foetus/child is not regarded as a person. Reissland and Burghart (1988), however, note that in Mithila, when the 'mind-soul' enters the foetus at five months, it has powers of agency and personhood. My informants stressed the idea that, whether from conception or the fifth month, the 'life-soul' has entered the foetus. Hitesh seems to indicate that the child is not considered autonomous - and thus a social person - until it can do things for itself, which accords more with what Carter seems to be saying. Delaney (1988:78-9) makes a similar observation among Turkish women.

6.) *Najar*, an illness widely acknowledged in the anthropological literature, was also reported by my informants as occurring in young children, especially those who are attractive and healthy-looking. They refuse food, especially milk, and begin to lose weight. The cause of *najar* - literally a look or glance - was attributed to the evil intention of childless women, or to women whose own children were not healthy or strong. To counter this, infants and young children wear black amulets on their wrist made from pieces of thin cord, and sometimes have a black mark made from khol pencil on their face or neck, or, less commonly, pencilled around their eyes. Pocock (1973), among others, links accusations of the evil eye to family and neighbourhood rivalry and competition. What was interesting among my informants was that it was often Muslim women who were singled out as the cause of *najar*. Nita explained that this was the case when her young daughter, Jyoti, succumbed to the illness. Likewise, after Bhanu told a story of how her *bhabhi's* son became ill with *najar* following a visit by a Muslim neighbour, several women at EL offered similar stories, some of which took place when they were living in East Africa. When I asked why it was Muslim women who caused this to happen, I was told that they were 'bad' women, jealous of healthy babies they did not have. This does not explain, however, why these accusations are made against Muslim women in particular. My own data are lacking here in that I do not know if similar accusations are made by Muslim women of their Gujarati neighbours, nor what structural factors may account for competition and rivalry between these two groups both in England and East Africa.

7.) *Kholo* is a ceremony performed in the seventh month of the first pregnancy and will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

8.) I shall discuss the fasts which women undertake, and the implications of these fasts for women themselves and for the well-being of their households, in the next chapter.

9.) Cf. McGee (1991:74,83) whose female informants in Maharashtra, and Harlan (1992:45) in Rajasthan, also saw *vrats* in terms of a woman's *dharma*. Veena Das (1988:196) offers a different interpretation. Discussing what she terms 'the body in nature', Das argues that in Hinduism, unlike Christianity, the condition of being hungered and sexed is not the result of the Fall from Eden, but a necessary component of being human. Of these two, hunger is 'symptomatic of the condition of man, and hence the stomach is selected as the most condensed symbol of man's constant attempt to defeat the biological needs of the organism in order to follow the path of *dharma*'. In the male body, men try to rise above the vagaries of nature by maintaining the rule of *dharma* in pursuing *artha* (wealth). Women try to rise above this 'by consciously cultivating the ascetic practices of abstaining from food during various fasts' (ibid).

10.) My informants were not always certain, though, whether a *manta* and a *badha* were types of *vrats*, or whether they were different rituals altogether. Some said they came under the general category of *vrats*, while others pointed out that a *badha* was a variation of a *manta*, with the two being distinct from a *vrata*. Tanaka (1991:90) also

notes two types of votive rites among a fisherman caste in east Sri Lanka. *Viratam* is intended to gain a divine boon by observing an austere ritual, especially a vigil or a fast. *Nerri* is performed in fulfillment of an initial vow to carry it out and is a rite of thanksgiving.

11.) This seems to correspond to a *navai* in Maharashtra (McGee 1991:81).

12.) Cf. B. Tapper (1979:20) who also notes that humbling oneself before God is a means of achieving health and prosperity, with the converse explanation of misfortune in terms of pride and social competitiveness.

13.) Raheja (1988:83) points out in her discussion of *vrat* in Pahansu, north India, that *badha* refer to 'hinderances'.

14.) There is no one textual authority used to regulate the performance of the life cycle rites and, depending on which source is used, certain rites may be included or excluded from the list and sometimes several rituals are done at the same time. It will be noted that *sighraprasavopaya yantrash* has a roughly equivalent form in *panchamasi*, performed in the fifth month, while *simantonnayana* is a direct equivalent of the seventh month ceremony of *simant*. The seventh and eighth Brahmanical rituals, *chaththi* and *namakarana*, do have local Gujarati equivalents, but they are followed by an important Gujarati custom, the child's first outing to the temple, which does not figure in this particular Brahmanical list of rituals. While *janmajata* and *anadistaprayascitta* appear to be similar to *jatakarma* and *ayusaykarma*, noted in Bengal by Inden and Nicholas (1977:55-6), I have been unable to find an equivalent in the literature of *sighraprasavopaya*.

15.) Dandona et al (1985) point out that osteomalacia, a softening of the bones due to lack of Vitamin D, is widely prevalent among Asians in Britain, particularly among vegetarians. In clinical terms, pregnancy is associated with an increased demand for Vitamin D and 'may be responsible for the induction of chemical osteomalacia among women who may otherwise have only bio-chemical, sub-clinical abnormalities' (ibid:837). Osteomalacia affects the weight-bearing bones, especially the legs and vertebrae, and pain in the back and legs is a common presenting symptom. Among my informants, *bhare pagi* would seem to be a euphemism for pregnancy.

16.) I make several references to different categories of food in this chapter which will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

17.) Stevenson (1971:113-4) notes similar items placed in the *rakhadi*. Similarly, Raheja (1988:128-9) points out that during the marriage ceremony in western Uttar Pradesh, an areca nut, an iron ring, a shell, a splinter of wood from the nim tree, and a small amount of mustard seed are placed in a protective bracelet and tied to the right wrist of the bride or groom. These items, she remarks 'are said to attract and absorb inauspiciousness' (ibid:128).

18.) At the first hair-cutting ceremony (*bal mavara*), one can note that the cut hair is caught by either the mother or her *nanad* (HZ) in her *khola*.

19.) On the association of women with pots and vessels, see Ferro-Luzzi (1980:49) and Werbner (1986:236).

20.) In north India, a 'joking relationship' exists between a woman and her husband's younger brothers (Van Der Veen 1972:68; Parry 1979:299), where considerably more licence in behaviour is permitted than with other male members of the household. The licensed behaviour here is a ritual act which takes place after the woman has been 'cooled' by her hair-washing and after the exchange of the baby between husband and wife. Werbner's (1986:243) discussion of the laughter and masquerade of the clown in Pakistani weddings in Britain, raises the possibility that laughter is a way of containing and facilitating something which is potentially dangerous into something which is comprehensible or transcended. In other words, this is a way of alleviating the anxiety of childbirth by firstly demonstrating the ease of delivery and secondly, by making a ritual 'joke' of it.

21.) Cf. Kakar (1989:143) who notes that the public discourse of patriarchal societies, including India, stresses motherhood while underplaying the importance of fatherhood for a man. He offers some fascinating psychoanalytic theories to account for this in India.

22.) There were several reasons for this. For those women who were pregnant when I first began fieldwork, I could not tape-record them at the antenatal clinic as I did not have permission from the Ethics Committee to carry out research at that time in the hospital. Hemkurva would have been a good candidate but she, like some other informants, did not attend the Newham maternity hospital, and I had no clearance from other health districts to carrying out research in their 'patch'. When I finally did obtain clearance in Newham, I just did not seem to meet women who were pregnant and 'booked in' to the hospital. Relatives of informants who were pregnant, often lived outside the borough in other parts of London where I was also excluded from carrying out research.

23.) There is now a large body of feminist literature on the 'medicalization of motherhood' (see, for example, Kitzinger 1972; Ehrenreich 1974; Oakley 1979).

24.) Some women, though, said that these two terms were the same and referred to the delivery of the child.

25.) Stevenson (1971:3) also notes the practice of placing a brazier of hot coals under the mother's bed. The notion of applying dry heat in the postpartum period, or 'roasting' the mother, has been observed in other cultures, particularly in South East Asia (Chen 1975:173; Manderson 1981:510-515). Reissland and Burghart (1987:232), in their discussion of the role of massage in child development in Mithila, note that if all the vernix is not rubbed off the infant by the midwife it can cause sores on the skin. The problem of 'milk spots'

was one which troubled many of my informants. One woman associated this with the fact that, in hospital, the vernix and the 'blood' was not immediately wiped from the infant. Others, though, saw the cause to lie with their breast milk.

26.) Bennett (1976:32) points out that in Nepal the goddess of fate is called Bhabhi. When Nepalis 'speak of their personal fate or destiny [they] are fond of saying 'who can erase what Bhabhi has written?' (ibid). On the sixth day in Uttar Pradesh the goddess Bemata comes to write the fate of the child on its forehead (Raheja 1988:96).

27.) Stevenson (1971:14) translates this as:

Cradle and pipal tree and leaves of the same

Aunt has chosen [            ] as baby's name.

Other informants had different versions, for example, '*ori jori pipal pan*'.

28.) There are many differences in this naming process, the most obvious being where the last name remains constant, for example, Patel.

## CHAPTER SIX

1.) This chapter is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of food and commensal relations among my informants but rather, it examines the way in which food is evaluated in different contexts. I have benefited considerably from an article by N. Tapper and R. Tapper (1986) who examine notions of goodness and power in relation to food among the Durrani. My thanks to Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper for pointing out some of the similarities in the way in which my informants and the Durrani utilize and evaluate food in different contexts.

2.) Parry (1989a) points out, for example, that both the notion of a 'dividual' in Hindu South Asia, and an 'individual' with a separate body and soul in the West, are problematic. There is a degree of dualism in the former which is neglected in the monistic worldview of Hindus presented by Marriott and his colleagues. For instance, the idea that each person possesses a unique soul while their bodily substance is composed of particles shared with bilateral kin. The notion of a *constantly* transformed person through each unique action, leads him to ask how could 'anybody ever decide with whom, and on what terms to interact?' (ibid:494). His observation that this does not square with the robust and stable sense of self which his Indian friends project, are equally applicable to my Gujarati informants. On the other hand, the pervasive dualism of Western ideology between body and soul which Marriott and others assert, are, Parry (ibid:512-513) forcefully argues, not really quite so pervasive as they suggest. The body, he notes, is a 'mirror of the soul' while the tortured body 'is a mark of election, a privileged opportunity for identification with the Cross'. The point Parry makes so eloquently is that both the monism of Hindu South Asia, and the duality of the Christian West, act as ideologies.

3.) Lists of food items which are classified as 'hot' or 'cold' have little relevance on their own. While Beck's (1969) article on the symbolism of colour and heat in south India has been extremely influential, she used only one informant to draw up an extensive list of food categories. As M. Logan (1977:99) has observed of individual variation in the humoral values of foods 'all too often data collected from a few informants are presented as being representative of an entire community, ethnic group or even entire countries'. In her discussion of food categories among Asian women in Britain, Homans (1982) has attached an appendix of 'Ayurvedic' classifications which takes no account of individual variation, nor of the considerable variation which exists in South Asia itself.

4.) cf. Parry (1985:626) who remarks on the emphasis given to evacuating the bowels in the morning prior to the consumption of food, and the distaste of mixing fresh food with 'food which has lain rotting in the stomach'.

5.) cf. Gould (1957:510); Lewis (1958:263); Hasan (1967:144); Beals (1976:185); Montgomery (1976:279); Kapur (1979:27); Nichter (1979:183).

6.) cf. Chen (1975:177); Sussman (1981:253); Early (1982:1495); Worsley (1982:332).

7.) As noted in Chapter One, I have not utilized in this study other data on acute and chronic illness. Here one can note that illness and misfortune among my informants are attributed to numerous causal agents. Remedies are sought from many healers, often simultaneously, including biomedical practitioners, specialists in Ayurvedic, homeopathy and other forms of 'complementary' medicine, practitioners of 'folk' medicine, as well as ritual specialists.

8.) For coughs, colds and 'flu, commonly used preparations include turmeric or saffron mixed to a paste and applied to the face, chest and back; aniseed leaves in warm oil massaged into the skin; and 'Vicks Vapourub'. In the treatment of mumps, chiretta is mixed to a paste and applied to permeate the skin, cool the body and reduce swelling. When Tara contracted mumps, I arrived at Hemkurva's house one afternoon to find her daughter with what appeared to be mud spread liberally over her face. Tara, who was seven at the time, explained with considerable aplomb, that although they had been to the doctor 'mummy's medicine is just as good'.

9.) Parry (1985) links this to notions of irregular exchange at the level of the social order which are often conceptualized in terms of a biological model of digestive malfunction.

10.) cf. Beck (1969), Babb (1973), McGilvray (1982), Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon (1989).

11.) cf. Harrell (1981:811), Laderman (1981:469), Manderson (1981:511).

12.) The idea that hot and cold properties of food are related to the seasonal cycle is widespread in South Asia, in both classic Ayurvedic texts (Kutumbiah 1969:132-3), and in the ethnography (Khare 1976b:82; Zimmerman 1980:104-5; Cantlie 1981:43; Parry 1985:613).

13.) Like women in Mithila (Reissland and Burghart 1988:463), some of my female informants also reckoned time by counting from the first unit of time and not from when it has elapsed - so the 'proper' milk arrives after 24-48 hours.

14.) As Savage (1991:172-3) points out in a discussion of 'bonding' in relation to breast feeding among English women, anthropologists have not really considered what 'bonding' entails in the West.

15.) cf. Winikoff and Laukaram (1989:861) who note a similar varied pattern in their study of breast and bottle feeding in Thailand, Colombia, Kenya, and Indonesia.

16.) To give some examples we can begin with Sarka and Rahina who, it will be recalled, had recently arrived from Gujarat and had their first baby within a month of each other. Both their husbands worked in factories and both lived in large joint households. Rahina breast fed

for almost two months before changing to bottle feeding, while Sarka continued to breast feed for more than nine months before introducing bottle feeding. Rahina's baby weighed 6 pound 2 ounces at birth while Sarka's weighed 7 pound 13 ounces. Bharti, who had lived in Britain since she was twelve, breast fed her son, who weighed over 8 pound at birth, for ten months. Her neighbour, Hemkurva, who had been here for seven years, breast fed her third daughter, who weighed 6 pound 2 ounces at birth, for about three months before changing to the bottle completely. Hemkurva's eldest daughter, who weighed 6 pound 7 ounces at birth, was breast fed for nine months. Her second daughter spent eleven days in a special baby unit and was not breast fed at all. Both Bharti and Hemkurva's husbands are businessmen and both live in households which include their widowed mother-in-law. These examples, and other data from my informants, suggest there are wide variations in breast and bottle feeding patterns where length of residence or social class do not appear to be major factors. Other studies, however, show class to be a major factor in this. Martin and White's (1988) 1985 survey of breast feeding in Britain showed that the highest incidence of breast feeding was related to mothers of first babies, especially those aged over twenty-five, who were educated beyond eighteen, and living in London and the south-east. Age, social class, and education were important in terms of breast feeding uptake and continuance. A more detailed study of Gujarati women in relation to class is obviously needed. But one of the factors which Martin and White note for ceasing breast feeding is also a fear of insufficient milk. What seems to me important here are the different cultural perceptions of what constitutes insufficient milk, how and why it is identified as such, and the measures taken to remedy this.

17.) *Annaprashana*, the first feeding of rice (Inden and Nicholas 1977), was known only to a few older women. None of my informants said that they celebrated this life-cycle rite.

18.) There is a strong proscription on eating beef in Hindu culture. While men and women positively encouraged their children to eat meat, they told me that this did not include beef. This is not to say that beef is not eaten but rather, it may be consumed because many of my informants did not know the contents of some English food products - for example, it was not generally known that sausages can contain beef. Hamburger is an especially deceptive term in this case as it implies pork as opposed to beef (burgers).

19.) The concepts of meal cycles, meal formats, menus and menu negotiation were developed at the Russell Sage Foundation (Douglas 1984:1). For a discussion of these in terms of Italian-American food, see Goode, Curtis and Theophona (1984). A meal format is 'a named, standardized pattern of dishes and food items' (Douglas 1984:29).

20.) Red is an auspicious colour in this context. It is used when writing wedding invitations or letters which contain good news - from the perspective of the writer, at least.

21.) Parry (1989b: 182-3) points out that precious metals are said to multiply when offered to Lakshmi. He further notes that money breeds money through the mediation of the divine power of the Goddess.

22.) Appadurai (1981) analyses 'gastro-politics' in three domains: the household, the context of the marriage feast, and at the temple. This analysis provides a further critique of Marriott's notion of the person in Hindu South Asia.

23.) This study is primarily concerned with domestic religious worship and does not consider the relationship between foods, deities, and worshippers in the context of the temple, of which there are numerous ethnographic examples (see, for instance, Babb 1975; Fuller 1984; P. Bennett 1983).

24.) Khare (1976b: 131) makes the important point that the categories of 'fruit', 'gram' and 'cereals' do not necessarily correspond to English categories but rather, they are approximate translations of native ones. Parry (1985: 628 n1) observes that 'fruit' also includes wild rice and wild vegetables. He suggests that crops cultivated by the plough are excluded as this correlates with the idea 'that ploughing is represented as an act of violence against the earth and the insect life it harbours, thereby rendering such food uncongenial to the higher spiritual states'.

25.) Parry (1985: 628 n6) notes that *tita*, the equivalent of the Gujarati *tikho*, is not necessarily hot in the sense of *garam* which is conducive to 'a passionate, lustful and aggressive temperament'. This differs from my informants who associated *tikho* with pungency, heat and with *tamsik* food. *Garam* was used contextually in the humoural domain.

26.) I initially assumed that the women I came to know in their twenties and thirties had always worn 'traditional' dress until I was in Hemkurva's house one day, with several other young mothers, when they got to talking about life in East Africa. They described, amid gales of laughter, the bell-bottom jeans, tight-fitting T-shirts, and high wedge-heeled shoes they had worn during their teenage years. This, as I found out, was not an isolated case. They told me it was their husband who had insisted they return to wearing a sari when they married. Some were 'allowed' to wear 'punjabi suits' occasionally, but mostly they wore saris in the Gujarati style and, for the most part, they did not object to the bargain they had made. Yet another example, one could suggest, of their 'bargain with patriarchy'.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

1.) According to Parry's (1989a) Brahman informants in Benares, '[a] "good death" occurs after a full and complete life: having lived to see the marriages of one's son's sons, when one is still in full command of all one's faculties and in the presence of all one's close family' (ibid:503). Parry goes on to note that '[a] good death is the product of a good life' (ibid:504).

2.) These observations contest Wadley's (1980a) assertion of difference between women in north and south India. Both she and Egnor (1980) stress that a married woman's *shakti* in south India comes from her self-denial and self-control, but this applies equally to female Gujarati informants - and to other north Indian women (cf. Harlan 1992). Wadley (ibid:162) notes the two annual rituals in north India to honour brothers, in which, quite rightly, she suggests women 'seek their brother's protection as insurance against the (legendary) pitfalls of life in their in-law's home'. However, her assertion that it is only south Indian women who are known to 'ritually work for their natal families' prosperity' (ibid:162), and who 'are perceived as being actively concerned with and able to ensure the welfare of their natal families' (ibid:163), is demonstrably inaccurate.

## APPENDIX A

### Research in the Clinic

The practice of biomedical health care in Newham takes place largely under the auspices of the National Health Service (NHS) of which Newham Health Authority is part. There have been many changes in the organization of the NHS since fieldwork was undertaken, but during 1983/4, the Authority was divided into three specialized units: the acute unit which comprised two general hospitals, one of which was Newham General and which included the maternity hospital; three specialized community hospitals; and the community unit of four health centres, twelve clinics and a health education unit. Most general practitioners were not health-centre based but scattered throughout the district in single and joint practices. During fieldwork, the maternity hospital, which was incorporated into the new Newham General in 1985, was housed in a separate building consisting mainly of 'pre-fabs'.

As part of my research proposal I intended to collect data not only on Gujarati perceptions of health and illness, pregnancy and childbirth, as well as biomedicine and biomedical health care, but also to examine communication in the encounter between Gujaratis and biomedical practitioners working in the local health authority. The latter was identified as a 'problem' by health administrators, by voluntary groups concerned with health care, such as the Community Health Council, and by organizers and leaders of South Asian organizations. Initially, I had to prepare and discuss a paper for an Ethics Committee which scrutinized and accepted or rejected any proposed medical research or research involving health personnel in the health authority. I succeeded in this on my second attempt when I was subject to close questioning concerning, in particular, anthropological methodology. I had then to obtain the consent and co-operation - which could be refused - of individual health professionals and their patients. I had proposed that fifty consultations would be required for analysis with six consultations

from five different GP's, and the remainder in antenatal and other out-patient departments. I knew from discussions with health administrators and from my informants that, while a few general practitioners worked in group practices from health centres, the majority were scattered around the borough in single or double practices. I obtained a list of GP's from the Town Hall and began contacting those who practiced in areas where Gujaratis were concentrated. I did this by sending a letter and then telephoning to try and arrange an appointment to discuss the research - an endeavour which my lack of a home telephone hampered considerably. In the event, I only obtained the co-operation of two GP surgeries.

Of those (many) GP's who did not wish to participate in the research, several 'groups' of reasons were given - 'too old' (2), 'too busy' (5), 'not interested' (4), 'no Asian patients' (2), 'no fee' for participating (1), and most significantly, 'language not a problem' (8). This latter reason, I came to realize, was partly due to a phrase I used in the letter which alluded to problems in communication between Gujarati patients and their doctors. In anticipating 'problems' in the encounter, I failed to realize that this was not necessarily the way in which doctors themselves perceived it. One GP told me over the telephone that 'I'd like to help you my dear but I don't think I can. I've been around here for some time now and talking to patients isn't one of my problems'. Another English GP who spoke Urdu told me, again on the telephone, that 'I can say that I have never experienced any difficulty in communicating with the patients'. Like the South Asian doctors I contacted or the surgeries where at least one South Asian doctor practiced, these GP's felt that a 'common' language - often Hindi - overcame any problems which might be encountered and so, despite my belated attempts to interest them in non-verbal communication, ruled themselves out of the research. Apart from the two surgeries where I did conduct research, only two others expressed interest but ruled themselves out by virtue of their minimal number of South Asian patients. One of these GP's was especially sympathetic and thoughtful, noting that the few South Asian patients he saw 'have a different way of thinking about the world and the

body'. He told me at his surgery that these patients 'don't know a lot of the western medical terms and I have to spend a lot more time explaining what I'm saying to try and ensure that I think they know what I'm saying'. Another GP I spoke to on the telephone, though, took the opposite view saying that 'after a few months they know just what I'm talking about - my dear'.

Of the two GP surgeries where I recorded interviews, one was a joint practice of one male English doctor and a male Gujarati doctor, while the other was a female English doctor who worked at a large health centre. I am very grateful to the doctors at both these surgeries for the time and interest they showed. I obtained seventeen recorded interviews, one of which was a return visit. Having explained the nature of the research, I obtained a signed consent from the patient prior to recording the consultation, as well as noting information on age, migration history, caste, pregnancy history where relevant, employment and household composition. Excluding the return visit, of the sixteen tapes nine were multiple consultations, that is, more than one person other than the doctor was present at the interview. My proposal to interview the doctor and patient after the consultation, both in the GP surgeries and later in the antenatal clinic was, after some discussion, either refused or not, to my mind, unreasonable grounds of lack of time on the part of the doctor who had a surgery or out-patient department of patients waiting to be seen; or proved unworkable. In the latter case the problem was a logistical one of lack of space, and very often a disinclination on the part of the patient to spend more time than necessary in the surgery.

Obtaining even this limited data took much longer than I anticipated and I decided to concentrate on only one hospital out-patient department - the antenatal clinic. Because of the difficulties I had experienced in interviewing GP's in the research, my supervisor at SOAS suggested that when contacting hospital consultants, I should write my letter of introduction and explanation on university-headed note paper - which I did. A consultant who lead one of the obstetric

teams eventually agreed to participate and gave permission for me to tape consultations, initially with himself and later with his registrar and Gujarati patients, but not with his junior housemen. I am also grateful to this consultant for participating in the study. Like the male spokemen for the Gujarati community groups I encountered (p30), and the members of the Ethics Committee, he too associated himself with what was 'scientific' and voiced concern at the 'unscientific' and subjective nature of anthropological methodology and agreed only after a protracted discussion. I obtained seventeen taped interviews between Gujarati women and these doctors at the antenatal clinic in the local maternity hospital. I used the same format of obtaining a signed consent and utilized the same set of questions as in the GP surgeries. For six of the women it was their first pregnancy, for six their second pregnancy and for five it was their third.

In addition to this, I also informally interviewed health visitors at three health centres in the borough - for which I obtained permission from their - nursing officer and the district nursing manager - where they raised their own perceptions of the problems they faced and those they identified with South Asian women. Apart from a few evening surgeries with the GP's, the clinics ran during the morning and so I was able to continue developing and expanding my relationships and contacts with Gujaratis throughout my fieldwork.

My over-riding difficulty - and continuing memory - of attempting to set up this part of the research programme, was the attitude of members of the Ethics Committee, and especially the consultant obstetrician, to the 'scientific' nature of anthropology - or rather, its 'non-scientific' approach - an attitude shared with some of the male Gujarati spokesmen I encountered. Judith Okely (1987) also documents a similar attitude among bureaucrats and colleagues when conducting research in Britain. It is not only, as Kuhn (1970) points out, that far from embodying 'pure' knowledge, a scientific 'community' is arbitrary and intuitive in its approach to science. It

is also, and here I agree with Okeby (Okeby in Ingold 1989:20, 23 quoted in Sanjek 1990), that the obsession with 'scientism' in the social sciences has led to a limited definition of science, and for many - including those individuals and groups noted above - to uncritical assumptions concerning 'objective' and 'scientific' research. It seemed to me that - at least for the obstetrician and the Gujarati male spokesmen - the notion of objectivity was as much about excluding themselves as 'objects' of research, as it was about 'scientific rigour'. After a lengthy and sometimes heated discussion with the consultant obstetrician, I 'snapped', deciding that whatever the consequences for my research, I would never persuade him of the value of the kind of work I was attempting to carrying out. When I told him just this and got up to leave, his reaction then startled me. 'No, no, my dear, don't be so hasty'. What he was concerned about, he eventually told me, was that 'I'll finish up with egg on my face'.

## APPENDIX B

The term 'main informant' is used in a very subjective sense. It refers to those people with whom I felt I had established some kind of relationship, whom I saw and spoke with on many occasions, or from whom I obtained some form of 'quality' data. Even within this group, however, some 'main informants' were 'closer' than others. These informants themselves may not necessarily share this view.

### Main Informants from the Ladies Club (LC)

**Dina**, about 60, a Brahman housewife, born in Gujarat who came to England with her husband, **Hitesh**, a retired civil servant, from what was Tanganyika in 1958. They lived in their own home with their only child, a daughter, her husband and their two sons aged 14 and 7 and a daughter aged 11.

**Laxmi**, a 67 year-old Suthar, born in Gujarat, who came to England in 1972 from Kenya. She lived with her husband, **Ram**, in their own home. Her five children, 2 sons and 3 daughters, were all married with children. With the exception of a daughter in Gujarat, her other children all lived in England.

**Mangala**, a 35 year-old Vaniya, employed as a teacher, came from her birthplace in Uganda in 1972. She and her husband, an accountant, lived in their own home with their daughter, 12, and son, 10.

**Nalini**, a 48 year-old Charotti Patel housewife, who came from her birthplace of Kenya in 1976. She lived with her husband, a civil service clerk, in their own home with their oldest son, a teacher, his wife and their daughter aged 4, and son born in 1983, and Nalini's youngest unmarried son. Her daughter was married and lived in north London.

**Nrupa**, a 64 year-old Mistry housewife, born in Gujarat, who arrived from Kenya in 1966. She lived with her husband, a retired factory

worker, in their own home. Apart from her married daughter in Kenya, her other daughter and three sons were all married and living in England.

**Rekha**, a 45 year-old Brahman housewife, born in Gujarat, who went to Uganda on her marriage. In 1972, she and her family left Uganda and returned to Gujarat and arrived in Britain in 1982. She and her husband, **Arvind**, a retired teacher, lived in a privately-rented flat with their son, 20 and daughter, 23, both factory workers, and two younger sons, 12 and 9.

**Sarla**, a 48 year-old Lohana widow, born in Gujarat, who came to England from Kenya in 1969. She lived in her own house with her two sons, aged 17 and 14. Her daughter was married and lived in north London with her husband and young daughter.

**Shanta**, a 49 year-old Charotti Patel housewife, born in Gujarat, who came to England from Kenya in 1971. She lived with her husband, a civil servant, in their own home with their four unmarried daughters aged 27, 25, 21 and 17.

**Ujam**, about 60, a Brahman housewife, born in Gujarat, who came to England from Kenya in 1972. She lived with her husband in their own home with a son, his wife and their three children. Two other sons and daughters were married and living in London.

## APPENDIX C

### Main Informants from the Upton Park centre (UP)

Informants who attended both LC and UP included Nalini, Nrupa, Rekha, and Sarla. My main informants from the UP centre were:

**Jayshree**, a 33 year-old Charotti Patel housewife, who came to England from her birthplace in Gujarat in 1979. She and her husband, a worker at the Ford car factory, lived in a privately-rented flat with their two sons aged 6 and 4.

**Lali**, a Charotti Patel, aged about 55, was born in Gujarat and came to England from Kenya in 1972. She was a housewife who lived with her husband in their own home with their youngest son, his wife and their two boys aged 8 and 4. Two older sons and a daughter were all married.

**Mani**, a Charotti Patel housewife aged about 55, was born in Gujarat and came to England from Uganda in 1972. She lived with her husband, a post office worker, in their own home with their son, his wife and two sons aged 13 and 7, and a daughter aged 11. Both Mani's daughters were married, one living in London and the other in Kathiawad.

**Reshma**, a 54 year-old Charotti Patel housewife, born in Gujarat, who came to England from Uganda in 1973. She and her husband lived in their own home with their youngest son (a bank clerk), and his wife, **Kersha**, a clerk at the DHSS. Reshma had two older sons and a daughter all married with children living in America.

**Vimla**, a 35 year-old Darji widow born in Tanzania, who came to England from Kenya in 1983. She lived in her older brother's home with his wife and their 4 year-old daughter, and her own two sons aged 8 and 4, and her daughter aged 11. Vimla was not employed outside the household.

## APPENDIX D

### Main Informants from the English Language centre (EL)

Three women from UP who joined this centre were Jayshree, Reshma, and Vimla. My main informants from EL were:

**Bhanu**, a 38 year-old Brahman, born in Uganda, who came to England from Kenya in 1973. She was a teacher and lived with her husband, Hari, a solicitor, and a son, 13, and daughter, 11, in their own home.

**Kamla**, a 33 year-old Leva Cutch Patel, born in Gujarat, who came from there to England in 1981 following the death of her husband. She lived in her brother's home with his wife and their 9 year-old son, and her own two boys aged 10 and 12. Kamla was not employed outside the household.

**Kanta**, a 54 year-old Darji housewife, born in Gujarat, who came to England from Kenya in 1974. She lived with her husband, a keeper at a museum, in a council flat. Her three children were all married with children and living in London.

**Rahina**, an 18 year-old Darji housewife, came from her birthplace in Gujarat in 1982. She lived with her parents-in-law in their home with her husband, his older brother and wife and 3 year-old son, and her husband's younger unmarried brother and sister. Rahina had a daughter in 1983 and a son in 1985.

**Sadhana**, a 45 year-old Brahman housewife, who was born in Gujarat and came to England from Uganda in 1972. She and her husband, a worker at the Ford car factory, lived in their own home with their two sons, aged 15 and 12. Another son and daughter were married and living in London.

**Sarka**, a 23 year-old Mistry housewife, who came from her birthplace of Gujarat in 1981. She lived with her parents-in-law in their home with

her husband, a factory worker, her husband's elder brother and his wife and 2 year-old daughter, and his younger unmarried brother. Sarka had a son in 1983 and another in 1985.

**Surbhi**, a 21 year-old Kadva Patel housewife, who came to England from her birthplace of Gujarat in 1982. She lived with her parents-in-law in their home with her husband, who worked in a shoe shop, and her husband's older brother and his wife.

**Vilas**, a 23 year-old unmarried Vaniya, who came from her birthplace in Kenya in 1974. She lived with her parents, who had a newsagency, an older brother and his wife and her younger brother. She worked as a clerk.

**Yogini**, a 48 year-old Suthar housewife, who was born in Gujarat and came to England from Kenya in 1973. She lived with her husband, a carpenter, in their own home with two daughters aged 16 and 13. Another daughter was married and lived in London.

## APPENDIX E

### Main Informants from the Mother and Toddler Club (MT)

**Hasmita**, a 35 year-old Lohana, who came from her birthplace in Kenya in 1972. She lived with her husband, **Dimesh**, an ethnic minority worker, and their two sons aged 6 and eighteen months (**Rajesh**), in a council flat. Hasmita was involved in various voluntary work and at the end of my fieldwork took a part-time post as a paid organizer.

**Jasvanti**, a 31 year-old Lohana, came from her birthplace in Kenya in 1974. She lived with her husband, a shift-worker at the Ford car factory, her father-in-law, and her two daughters aged 6 and 3, in their own home. Jasvanti began working as a paid childminder during fieldwork.

**Savita**, a 32 year-old Leva Cutch Patel employed doing piece-work at home. She came to England from her birthplace of Kenya in 1974 and lived with her husband, who worked in a family construction business, in their own home with their two sons aged 11 and 6.

## APPENDIX F

### Main Informants outside the Women's Groups

Mangala at LC provided introductions to Jasvanti at MT and, directly or indirectly to:

Nita, a 31 year-old Lohana divorcee, who came to England from her birthplace in Kenya in 1976. She lived in a council flat with her son, aged 6 and her daughter aged 3. Her parents and three brothers lived in Kenya. She eventually found employment in a travel agency.

Amba, a 39 year-old Vaniya, came to England from Gujarat in 1973. From the ages of 6 to 13 she lived in Kenya with her parents. She lives now with her husband, a businessman, and their two sons aged 9 and 6 in their own home. Amba qualified as a doctor in India but was not employed during my fieldwork.

Dipak, a 28 year-old Charotti Patel housewife, who came from her birthplace in Gujarat in 1976. She and her husband, who worked at the Ford car factory, lived in a privately rented flat with their three children, a boy aged 5, a daughter aged 3, and another son aged 6 months.

Hansha, an unmarried 23 year-old Lohana, who came to England from her birthplace in Kenya in 1971 and worked as a radiographer. She lived with her parents, her older brother and his wife and their eighteen month old son, plus her younger unmarried brother.

Through Hansha I met her friend Chandrika, a 24 year-old Brahman, who came from her birthplace in Kenya in 1968. She was unmarried and lived with her parents and younger brother, Jayesh. Her older sister was married. Chandrika was employed as a speech therapist.

Through Jasvanti at EL, I met her friend Jaya when she was visiting one afternoon. Jaya was a 36 year-old Brahman housewife, born in

Mozambique but returned to Gujarat when young and completed her teacher training there. She came to England in 1980 and lived with her husband, an accountant, her father-in-law and three children, a daughter 12, and two sons aged 7 and 6 in a council flat.

A month or so later when I dropped in to see Jaya, she took me to visit her friend Mukhta. Mukhta was a 31 year-old Kathiawadi Patel housewife who came from her birthplace of Gujarat in 1974. She lived with her husband, a worker at the Ford car factory, in a council flat with her father-in-law, daughter aged 8 and two sons aged 5 and eighteen months.

Through Hasmita at MT I met her caste-mate Indu, a 24 year-old unmarried Lohana who worked as a nutritionist. She was born in Kenya and came from there to England in 1973. She lived with her parents and two younger sisters aged, 18 and 16, in a council flat. Her older brother was married and lived in Canada.



## APPENDIX G

### Background to South Asians in Newham

From my knowledge of the local area and from contacts I still have in Newham, the composition of the South Asian community would seem to have altered considerably since my fieldwork. This is intended as a short guide to South Asians in the borough at the time of my research. Information on the various organizations in the borough comes from my own knowledge of some of these groups, or members of such groups, and from a local publication **Newham's Ethnic Communities: Background Reports 1982**. Some of the groups were already extinct by the time I began my fieldwork in 1983 and others evolved during the course of my research. The South Asians in Newham have numerous organizations, both secular and religious, but none can effectively claim to represent the diversity of the population. Many are specific to a particular religious and/or ethnic group and meet in community centres, schools, religious establishments, and private homes. Their longevity varies from those which exist for perhaps only a few meetings to others which are by now well established in the area. Most interaction between members of different South Asian cultural groups takes place on an individual or family basis between friends and neighbours, business associates, and work colleagues, and in the commercial arena. Several groups, however, do promote a 'pan-Asian' policy; for example, the Asian Senior Citizens Welfare Association in Upton Park which began in 1973 and now provides a comprehensive advice and counselling service, language classes, day centre, library and interpreting service. It has its own Racism Awareness Unit and works closely with the Newham Monitoring Project, a pressure group which was established to monitor instances of racism in the borough.

The Sikhs are the third largest of the South Asian groups in Newham with some 5,100 names on the Electoral Register. In the Kensington ward (see Map 4, p55) they account for 17% of all the people on the Register and for 20% of the Sikh population as a whole in the borough. The remainder are concentrated in the Monega, Upton,

Park, St. Stephens, and Central wards. There are three well established religious centres or *gurdwara*, two of which represent the main divisions of the Sikh community in Britain between the Jats, or traditional landowning class, and the Ramgarhia, or artisans. The Dashmesh Darbar Gurdwara in Manor Park represents the former and, with a membership of some 4,000, is the largest Sikh sect in Newham. The Ramgarhia Sikh Gurdwara is in Upton Park and the third centre, the Nadhari Sangat, is a minority sect in Forest Gate. These centres are used for religious worship as well as for social activities, English and Punjabi language teaching, and for separate women's organizations. For earlier accounts of Sikhs in Britain see see James (1974), R. Ballard & C. Ballard (1977) and Helweg (1979). P. Bhachu (1985) examines marriage and dowry as well as the upward social mobility of mainly East African Sikhs in west London. Recently, Roger Ballard (1989) has examined internal differentiation among Sikhs in Britain.

The majority of Muslims living in Newham are Sunni Muslims from west Punjab, now part of Pakistan, with only a small number from the Indian states of Punjab and Gujarat, and even fewer from Bangladesh. It is estimated that there are over 6,300 Muslims on the Register making them the second largest South Asian group defined in terms of religious affiliation but, unlike the other groups, they are more widely dispersed. In sixteen wards they make up 2.5% or more of the total electorate. Probably the largest Muslim organization is the Anjuman-E-Islamia which began in 1971. The Agakhan Ismaili Community has a membership of some 70-80 people spread across east London while the Imamia Missions of around 40-50 people draws its members from the Shia community. The Quwwat-Ul-Islam is a Gujarati Muslim organization and, in common with the other groups, not only provides a religious centre but also classes in Arabic and Islamic studies. Saifullah Khan (1976a, 1976b, 1977, 1979), Anwar (1979), Werbner (1986, 1987, 1988, 1990) and Shaw (1988) have written extensively on many aspects of Muslims in Britain.

## GLOSSARY

I have chosen a system of transliteration in the text which avoids diacritics and simplifies pronunciation for readers unfamiliar with Gujarati or other north Indian languages. I have, however, added diacritics in the glossary. English spellings are used for all names, places, castes, and Hindu deities. Some words, such as chapati and ghee, are not italicized in the text and do not appear in the glossary as they have passed into common English usage. Special mention should be made of adjustments made in transliterations in the text: all retroflexives are unmarked, for example, *ḷ* is rendered *l*, *ṇ* as *n*, *ḍ* as *d*, *ṭ* as *t*; nasals are represented as *ñ* and *ṁ* according to pronunciation (for example, *sañskar* and *saṁskara*); both *c* and *ch* are rendered as *ch*; and *ś* as *sh*. As far as the unpronounced final 'a' is concerned I have relied both on convention as well as sound as a guide. I have also used the conventional shorthand for kinship relations, for example, D=daughter; S=son; Z=sister; M=mother; F=father; y=younger; e=elder. Thus, HyBW denotes the husband's younger brother's wife.

<i>abhimani</i> [abhimānī]	proud
<i>adakov</i> [adakov]	menstruation, menses
<i>adeli</i> [adeli]	menstruation, menses
<i>adekhai</i> [adekhāi]	jealousy
<i>agiyaras</i> [agiyāras]	the eleventh day of each fortnight of the lunar month.
<i>akhovan</i>	married woman whose husband and children are all alive and who has experienced no miscarriages or stillbirths.
<i>aluna</i> [aluna]	a saltless fast
<i>Ambajimata</i> [Ambājimātā]	a mother goddess
<i>anadistaprayascitta</i>	one of the life cycle rites noted by Brahman
[anādiṣṭaprayāścitta]	priests which consists of prayers repenting the misdeeds of the parents to ensure that the

	child is born with no impure thoughts or deeds from the parents
<i>amboi</i> [am̃boĩ]	an illness which results from a displacement of the umbilicus. Also called <i>pichchoti</i>
<i>asha</i> [ás̃á:]	hope
<i>ashadha</i> [as̃áçha]	lunar month (June-July)
<i>ashvina</i> [ás̃vĩna]	lunar month (September-October).
<i>asvacch</i>	impure
<i>atak</i> [aṭak]	referred to as a 'surname' group. An exogamous unit among some castes
<i>ba</i> [bā]	mother, but most commonly used to refer to the paternal grandmother
<i>badha</i> [bāçhā]	a vow which entails an act of self-sacrifice until the grace of the deity is obtained.
<i>bahu</i>	daughter-in-law
<i>balmavara</i> (na)	ceremony for the first hair cutting
[bālmavārā (nā)]	
<i>balakni ucheri</i>	rearing a child
[bālaknī ucherī]	
<i>bandhan</i> [bañçhan]	tie, knot
<i>bapu</i> (ji) [bāpujī]	father, most commonly used to refer to the paternal grandfather
<i>bani bapuji</i>	grandparents, maternal and paternal
[bānī bāpujī]	
<i>be lota</i> [be loṭā]	literally two jugs or pots. This is a ceremony which can be performed after marriage to create auspiciousness and ensure fertility through the grace bestowed by the Mata.
<i>ben</i>	sister
<i>besharam</i> [bešaram]	shameless
<i>besatun varsa</i>	the first day of the Gujarati Hindu new year in the lunar month of <i>karttika</i> (Oct-Nov)
[besatun varṣa]	
<i>bhabhi</i> [bhābhī]	reference term for eBW. Can refer to a much wider range of kinswomen including classificatory BW's
<i>bhai</i> [bhāī]	brother

<i>bhai-bij</i> [bhāī-bīj]	the second day in the month of <i>karttika</i> (Oct-Nov) when brothers visit their sisters presenting them with clothing and money.
<i>bhajan</i>	devotional song
<i>bhanej</i> [bhānej]	ZD, ZS. Also includes all classificatory ZD's and ZS's.
<i>bhare</i> [bhāre]	heavy
<i>bhare khorak</i> [bhāre khorāk]	heavy food
<i>bhare pagi</i> [bhāre pagī]	heavy legs. Euphemism for pregnancy
<i>bhat</i> [bhāt]	boiled rice
<i>bhavanimata</i> [bhavānimātā]	house goddess, said to be the same as the <i>kul</i> devi (lineage goddess)
<i>bhed</i>	difference
<i>bhui</i> [bhūī]	a female devotee of the Mata who is possessed by her
<i>bimar</i> [bīmār]	sick
<i>bimari</i> [bīmārī]	sickness, illness
<i>chandalo</i> [cāṅdalol]	red dot placed on the forehead and worn by unmarried women and women whose husbands are alive.
<i>chash</i> [chāś]	drink made from water and yoghurt
<i>chatthi</i> [chaṭṭhī]	sixth day ceremony performed after the birth of a child
<i>chinta</i> [ciñtā]	solicitude, concern, anxiety
<i>chopada puja</i> [copaṇā pūjā]	worship of the account books during the Divali celebration
<i>churano</i> [cūraṇol]	medicinal powders
<i>dadani paksa</i> [dādānī paksa]	father's side; refers to those related patrilaterally
<i>dadanu ghar</i> [dādānū ghar]	father's house
<i>dan</i> [dān]	charity
<i>dharma</i>	moral and religious duty
<i>dhanateras</i>	third last day of the year when the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped
<i>didi</i> [dīdī]	eZ

<i>dikri</i> [dīkrī]	daughter
<i>dikro</i> [dīkro]	son
<i>dikrani dikri</i>	granddaughter
[dīkrānī dīkrī]	
<i>dikrano dikro</i>	grandson
[dīkrāno dīkro]	
<i>Divali</i> [Dīvālī]	final day of the Gujarati Hindu year in the month of <i>ashvina</i> (September-October)
<i>divasni rakhadi</i>	a day in the month of <i>shravana</i> (July-August)
[divāsnī rākhaḍī]	when sisters present their brothers with a protective bracelet to ensure their health and well-being in the coming year
<i>divāso vrat</i>	a vow undertaken by women once a year for five years or longer to ensure the health and longevity of their husband
[divāso vrat]	
<i>divo</i> [dīvo]	lamp or candle
<i>duhkha</i> [duḥkhal]	pain
<i>dunti</i> [dūñṭī]	navel, umbilicus
<i>dur</i> [dūr]	distant, far
<i>dya</i> [dyā]	compassion
<i>ektanun</i> [ektānuñ]	a one meal a day fast, i.e., a fast which reverts to the normal meal cycle in the evening
<i>galasudi/ galasuthi</i>	honey or some other form of sweetness which is given several hours after birth as the first thing a child tastes
[gaḷasudī/gaḷasuthī]	
<i>gandun</i> [gañduñ]	filth, dirt
<i>garam</i>	hot, heat
<i>garami svabhav</i>	hot temperament or nature
[garamī svabhāv]	
<i>garbha</i>	foetus
<i>garbhadhana</i>	life cycle rite noted by Brahman priests performed either before pregnancy or just after conception to ensure the birth of a male child
[garbhādhāna]	
<i>garbhapat</i>	abortion
[garbhapāt]	

<i>garbhāshay</i> [garbhāśay]	womb
<i>garbhavati</i> [garbhavatī]	pregnancy
<i>ghar</i>	house, household
<i>ghar mandir</i> [ghar maṅdir]	household shrine
<i>gnati</i> [gnātī]	caste or caste group. Also called <i>nat</i> , <i>jat</i> or <i>nat-jat</i>
<i>gotra</i> [gotrā]	a. named exogamous unit among some castes
<i>goyani</i> [goyaṇī]	unmarried women who are not menstruating and married women who are not menstruating, who are not pregnant and whose husbands are still alive
<i>guna</i> [guṇa]	moral qualities
<i>halke khorak</i> [halke khorāk]	light food
<i>haraday/ haday</i>	heart
<i>hariphai</i> [harīphāī]	rivalry
<i>ichcha</i> [icchā]	wish
<i>ijjat</i>	honour, reputation
<i>indun</i> [īṅḍuṅ]	egg
<i>jagsrana</i> [jāgarana]	a vigil. Specifically in the text refers to an all night vigil which women observe during <i>jaya parvati vrat</i>
<i>Jalarama</i> [Jalārāma]	a guru worshipped by many Gujaratis who has been elevated by some to a deity
<i>jalebi</i> [jalebī]	a type of sweet
<i>janan</i>	birth.
<i>janmajata</i> [janmajātā]	a life cycle rite noted by Brahman priests performed before the cord is cut
<i>janmashtami</i> [janmāṣṭamī]	birthday of Lord Krishna
<i>janmotri</i> [janmotrī]	the divisions of the day broken up into one-and-a-half-hour periods
<i>javabadar</i> [javābadār]	responsible

<i>javabadari</i>	responsibility
[javābadārī]	
<i>jaya parvati vrat</i>	a ritual performed annually for five years
[jayā pārvatī vrat]	or longer by women in the month of <i>ashada</i> (June- July) to ensure the health and longevity of their husband
<i>jeth</i> [jeth]	HeB
<i>jethani</i> [jethānī]	HeBW
<i>jivatma</i> [jīvātmā]	the individual soul-mind
<i>jivrat</i> [jīvrat]	another term for <i>jaya parvati vrat</i> (above)
<i>jnan</i> [jñān]	knowledge
<i>kacharo</i> [kacaro]	filth, dirt
<i>kachun</i> [kacuñ]	sour, raw, unripe
<i>kadavun</i> [kaḍavuñ]	bitter, acrid
<i>kalaratri</i>	second to last night of the year when malevolent
[kāḷaratrī]	spirits are abroad
<i>kalo dorō</i>	thread tied around a woman's wrist by her HZ in
[kāḷō dorō]	the fifth month of her pregnancy to protect her from evil influences
<i>kami</i> [kamī]	passion
<i>kanayadan</i>	gift of a virgin at marriage
[kanayadān]	
<i>kapha</i>	phlegm
<i>karela</i> [kārelā]	bitter gourd ( <i>momordica charantia</i> )
<i>kasuvavada</i>	miscarriage
[kasuvāvaḍa]	
<i>katha</i> [kathā]	stories from the Holy books
<i>kharun</i> [khāruñ]	salty
<i>khatun</i> [khātuñ]	sour
<i>kholo</i> [khoḷo]	literally 'lap'. Refers to the V-shape of the sari which extends from the shoulder to the knee. Popular name given to the life cycle rite performed in the seventh month of the first pregnancy
<i>kholo bharavo</i>	another term used for this life cycle rite
[khoḷo bharavo]	

<i>kir</i> [kīr]	sweet rice dish
<i>kothalo</i> [kothalo]	sack, used to refer to the sack in which the foetus grows
<i>kul</i> [kuḷ]	the patriline
<i>kul devi</i> [kuḷ devī]	deity of the patriline
<i>kunkum</i> [kuṅkuṁ]	red powder
<i>kunvarika</i> [kuṅvārikā]	virgin
<i>kutumb</i> [kuṭuṁb]	the patriline. Usage is contextually variable. May be used to describe the members of the extended family traced through the male line. Can include married sisters and daughters in some (ritual) contexts but excludes them in others.
<i>lahani</i> [lahāṅī]	distribution of gifts often on completion of a vow
<i>Lakshmi</i> [Lakṣmī]	goddess of wealth and good fortune
<i>lekh</i>	that which is written, one's fate or destiny
<i>lohi</i> [lohī]	blood
<i>lohinu bhramana</i> [lohīnu bhramaṇa]	blood pressure
<i>lohinu dabana</i> [lohīnu dabāṇā]	high blood pressure
<i>lota</i> [loṭā]	jug, pot
<i>mag</i>	green lentils
<i>man</i> [mān]	respect
<i>mandir</i> [maṅdir]	temple
<i>mans</i> [māṅs]	flesh
<i>manta</i> [māntā]	vow which entails fulfilling a promise to the deity if a wish is granted
<i>masala</i> [masāḷā]	combination of spices and flavourings used in cooking
<i>masi</i> [māsī]	MZ. Also refers to any classificatory MZ and is used as a general term in addressing older women
<i>Mata</i> [Mātā]	used to refer to one particular goddess or as a general term to describe female deities

<i>mataji puja</i>	worship of the Mata
[mātājī pūjā]	
<i>matrutva</i>	motherhood
[māṛṭva]	
<i>mithun</i> [mīṭhun]	sweet
<i>mitho bhat</i> [mīṭho bhāt]	sweet rice
<i>molakata vrat</i>	vow performed by young girls to ensure a good
[moḷākāta vrat]	husband and/or protect their brother
<i>moksha</i> [moksā]	release from the cycle of rebirths
<i>moti satam</i>	seventh day of the dark half of lunar fortnight
[motī sātami]	in <i>shravana</i> when the goddess Shitala is
	worshipped to protect children in the coming
	year
<i>nabalai</i> [nabaḷāi]	weakness
<i>nabhi</i> [nābhi]	navel, umbilicus
<i>nag panchami</i>	fifth day of the dark half of the lunar
[nāg pañcamī]	fortnight in <i>shravana</i> when the face of the cobra
	is worshipped to protect children and/or ensure
	fertility
<i>najar</i>	a glance or look. Term used to refer to the evil
	eye
<i>najik</i> [najik]	close, near
<i>namakarana</i>	the name-giving ceremony performed after birth
[nāmakaraṇa]	
<i>nam padun</i>	'give the name' - popular title for name-giving
[nām pāḍun]	ceremony
<i>nam phoiba padun</i>	'give <i>phoiba's</i> name' - another title for the
[nām phoibā pāḍun]	name-giving ceremony, <i>phoiba</i> being the child's
	FZ
<i>nanad</i> [nanad]	reference term for HZ or any classificatory HZ
<i>nanani paksha</i>	mother's side, maternal relatives
[nānānī pakśa]	
<i>nananu ghar</i>	mother's house
[nānānu ghar]	
<i>nani satam</i>	seventh day of the bright half of the lunar
[nānī sātami]	fortnight in <i>shravana</i> when the goddess Shitala

	is worshipped
<i>nat-jat</i> [nāt-jāt]	caste
<i>nikat</i> [nikaṭ]	close
<i>nikatano sambandha</i>	close relationship
[nikaṭano sambandha]	
<i>norta</i>	Gujarati term used for navaratri, the festival of
[nortā]	Nine Nights when the Mata is worshipped
<i>ora</i>	placenta
<i>panchamasi</i>	life cycle rite performed in the fifth month of
[pañcamāsī]	pregnancy
<i>pap</i> [pāp]	sin
<i>paustik khorak</i>	nutritious food
[pausṭik khorāk]	
<i>penda</i> [peñḍā]	a sweet, given out at the birth of a boy
<i>peda dukkhe che</i>	pain of childbirth
[pedā dukkhe che]	
<i>pet</i> [pet]	stomach
<i>phaki</i> [phākī]	a decoction made from herbs to cleanse the
	stomach and evacuate the bowels
<i>pharali</i> [pharālī]	the food of fasts
<i>phoiba</i> [phoibā]	reference and address for FZ and classificatory
	FZ
<i>phuva</i> [phuvā]	husband of any FZ
<i>pichhoti</i>	illness characterized by a displacement of the
[pīchhotī]	umbilicus, also called <i>amboi</i>
<i>pihar</i>	woman's natal home
<i>pit or pitta</i>	bile
[pīt/pīttā]	
<i>pochi</i> [pocī]	a brace
<i>pocho bhag</i>	fontanelle
[poco bhāg]	
<i>prasad</i> [prasād]	consecrated food from the gods
<i>prasuti</i> [prasūti]	delivery of a child
<i>prem</i>	love
<i>puja</i> [pūjā]	worship
<i>pukht</i>	ripe, mature

pumsavana [pũmsavana]	life cycle rite noted by Brahman priests performed in the third month of pregnancy to ensure the birth of a male child and to mark the cessation of intercourse
punaya [puṇaya]	merit achieved through good behaviour and good deeds
puri/puli [pũrĩ/pũlĩ]	small round wheat cakes deep fried in oil
rab [rab]	hot spicy drink taken in the post natal period
rakhadi [rākhadī]	protective bracelet
rakhavi [rākhavī]	protection, care
rashi [rāśī]	first letter of the name determined by an astrologer to the time and date of birth
ritabhat [rītabhāt]	conduct, manners, behaviour
ritini kutumb [rītīnī kuṭumb]	customs, behaviour and traditions of the patriline. Family tradition
sado khorak [sādo khorāk]	simple food
saduvatran [sadūvatran]	good conduct
sagao [sagāo]	relatives
samatol/samatula [samatoḷ/samatulā]	balanced/balance
sambhala rakhavi [sāmbhāḷa rākhavī]	care for and protect
samskara [saṃskāra]	sixteen life cycle rites
sanskar [saṅskār]	education, refinement, proper conduct and behaviour
Santoshima [Sāntośīmā]	goddess of contentment
saph [sāph]	clean
Sarasvati [Sarasvatī]	goddess of knowledge and education
saro khorak [sāro khorāk]	good food

<i>sarun sukan</i>	good omen
[sāruṅ sukaṅ]	
<i>sasara</i> [sasarā]	conjugal household
<i>sasaro</i>	father-in-law
<i>sasu</i> [sāsu]	mother-in-law
<i>satvik</i> [sātvik]	spiritual quality inclined toward goodness and tranquility
<i>satvik khorak</i>	food which promotes spiritual and moral well-being
[sātvik khorāk]	
<i>saubhagyavati</i>	women whose husband is alive. An auspicious woman
[saubhāgyavatī]	
<i>shakti</i> [śakti]	power
<i>shakti khorak</i>	powerful food which produces strength and energy
[śakti khorāk]	
<i>shakti sali</i>	very strong and powerful
[śakti sāli]	
<i>shanagar</i>	auspicious items associated with a married woman
[śaṅagār]	
<i>seva</i> [sevā]	service without expectation of reward
<i>sharam</i> [śaram]	shame
<i>shist</i> [śist]	discipline
<i>Shitala</i>	goddess often associated with smallpox which may itself be referred to by this term
[Śitalā]	
<i>shitala satam</i>	ritual performed by women to ensure the health of their children - it consists of <i>nani satam</i> and <i>moti satam</i>
[Śitalā sātam]	
<i>shravana</i> [śrāvāṇa]	lunar month (July-August)
<i>Shri Nathaji</i>	worshipped as the divine embodiment of Lord Krishna as a child
[Śrī Nāthājī]	
<i>shubha</i> [śubha]	auspicious
<i>shubhani divas</i>	an auspicious day
[śubhanī divāsi]	
<i>shuddha</i> [śuddha]	pure
<i>shuddha khorak</i>	pure food
[śuddha khorāk]	

<i>sighraprasavopayo yantrasa</i>	life cycle rite noted by Brahman priests
{sīghraprasavopāyo yantraśā}	consisting of writing prayers on paper to be worn on a woman's wrist for protection during pregnancy
<i>simantonnayanna</i>	life cycle rite noted by Brahman priests
{sīmañtonnayanna}	performed in the seventh month of pregnancy for the safe delivery of the child
<i>simant</i> {sīmañt}	more commonly used term for this ceremony - also called <i>kholo</i> , or <i>kholo bharva</i> .
<i>sopari</i> {sopārī}	betel nut
<i>sukhi</i> {sukhī}	happy
<i>suko khorak</i>	dry food
{sūko khorāk}	
<i>sutak</i> {sutāk}	birth pollution
<i>suvavad</i>	period from the breaking of the water to the actual birth of the child
{suvāvad}	
<i>svabhav</i> {svabhāv}	nature, temperament
<i>svabhavik</i>	natural, normal
{svabhāviki}	
<i>tabiyat</i>	health
<i>takat</i> {tākāt}	strength
<i>tamsik</i> {tāmsik}	spiritual quality inclined toward passion
<i>tamsik khorak</i>	food which promotes a passionate temperament.
{tāmsik khorāk}	Associated with sexual passion and heat.
<i>tandurasti</i>	health
{tāñdurastī}	
<i>thanda</i>	cool, cold
{ṭhañḍa}	
<i>thando khorak</i>	cold food
{ṭhañḍo khorāk}	
<i>thandi svabhav</i>	cool temperament
{ṭhañḍī svabhāv}	
<i>tikhun</i> {tikhuni}	pungent, acrid
<i>tikho khorak</i>	pungent food
{tīkho khorāk}	
<i>upavas</i> {upavās}	a fast

<i>vahu</i>	daughter-in-law
<i>vanajhiya</i>	barren woman
[ <i>vāñajhiyā</i> ]	
<i>vasi</i> [ <i>vāsī</i> ]	stale
<i>vatachit</i> [ <i>vātacīti</i> ]	gossip
<i>vayu</i> [ <i>vāyu</i> ]	wind
<i>vidi</i> [ <i>vidi</i> ]	religious ceremony
<i>vidhava</i> [ <i>vidhavā</i> ]	widow
<i>Vidhata</i>	goddess of fate and good fortune
[ <i>Vidhātā</i> ]	
<i>virya</i> [ <i>vīrya</i> ]	semen
<i>vrat</i>	a vow

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