

Chapter 4

Women’s shared spaces

To understand the complex web of gender relations the Seharia tribe of Baran has been selected as a case study. Visiting Mamoni village of Baran was quite instructive for the present study. It represents the rural Hadauti as Seharia women offer all aspects of womanhood. The photographs taken offer visual evidence of present day Seharia living conditions that can be seen as representative of the rural life of two hundred years ago. The concept of *andar* and *bahir* of the Nationalists reformers applying to the distinctions to the inner outer world of the social spaces is also visible amongst the Seharis’. Everything inside the threshold of a house is related with women thus spiritual and all that is outside is external therefore profane.<sup>1</sup> It also is crucial to see what all works were assigned for men and women their occupations shall also help in locating the position of women as subordinates. The data in 1901 Census of Rajputana offers details of different works in which men women were engaged. The table below speaks itself:

Table 1:  
Occupations of Females by Selected Sub-orders and Groups

S. No	Group	No. Of actual Workers Male	No. Of actual Workers Female	% of Females to Males
1	Non-cultivating landholders or land-owners	68,616	13,488	19.66

<sup>1</sup> Partha Chatterjee, ‘Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest of India’, *American Ethnologists*, Vol. 16, No.4, (Nov., 1989), 622-33.

	Cultivating landholders or land-owners	79,878	24,181	30.27
	Unspecified	6,138	1,081	17.61
2	Non-cultivating tenants	103,997	56,025	53.87
	Cultivating tenants	858,501	614,734	71.61
	Other cultivators	777,595	545,556	70.16
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,894,725</b>	<b>1,255,065</b>	<b>66.24</b>
3	Farm servants	37,005	17,066	46.12
4	<b>Field labourers</b>	<b>126,127</b>	<b>168,765</b>	<b>133.81</b>
5	Taungya or jhum cultivators	1	-	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>163,133</b>	<b>185,831</b>	<b>113.91</b>
6	Betel, vine and areca-nut growers	837	287	34.29
7	Fruit and vegetable growers	4,772	2,271	47.49
8	Miscellaneous	143	42	29.37
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,752</b>	<b>2,600</b>	<b>45.20</b>
9	Gas-works : owners, managers and superior staff	5	-	-
10	Gas works: operatives and other subordinates	100	8	8
11	Petroleum dealers	38	1	2.63
12	Pressers of vegetable oil for lighting	425	266	62.59
13	Sellers of vegetable oil for lighting	36	20	55.55
14	Match, candle, torch, lamp, lantern makers and sellers	112	10	8.93
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>42.60</b>
15	Collieries : miners and other subordinates	2,214	1,672	75.52
16	Coal dealers, brokers, company managers	348	706	202.87
17	Hay, grass, and fodder sellers	11,499	15,791	137.32
18	Firewood, charcoal and cow-dung sellers	9,490	13,729	144.67
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23,551</b>	<b>31,898</b>	<b>135.44</b>
19	Carpet weavers	23	10	43.48
20	Felt and pashm workers	95	67	70.53
21	Persons occupied with blankets, woollen cloth and yarn, fur, feathers and natural wool	1,641	857	52.22
22	<b>Wool-carders</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>123.78</b>
23	Wool-dyers	140	89	63.57
24	Dealers in woollen goods, fur and feathers	382	169	44.24
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,710</b>	<b>1,723</b>	<b>63.58</b>
25	Silk-carders, spinners and weavers; makers of silk braid and thread	394	242	61.42
26	Sellers of raw silk, silk cloth, braid and thread	81	33	40.74
27	Silk-dyers	3	1	33.33
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>57.74</b>
28	<b>Cotton ginning, cleaning and pressing mills owners, managers and superior staff</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>207.69</b>
29	Cotton ginning, cleaning and pressing mills operatives and other subordinates	251	43	17.13
30	Thread glazing and polishing factories owners, managers and superior staff	13	-	-
31	Thread glazing and polishing factories operatives and other subordinates	31	33	106.45
32	Cotton spinning, weaving and other mill owners, managers and Superior staff	12	-	-
33	Cotton spinning, weaving and other mill operatives and other subordinates	155	18	11.61

34	Cotton cleaners, pressers and ginnerers	9,513	7,795	81.94
35	Cotton weavers; hand industry	73,513	36,708	49.93
36	Cotton carpet and rug makers	1,788	776	40.43
37	Cotton carpet and rug sellers	62	12	19.35
38	<b>Cotton spinners, size and yarn-beaters</b>	<b>2,903</b>	<b>56,994</b>	<b>1,959.49</b>
39	Cotton yarn and thread sellers	508	328	64.57
40	Calenderers, fullers and printers	6,623	4,415	66.66
41	Cotton dyers	9,777	6,184	63.25
42	Tape makers	322	172	53.42
43	Tape sellers	4	1	23.0
44	Tent makers	15	-	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105,516</b>	<b>113,533</b>	<b>107.60</b>
45	Dealers in raw fibers	153	63	41.18
46	Rope, sacking and net makers	273	155	56.78
47	Rope, sacking and net sellers	130	22	16.92
48	Fiber matting and bag makers	722	237	32.83
49	Fiber matting and bag sellers	124	30	31.45
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,402</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>38.80</b>
50	Clothing agencies : managers and superior staff	229	-	-
51	Umbrella sellers	13	8	61.54
52	<b>Embroiderers and lace and muslin makers</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>140.07</b>
53	Hat, cap and turban-makers, binders and sellers	127	55	43.31
54	Hosiers and haberdashers	1,385	295	21.30
55	Piece-goods dealers	11,719	1,208	10.31
56	Tailors, milliners, dress makers and darners	17,143	12,968	75.64
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30,898</b>	<b>12,968</b>	<b>75.64</b>
57	Potters and pot and pipe-bowl makers	50,700	26,445	52.16
58	Sellers of pottery ware	255	64	25.10
59	Grindstone and millstone makers and menders	1,352	382	28.25
60	Grindstone and millstone sellers	136	22	16.18
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52,443</b>	<b>26,913</b>	<b>51.32</b>
61	Bone mills: owners, managers and superior staff	1	-	-
62	Bone mills: operatives and other subordinates	7	-	-
63	Tanneries and leather factories: owners, managers and superior staff	3	-	-
64	Tanneries and leather factories: operatives and other subordinates	31	-	-
65	Leather dyers	21,532	9,173	42.60
66	Shoe, boot and sandal-makers	63,154	22,800	36.10
67	Tanners and curriers	8,015	2,030	25.33
68	Sellers of manufactured leather goods	522	92	17.62
69	Sellers of hides, horns, bristles and bones	2,327	693	29.78
70	Water bag, well bag, bucket and ghee-pot makers	1,418	613	43.23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97,010</b>	<b>35,401</b>	<b>36.49</b>
71	Priests, ministers, etc.	35,832	10,108	28.21
72	Catechists readers, church and mission service	1,190	52	4.60
73	Religious mendicants, inmates of monasteries, convents, etc	2,750	1,029	37.42

74	Church, temple, burial or burning-ground service, pilgrim conductors, undertakers, etc	9,804	1,572	16.03
75	Circumcisers	44	7	15.91
76	Astrologers, diviners, horoscope makers, etc	1,967	66	3.36
77	Almanac makers and sellers	22	1	4.54
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51,549</b>	<b>12,835</b>	<b>24.90</b>
78	Administrative and inspecting staff (when not returned under general head).	9	-	-
79	Practitioners with diploma, license or certificate	211	16	7.58
80	Practitioners without diploma	1,510	236	15.63
81	Dentists	2	-	-
82	Occultists	3	-	-
83	Vaccinators	149	1	.67
84	<b>Midwives</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,992</b>	<b>-</b>
85	Compounders, matrons, nurses in hospital and dispensary services	469	59	12.58
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,358</b>	<b>5,304</b>	<b>225.41</b>
86	<b>General labour</b>	<b>187,278</b>	<b>195,270</b>	<b>104.51</b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>187,278</b>	<b>195,270</b>	<b>104.51</b>

Source: (Capt.) A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India, Rajputana*, Vol. XXV Part-I, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1902, 214-216.

It is evident that women were engaged in most tedious and laborious works as general labourers' women outnumbered men 195,270 against 187,278 men. They were employed into low-paid jobs as wool carders, yarn beaters, cow-dung sellers, fodder sellers, embroiders and field labourers.

In the conventional social backdrop we find women centrally located within the family structure. Most of the ceremonies, customs and rituals, were made women-centric and the burden of moral and ethical duties was loaded on their shoulders. They were projected as custodians of family honours and traditions.



*A man pulling the bulls towards his home, his family waiting on the other side, Mamoni*

The division of labour for men and women is based on notions of power. Man is believed to be fit for hard work as farming for which he earns the pride of honour as the bread earner of the family. For the Seharia tribe farming is the basic source of livelihood in which both man and woman are engaged but even for the hard-working tribe the role of woman is 'undervalued'. Men and women do not cross each others' demarcated lines. Despite harmonious living amongst the members of the tribe, gender divide is easily visible.



*A woman waiting for her husband to return home with her children and a basket of fodder for the cattle, Mamoni*

The pressures on the Saharia women and other women are similar with a difference of degree and scale. Both do all the work at homes as they also contribute in the economy of the family.



*Original dwellings of the Seharia, man and woman of the family make it together*

In the past the Seharia women used to make their houses using dried leaves, tree trunks and branches mostly collected by women and then the



house was built by both men and women. The tedious job of collecting the raw material was assigned to the woman.



*A house imprinted with mandana on the floor covered with the mixture of red sand and cow dung*

Recently, they have been allotted *pucca* houses. The woman ensures that houses are painted with the symbolic art of *mandana*. Earlier, the *mandanas* were created using the earthen colours but now the oil paint is used for longer life.



*A chulha outside the house*



*A fresh painted chulha outside the house*

A Seheria woman usually does her work by herself without any help coming from the men of their family. This is expected by the people of her tribe failing which she loses her worth.



*Niche made by the seharia women inside the house to keep their belongings*





*An Ovary a storing area prepared inside the hut*



Waking up early in the morning plastering the floor outside the house before every one gets up, painting it with *mandana*, grinding grains and preparing food for everyone is part of a Seharia woman.



*Plastered and Painted floor of the house*



*Stone grinder used by the Seharía women to grind the wheat and grains*

Everything from handling the children to husbands' demands, daily household chores and also helping the man with farming and other related work is a daily routine. Even when the day is over for husband who is free to sit and relax the work of a woman does not end. She does the cooking serve it to everyone and have it at the end when every one's over with it, sleep late after doing the utensils and then again getting up first early in morning. Men

and women both feel fine with the entire system that has been prevalent within the tribe; neither the women nor men find anything 'wrong' in it.



*A young girl taking care of her sibling*

Child marriages are common within the tribe pressurizing young maidens to act mature at a very young age and behave like grown-ups. Young child brides wait for their *gauna* (consummation). Gauna is done only after girl attains puberty but the marriage is solemnized when they are kids. In Mamoni almost girls below 18 years were married. If the bride and the groom are of a mature age at the time of the wedding, a second ceremony called *gauna*, is usually performed at once and the marriage is then consummated.

But if the bride and bridegroom are of tender age the *gauna* ceremony is performed after the 1st, 3rd, 5th or 7th year.<sup>2</sup>



*A young girl adorning herself*



*Young girls who would also become young brides dressed in modern salwar-suits*

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<sup>2</sup> A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India, Rajputana*, op. cit., 86.





*A girl returned home after her gauna*



*A lady preparing plaster mixture with red sand and cow-dung*



*Another woman applying the plaster on the floor*



*Young girl waiting preparing to paint her house for her husband's family for gauna*



*Ladies of the house cleaning the grains for storage*





*Men of the secharia tribe singing teja ji at the chaupal*



*The children and older women excluded from the women singing Tejaji on other side*



*An incomplete basket which is made by both men and women but mostly by women*



*Machan-shed constructed by the Seharia's outside their house to sleep*



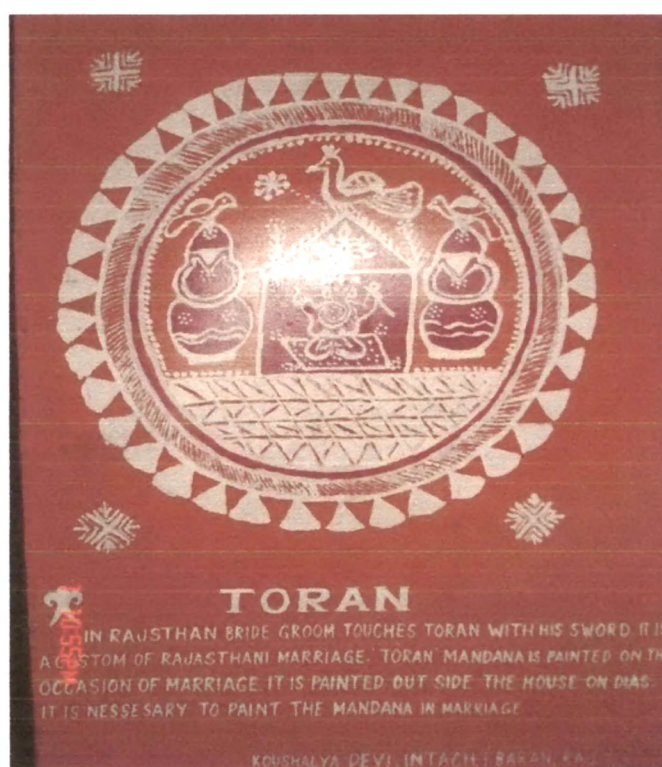
*Older women going to sell brooms and baskets made by them*

A transformation was witnessed among the forest tribes of Bhils and Grasis in the modern times. They adopted Hindu system of child marriages and widows not allowed to marriage, an observation made in 1901 by Bannerman was seen in the Seharis' too.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India, Rajputana*, op. cit., 130.

*Mandanas* made by the Rajasthani women to adorn their houses are now loosing their ground even in the rural areas. There are several for the various rituals, seasons and ceremonies; almost for every occasion there is different. *Mandanas* signify the role of a woman at the centre of her family. *Mandana* art is inspired by the Tantra that worships different *yantras*; it is believed that the *Mandanas* invoke positive energy.

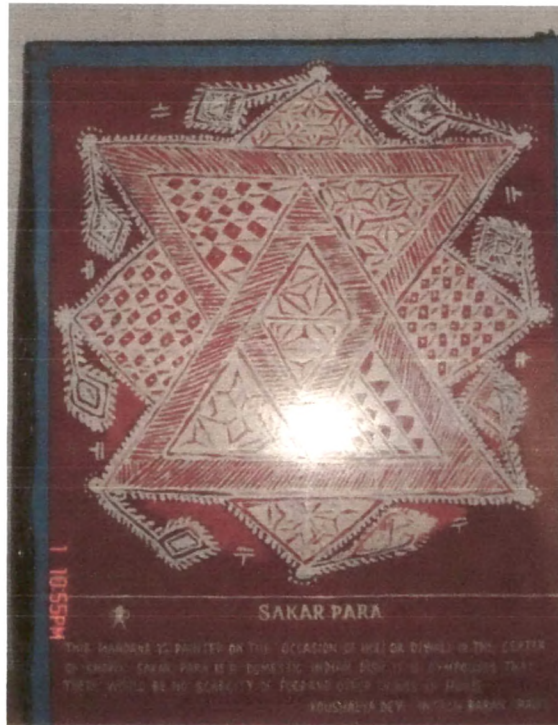


*'Toran' Mandana painted on the occasion of marriage*

Kaushalya Devi of Baran is an expert in *Mandana*. She teaches the importance of *Mandanas* to the young girls of Baran. Baran city is now moving away from the modesty of the rural life toward a complexity of an urban city, therefore the importance of *Mandana* is lost on the youth. Still its importance can be seen at the festivals of Dusherra and Diwali. Likewise



*Toran mandana* is popularly used during the marriages as there is a custom to touch the Toran at entrance for the groom before entering the house of marriage.



*Sakar Para Mandana painted on the occasion of Holi and Diwali*

Different *Mandanas* signify different things. The *Sakar Para Mandana* for instance symbolizes the importance food.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In conversation between Shivji Mali and Ann Grodzins Gold asking on importance of grains Shivji Mali says: It is Lord. How could our bodies live without grain? It's like, when we plant a small tree, if we water it then it stays green and grows. In the same way our body needs grain to keep it alive and growing. When a sick man gives up eating grain, then people understand that he is going to die. There is a saying, "If you've left grain you've left your house" (*ann chhutya to ghar chhutya*)... We need so many things like oil and pepper and turmeric for cooking, so how do we get those things? [The answer-by trading grain for them-is so obvious he does not verbalize it.] Grain God is the greatest, and if we have him then we can do weddings, funeral feasts, buy clothes, or complete whatever work we need to do-we can sell grain and do it. We can build a house. But if there is no grain in our stomach then how can we do all those things? You see, if we have a certain amount of

Culture of folk songs offers insights into gender relationship in the day to day life. Folk songs also provides a window to peep into the images of men and women created through these songs. It signifies the mental make up of the people. The songs become a powerful and accepted medium for women to pour out their feelings and emotions. It cathartic in a sense that a woman is able to relate her challenges with the events of the song.

The *bana-bani* songs at marriage invoke legendary gods Krishna and Ram for the groom and Radha and Sita for the bride. They are very expressive of desire, love and passion; to stimulate the newly wed for consummation of their relation. In one song the groom is coaxed to mount the mare which has been decorated by the women of the house *Babaji ri alya galya kai pharo ji dulha ji*. Likewise the song goes *kakaji ri...mamaji ri...jijaji ri*<sup>5</sup>...this expresses the demarcated spaces for men and women. Men possessed everything related to the outer world while women were to take care of the inner sanctum.

In another song one can clearly see the difference between the work and 'spheres' allocated to men and women of the family where marriage is taking place. All the work outside is handled by men and is termed as 'work'

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grain, we keep what we need for our family and sell the rest in the market, and from that we can buy jewelry, build houses, and have weddings. We can do everything with grain; that's why we say that "grain is the seed of adornment," and that Grain God [annadev] is the greatest god. Ann Grodzins Gold, 'Grains of Truth: Shifting Hierarchies of Food and Grace in Three Rajasthani Tales', *History of Religions*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (Nov., 1998), 150-171

<sup>5</sup> Atul Kumar Agrawal, *Marriage Songs in Harauti*, op. cit., 21.

rest inside is taken care by the women which is labelled as leisure (*magan*).<sup>6</sup> In the next song after the marriage is fixed then the boy would get dressed which is called *sapri* this is the time when evil can hurt the groom, which usually would come from the women related to the boy like *dadi*- father's mother, *maiya*- mother of the boy, wives of father's brother -*kaki*, brother's wife -*bhabhi*, *jiji*- sister and father's sister -*bua*, mother's mother- *nani*, mother's brother's wife- *mami* and also the women from the neighbourhood- *pas-parosino*.<sup>7</sup>

This song is quiet interesting for simple reason that this ceremony of *banori* is celebrated in the evening therefore not many women are able to be part of it, so all those who attend it call themselves as *mha marda* we the brave (here *mha* means me and *marda* means brave but literally it means man i.e. men are brave). The song is full with double meaning and is blunt enough to curse even the husband of the lady who could not make it.<sup>8</sup>

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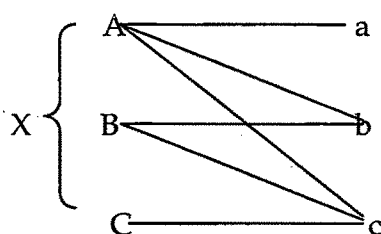
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 98: *saijade bane teri ho rahi lagun dadi rani to kamare me ho rahi magan tere babaji barat sajai rahe saijade bane teri ho rahi lagun. Tere chacha bhaiya ji lagun jhilaye rahe teri chachi bhabhi kamare me ho rahi magun tere chacha bhaiya baarat sajai rahe saijade bane teri ho rahi lagun. Tere jijaji phupha ji ghorī sajai rahe teri jiji bua kamare me ho rahi magan saijade bane teri ho rahi lagun. Tere nan ji mama jib hat sajai rahe teri nani mamiya kamare me ho rahi magan saijade bane teri ho rahi lagun. Hariyale bane teri ho rahi lagun tere mausaji barat sajai rahe tere parausi barat sajai rahe teri mausi to kamre me ho rahi magan teri parausin to kamre me ho rahi magan saijade bane teri to ho rahi lagun hariyale bane teri to ho rahi lagun.*

<sup>7</sup> Agarwal, Atul Kumar, *Marriage Songs in Harauti*, op. cit., 100: *bane ki ho rahi laguniya kaise sapri kar solah singar bana sihasan baithe re lag gai dadi ki najariya kaise sapri kar solah singar bana sihasan baithe ri lag gayi maiya ki najariya kaise sapri bane ki jhil rahi laguniya kaise sapri kar solah singar bana sihasan baithe ri lag gai kaki, bhabhi ki najariya lag gai jiji, bua ki najariya kaise sapri bane ki ho rahi ri laguniya kaise sapri kar solah singar bana sihasan baithe ri lag gai nani, mami ki najariya lag gai pas-parausin ki najariya kaise sapri bane ki ho rahi laguniya kaise sapri.*

<sup>8</sup> *banori mha marda ne khadi re gav ki lugaya ghara me suti rahai re ve gaya rajan ve gaya ji ve gaya kos pachas sar badnami le gaya khadiyan baithya pasbanori mha marda ne khadi re gav ki lugaya ghar me suti rahgi re arac-marac ka bijya ji luga ka ramjhol godya lelyo sayba mhara tis bharya ramjhol banori*



Brahmanical patriarchy started affecting even those communities who were never part of it. Bannerman pointed out in the 1901 Census of India that the process of transculturation began then. The non- swarna caste and communities started following Brahmanical culture in the hope of elevating their status but in return unknowingly began to cage their women. Today, hardly their true self can be seen, their women have started taking purda which was not in vogue in the past, child-marriages started which still exist and most of it is preferred on the *Akha-teej*. Mr. Risley provides a graphic the custom of hypergamy in his '*Castes and Tribes of Bengal*':



Let X represents a caste divided into the three hypergamous groups A, B, and C. Within each group, the capital letters stand for the marriageable men and the small letters for the marriageable women of the group. The horizontal and diagonal lines connecting the capitals with the small letters show what classes of men and women can intermarry. It will be seen that a

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*mha marda khadi re gav ki lugya ghara ma suti rahgi re бага jaiyo balma ji lajyo darpu dakh nimu lajyo kagtinaragi dakhnadarbanori mha marda ne khadi re gav ki lugaya ghara me suti rahgi re kali dabi kac ki re ve bhi dhaknadar mhara bhawar ji ki bhaili koi va bhi nakhradar banori mha marda me khadi re gav ki lugaya ghara me suti rahgi re alar-balar ki belri re jipo kalo nag khajyo lthori syok ne mharo matai janam ko sal banori mha marda ne khadi re gav ki lugaya ghara me suti rahgi re adho phul kanir ko ji adho бага bic mhu бага ki koyli mharo paranyu jana ko reech banori mha marada ne khadi re gav ki lugya suti rahgi re chanda thari chandni re panyu gai talay kato bhagyo prem ko koi ubi jhola khay banori mha marda ne khadi re gav ki lugaya suti rahgi re. Agarwal, Atul Kumar, *Marriage Songs in Harauti*, op. cit., 103.*

man of the A group can marry a woman of his own or of the two lower groups, a man of B can marry into B or C, while a man of C is confined to his own class, and cannot marry a woman from either of the classes above him. Conversely, a woman of the C class can get a husband from A, B, or C, and a woman of the B class from A or B; but a woman of the A class cannot find a husband outside of her own group<sup>9</sup>. The Hindu belief that the girl should always be married into a well-off family while they can marry their son with a poor girl highlights the way they can take full control over the girl. The systematic moulding of both boy and girl provides very little scope for change, but with time in some aspects positive changes are appearing. But the fact remains that a woman feels more or less the same anxiety irrespective of caste and community.

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<sup>9</sup> A.D. Bannerman, *Census of India*, op. cit., 128.