

Moral Continuity

Gujarati Kinship, Women, Children and Rituals.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

by

Alison Mary Spiro

Department of Anthropology, Brunel University

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of Gujarati women and children living in the North London Borough of Harrow. It addresses the issues concerning women in the household, that include their relations with other kin and wider networks, caring for children, feeding, and protecting them from evil influences, and their key involvement in ritual practice. Men as husbands, fathers, uncles and grandfathers are also discussed. Children's involvement in ritual from birth, or even before, is addressed and the way they make sense of the world through multiple carers.

Households were studied using the methods of participant observation and in-depth, taped, unstructured interviews. Different caste groups, religions and social classes were included in the study group, but the majority were Hindu, and a few Jain. Muslim households were excluded because they represented less than 10% of the Harrow population and would have made the study too broad. Data obtained from a three-month period of research in Ahmedabad, informed the Harrow data, but a direct comparison was not made.

The theme of moral continuity emerged from the data as a central concern for Hindu and Jain households. This was linked to kinship ties, respect for elders, obligations, religious festivals and rituals. The joint household remains popular and many younger people are learning Gujarati, practising rituals and asking for arranged 'introduction' marriages. Family 'rules' which have been followed through many generations are followed in respect to festivals, life-cycle rituals of childhood, warding off the evil eye and what foods to eat. Childhood is a time of purity when children are thought to be close to the gods, requires special consideration, especially when it comes to food, and milk may be thought to be the safest option. Children live in a network of interdependency with other kin and through rituals participate in a world that respects the hierarchy of the household and wider Gujarati 'community'. Western influences of toys, peers and the educational system are acknowledged at various points. In conclusion, a sense of being Gujarati is still held by individuals today in Britain. Continuity of moral codes is achieved through ritual practice, which is transformed over time, links with the ancestors and gives a sense of belonging to 'one of us'.

To Stephen, Jonathan, Matthew and Michael.

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student. Jonathan and Matthew have always shown a great deal of interest in the research and have discussed it with their Gujarati friends. I must say a big thank you to Michael, for his computer skills and his invaluable contribution to the final layout and illustrations of this thesis.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Eyes wide with excitement, Yogesh came running into the parent and toddler group and joined a group of other two-year old children who were waiting to go down the slide. His grandmother proudly explained to me that he now knows how to greet the priests in the Swaminarayan Temple, calling them *bapuji* (honourable father) and bowing down on the ground in front of them. He goes with her to the temple every week and really enjoys himself. She said that they hope he will attend the Swaminarayan School, which is private but worth saving for, because she thinks it will teach him how to be a proper Gujarati. Once he has learnt how to eat properly (that is vegetarian, without eggs), to be respectful of adults in both his manner and the language he uses, to read and write Gujarati, and to know about his religion, then they will be happy for him to go to another school. The first years at school are important. If he goes to a local primary school, he might learn swear words, bad behaviour and lack of respect for adults.

During the fifteen years I have worked as a Health Visitor with Gujarati families in Harrow I have become deeply interested in the moral values upheld by many and described so well by Yogesh's grandmother. These moral values reside not only in Hinduism or Jainism, although these are important, but in a general sense of what it is to be Gujarati – a sense that is informed by a long history of life in India and, for some, migration to Africa before the United Kingdom. This sense of being a proper Gujarati to which Yogesh's grandmother referred is recognised by Gujaratis of different castes and sets them apart from other people in the UK who are of South Asian descent. Punjabis to whom I have spoken suggest that many Gujaratis are conservative in their outlook and have held on to rituals, beliefs and practices that Punjabis now consider to be old fashioned. Festivals and religious gatherings, hymn-singing sessions referred to as *bhajan* by Gujarati Hindus and *satsang* by Jains, are popular meeting places for kin and wider sociality networks; here Gujarati ideals are reiterated. Life-cycle and calendrical rituals are meeting points for people referred to and addressed as kin.

Victor Turner's (1969,1974) processual analysis of ritual will be used throughout the thesis in a variety of social contexts. He argues that rituals are performances, which follow distinct stages and occur in groups, which are bounded by shared values, norms and histories. The beginning of the ritual is marked by a separation from the usual social relations, followed by a period of liminality during which there is status reversal for the

individuals involved, with the structure and hierarchy of the group being overthrown. During the liminal period there is a 'blend of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship' (Turner 1969: 96). Through this a sense of 'communitas' arises during the rite, in which there is a sense of being which is a:

.. 'moment in and out of time' and in and out of the secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalised social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties (Turner 1969: 96).

Religious sentiments are brought into the secular world of the group and become accepted, even taken-for-granted. The research data explored in this thesis bear on ideas and practices important to Gujarati people in their day-to-day life, on how ideas and practices are articulated to one another and how children are inducted into the process of ensuring their continuing importance. The relevance of ritual in the household and at social gatherings became apparent at the beginning of the research as an area requiring detailed observation and analysis.

The study group

The people with whom I carried out my research came from households which had originated in Gujarat, but which may have been established in East Africa before the second migration to the UK. At the beginning of the fieldwork I also visited some Muslim households (Muslims represent less than 10% of the Gujarati-speaking population in Harrow) but soon realised that it would be too big a task to incorporate this group with all its different religious ideals into one thesis. My study therefore focuses on Hindu and a few Jain households in Harrow whose members share certain rituals and inter-marry, although they worship at different temples. I have focused on Hindu religious practices through my experiences and observations in India while living with a Brahman family, and through my temple and household observations in Britain. I have not been able to include Jain religious practices, but have included a Jain life-cycle ritual. Hindu and Jain Gujarati people speak of having a common sense of difference, a sense of shared history and, for all they belong to different religious sects, a shared moral code.

The research experience

The object of my research is to understand the meanings my informants attach to kinship, life-cycle ceremonies, household rituals, religious and supernatural beliefs, food, child-rearing and everyday interactions in the households, temples and public gatherings. As will become plain, my interests focus on aspects of daily life that come within the remit of the Health Visitor. The fieldwork for this thesis began in 1997, following receipt of approval from the Ethics Committee for the local Health Authority. I work in an area that has a Gujarati population of about 30%, so I found it easy to recruit families who were prepared to co-operate in the research. At every meeting or home visit, I was welcomed warmly. On special occasions I wore a Punjabi dress: baggy trousers, tunic top and scarf; and as my confidence in spoken Gujarati increased I was able to make myself understood. I was told that wearing the correct clothing and speaking Gujarati indicated that I was showing respect. Few families refused to take part and most have been keen to see me and to have interviews recorded on tape, some actually asking where my tape-recorder was if I did not produce it in the first few minutes. At first, I identified ten families of different backgrounds to visit on a regular basis and the methodology I employed depended on the situation. Gradually the numbers of families have grown and I now have in-depth data on thirty families in Harrow.

Two members of staff in the practice where I work are Gujarati and as a health visitor I have continuing contact with large numbers of Gujarati families as a matter of routine. I have been and in a position to make notes on discussions, to test ideas or themes, with eighty individuals in addition to the core 30 research families, always ensuring confidentiality and using pseudonyms.

During planned research sessions with families I tape-recorded interviews if it was appropriate, but I always took notes of my observations or key quotations. Detailed field notes were made as soon as possible after the visit. I began to find that when I was listening to tape recordings, even semi-structured interviews interfered with the flow of the discussion. So later interviews were totally unstructured and I tried to interject only where I wanted clarification or where themes I had picked up from other discussions wanted confirming. There were also times when I needed information about, for example, marriage arrangements or genealogies when I asked direct questions. What people say they do and what they actually do may, however, conflict with one another

and so, where possible, participant observation always helped to provide a more complete picture.

Participant observation as a method provides richness of data not otherwise available. By observing where people live, the lay-out of houses, how they greet each other, what they wear, how they conduct themselves especially in relation to others, how children are reared, kin relations and eating arrangements, a deeper understanding can be gained. In my own case, detailed descriptions are always completed as soon as possible after the visits and I became aware of an improvement in my observing-and-recording skills as time passed. The observations I have made in households of everyday activities, especially with families with children, have been invaluable. A group of nine women belonging to different castes offered to talk to me for three hours in March 1999, about their experiences of living as Gujaratis in London. We covered a wide variety of topics from caste to marriage, food, religion ideas of pollution and ritual practice. In Harrow I have also participated in many public gatherings of kin and friends and festivals at temples and have visited a Gujarati school and a caste association. I have attended household rituals (both Hindu and Jain), life-cycle rituals (including two weddings), a *bhajan*, a Jain Paryushan feast and two Navratri dances (*garba*), two Diwali parades in Ealing Road, Hindi movies at a local cinema with one of the families and a concert of Hindi movie stars at Wembley Stadium.

I began to learn Gujarati in 1996 and now have an adequate understanding of the spoken language, can converse at a basic level, and can read and write the script. I have attended a GCSE Gujarati course where I was the only student not to have been brought up in a Gujarati household – an experience which was not only helpful in learning the language, but which gave me an opportunity to observe interactions in the class and to explore certain themes with the group. My classmates were aware of my research and invited me to their houses on special occasions.

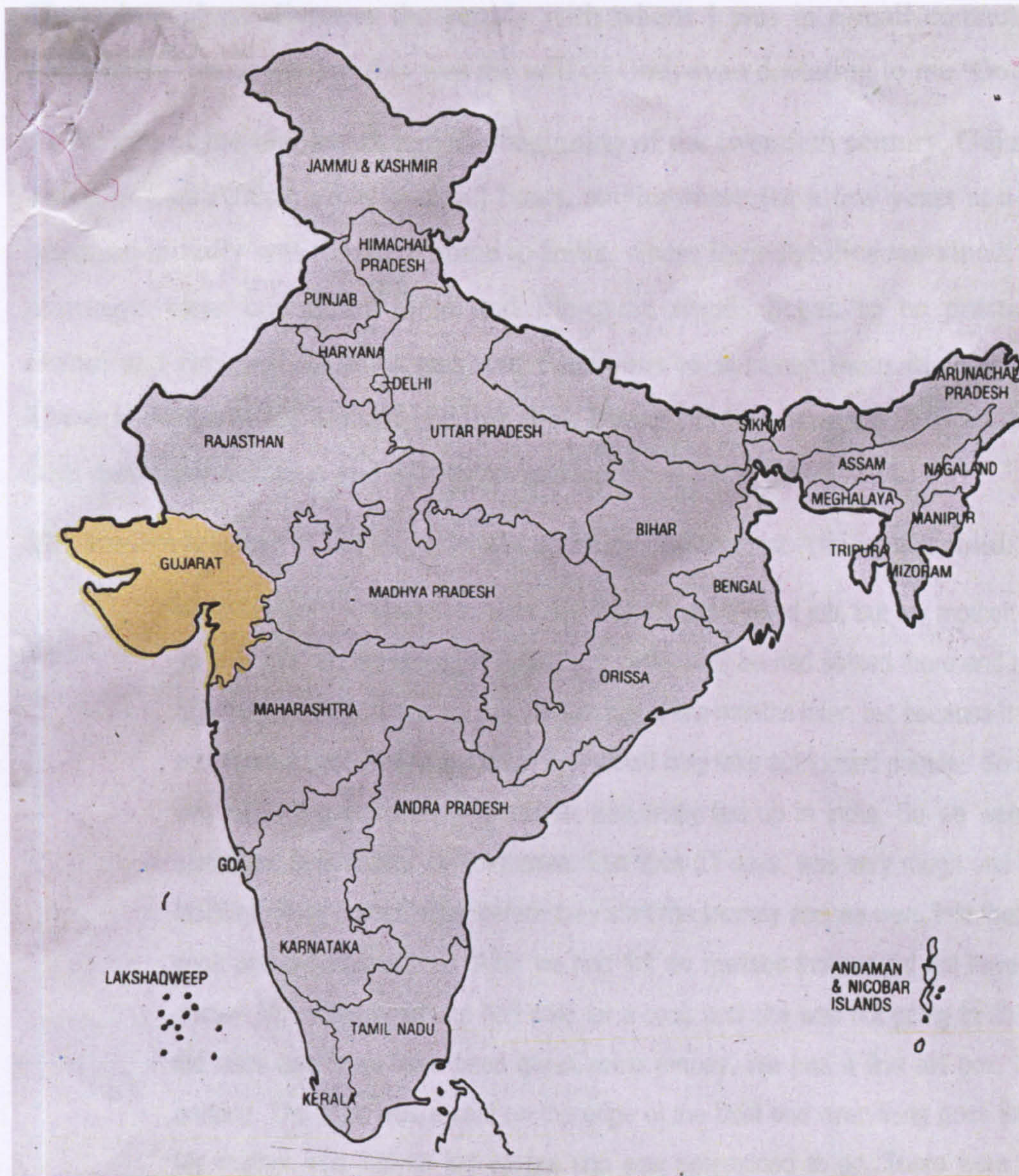
The main emphasis of this research is on the Harrow Gujarati ‘community’; Gujaratis themselves use this word, and use ‘community’ to denote group unity or solidarity. Bauman (1996:15) has argued in his search for a ‘dominant discourse’ in Southall that the word ‘community’ has become a polite term for ‘ethnic minorities’, which was used by South Asians in Africa and is now used freely in Britain. In my research, the different meanings attached to ‘community’ depend on context, but can refer to caste membership, religious affiliation, or a wider Gujarati cohesiveness.

When first I began my fieldwork, several of my informants suggested that in order to understand Gujarati people's lives, I should go and live with families in India – a sentiment reinforced by Banks (1992:219) who argued that in order to understand the lives of people who are part of a diaspora, the researcher has to visit the diaspora's country of origin. I was fortunate to gain a travel scholarship from the Florence Nightingale Foundation that enabled me to travel to Gujarat in 1999 where I spent three months with a Brahman joint family in a two-bedroom first floor flat in the suburbs of Ahmedabad. At the time I was the only non-Indian in the neighbourhood and one of the few in Gujarat as a whole. People stared, children gathered round me and touched me. I found this difficult at first – that is until I learned to relax and smile and talk with them. Everyone wanted to know why I had left my husband and children in England – was I getting divorced? My time in Ahmedabad gave me the opportunity for participant observation on the household where I was staying and I learned a lot – especially from the two-year-old girl and her grandparents. The oldest son proved to be a useful informant too and took me on several trips on his scooter to visit inner city areas and families living there. We also went to Vadodra (Baroda) during Navratri (festival of nine nights) to observe dances there and visit a pilgrimage site up a mountain. I visited twelve other households in Ahmedabad on a regular basis – some in poor, slum dwellings, some in basic, one or two-bedroom flats, and others in wealthy bungalows. I visited temples, almost on a daily basis, with families and attended local celebrations, such as a full-moon festival. I was also able to visit health service institutions, local clinics and charitable projects. I was in Ahmedabad for Navratri and Diwali and participated in all the religious rituals and social events of that time. Without any of the distractions of doing anthropology at home, I was able to focus my attention on participant observation and found I had time in the afternoons when the weather was hot (over 40 degrees C.) to write copious notes. I met Harishdaben Dave, a post-doctoral research anthropologist working in tribal research and development at the Gujarat Vidyapith, part of the University of Ahmedabad, who gave me material on the local deities (the *Mataji*) and spent two days with me going through relevant PhD theses written in Gujarati. I was invited to use the University library whenever I wished. She and her brother Kirit, who worked in tribal development, took me to visit Ambaji in the north of Gujarat, which is an important pilgrimage site. There I participated with them in doing *darshan* (being in the presence) of the goddess and the priest allowed me to go

into the innermost part of the temple, which is usually reserved for Brahmans. Harshidaben also took me to visit to temples in the central area of Ahmedabad.

To understand Gujarati ideas of the person, the researcher has to address issues of kinship, sociability networks, ritual, religion, body boundaries and substance as well as concepts of health and disease. A processual view is essential to capture a time in history where change is rapid – especially in respect of women’s roles. Traditionally, in the household, women have been responsible for ritual practice and guiding the family in religious observance. Will this still be the case in twenty years time when the majority will be working – many in demanding professional careers? Gujaratis have a reputation among other South Asians for clinging on to the traditions they practised forty years ago, perhaps more so in the UK than in India, but will this change in light of women’s present educational achievements? This study addresses the current situation where rituals, religious observances, the eating of special foods and kin gatherings are all guided by older women in the family, many of whom migrated to the UK from Africa and India. The situation may change once the women born and educated in the UK gain seniority and authority in the household.

Map 1- India - the location of the state of Gujarat (Directorate of Tourism Government of Gujarat 1992).



The history of migration to Harrow

Gujarat is a coastal state in north-west India (see map 1) and the people there have been traders for centuries, selling their merchandise to other countries. A catastrophic earthquake hit the state with the epicentre near the western city of Bhuj, in January 2001, killing 60-80,000 people and making over a hundred thousand homeless. In Ahmedabad, many concrete tower blocks of flats, similar to the one I stayed in two months earlier, were destroyed. Thankfully, the families I knew survived, but many were made homeless. Another disaster hit the state in 2002, when violence escalated

between Muslims and Hindus, resulting in riots in Ahmedabad. It is estimated that about 6,000 people were killed across the state and many buildings were destroyed. Throughout these disasters the people with whom I was in e-mail contact, remained positive and accepted that this was the will of God, even declaring to me 'God is great'.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Gujarati traders sailed to East Africa, often in small boats, staying there for a few years at a time. The intention initially was to return home to India, where their families remained. Gradually marriages were contracted there and life-cycle rituals began to be practised. Men retired and returned to India and sent their sons to succeed them in their businesses. These alien countries did not become their homes; India remained their ancestral home with their main temples and deities remaining there (Burghart 1987).

Mrs Pandya told me of her experiences of migrating to East Africa as a child:

My father went to Nairobi in 1944. He was offered a good job, but my mother and I did not go with him. So we stayed in India for a while, until he had settled there and he had learnt about the country. Then we went to join him a few months later, but because it was the war, a ship would not take us because they would only take authorised people. So there was no way of getting there and my mother was really fed up in India. So we went by boat, a schooner, from Janika to Mombassa. This took 21 days, was very rough and had no toilet facilities. They collect water before they start the journey and we were told that there was a cook and a doctor with us. After we had left we realised that we did not have a cook or a doctor. My mother said she had paid for a cook and she was not going to do it. Someone did cook and must have been given some money. We had a first aid box, but they had nothing. The toilet was a seat on the edge of the boat and everything goes into the water. My mother was just so fed up but she was determined to go. There were about 20-30 people in the boat and the planes used to fly really low to check we were not a spy boat. When they came low, everyone shivered because they didn't know what was going to happen. Then within 15 days we reached Mombassa. We saw the port and the houses, but as it was night the captain anchored the boat, intending to let us off in the morning. He did not anchor the boat properly and the tide was going out. In the morning, we found we were out at sea again and it took us 8 days to come back again! We were very tired and had little food or water left. From Mombassa we went to Nairobi to join my father.

By the time the Pandya family arrived, thousands of Gujarati settlers were already well established in East Africa and becoming economically successful. The first migrants

arrived at the end of the nineteenth century and worked as traders and clerks in the colonial administration or in the construction of the East African railway.

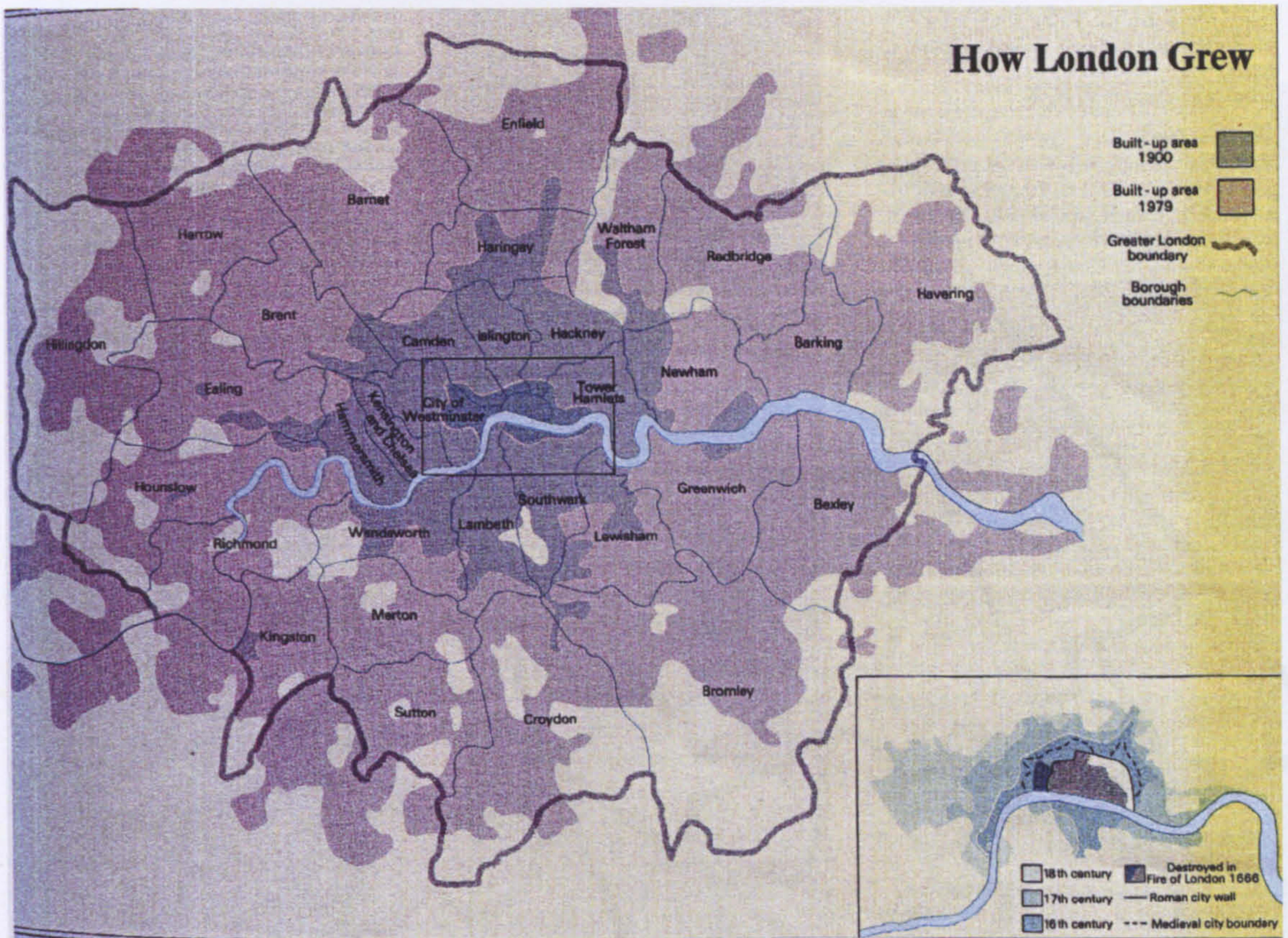
Burghart (1987) argued that the Hindu Universe was no longer seen as the centre of the world. Queen Victoria was known by some as the 'Maharani Viktoria' who performed the works of the gods by bringing fire in the form of gas lanterns to India like Agni, the god of fire. She also brought justice like Dharma Raja, the god of justice. Religious leaders travelled to Great Britain at the middle to end of the nineteenth century, to give lectures on Hinduism. In the first half of the twentieth century very few Indians lived in Britain. In 1945 it was estimated that 7,000 people of Indian origin came here and these were mostly Bengalis and Punjabis and very few Gujaratis (Burghart 1987). There was no evidence of a public temple in use at this time, the first public place of worship being built in 1949. After the Second World War, work for professional and skilled labourers became available, and an open system of immigration from commonwealth countries enabled large numbers of people to enter Britain from the Indian Subcontinent. Many of these were professional people wanting to follow their careers in Britain (Kanitkar 1972). Many of these were Punjabis who came after their homeland had been divided after the Partition of India and Pakistan. The Punjabis settled in manufacturing towns such as Bradford and Leeds and then in Southall in West London, finding work in transport or Industry. In 1962, however, the Commonwealth Immigration Act restricted the entry of Indians who did not hold British passports and in 1968 a voucher system was introduced which restricted the numbers that could be admitted each year.

Gujaratis started arriving in Britain in the mid to late 1960s following political changes in Kenya and increasing nationalisation and 'Africanisation'. In 1972 Idi Amin ordered all Asians holding British passports to leave Uganda within three months, taking no more than £50 with them. Most of the people who arrived in Britain were Gujarati speakers, and they settled in Leicester, Bolton, Birmingham, Manchester, Coventry, Harrow, Brent, Barnet and Newham. In 1977 there were 307,000 Hindus in Britain, 70% of whom were Gujarati, 15% Punjabi and 15% other Indians (Burghart 1987:8). The arrival of Hindu women in Britain was significant for the continuation of religious life, for although ascetic men and Brahmans are important in public ceremonies, women take the more active role in the observances in the home. In the early 1960s the immigration of men was double that of women, a chain migration occurred and by the end of the 1960s there were more women arriving than men. At this time temple trusts

were set up with the intention of purchasing properties that could become temples. In 1969 the first temple was consecrated in Leicester, followed soon afterwards by one in London, another in Leeds and one in Bradford (Burghart 1987). Gujarati families have always retained their close kin and village ties with India. Even those who came from East Africa, still view the Indian Subcontinent as their home.

Since 1970 large numbers of Gujarati families have settled in the London Borough of Harrow (see Map 2), which has attracted the wealthier, more upwardly mobile individuals. Adjacent to Harrow are other boroughs where South Asians have congregated, notably Brent and Ealing, which have added to the attraction of Harrow with their Indian shops, temples, caste associations and businesses. The Harrow population differed, however, from its neighbours because Harrow families showed a tendency to buy their own two- or three-bedroom, semi-detached properties built between the two World Wars. According to the 1991 Census, Harrow had the tenth highest proportion of non-white ethnic groups of all local authorities in the UK. Sixteen per cent (32,145) of Harrow residents were of Indian origin and in some southern wards of the borough, notably Kenton East and West (see Map 3), this rose to 43% of the population. The projected numbers of South Asians (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) in Harrow for 1997, compiled by the London Research Centre was 49,700 (see Figure 1). 25% of these residents in the 1991 Census were born in India, 32% in the UK and 39% in Eastern Africa. Kalka (1991) in her study of how Gujarati leaders fought for their rights with Harrow Council, estimated that 70% of these residents are of Gujarati origin and that the majority had arrived in the UK as a result of the upheavals in Kenya in the late 1960s and the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in 1972. Rachel Dwyer estimates that of the half-million Gujaratis in Britain as a whole, about half have strong East African connections (Dwyer, in Ballard, 1994: 182).

Map 2. The Growth of Greater London (Publications research unit of the Automobile Association 1979).



Map 3. The Electoral Wards of the London Borough of Harrow. (Her Majesty's Stationery Office 2000)

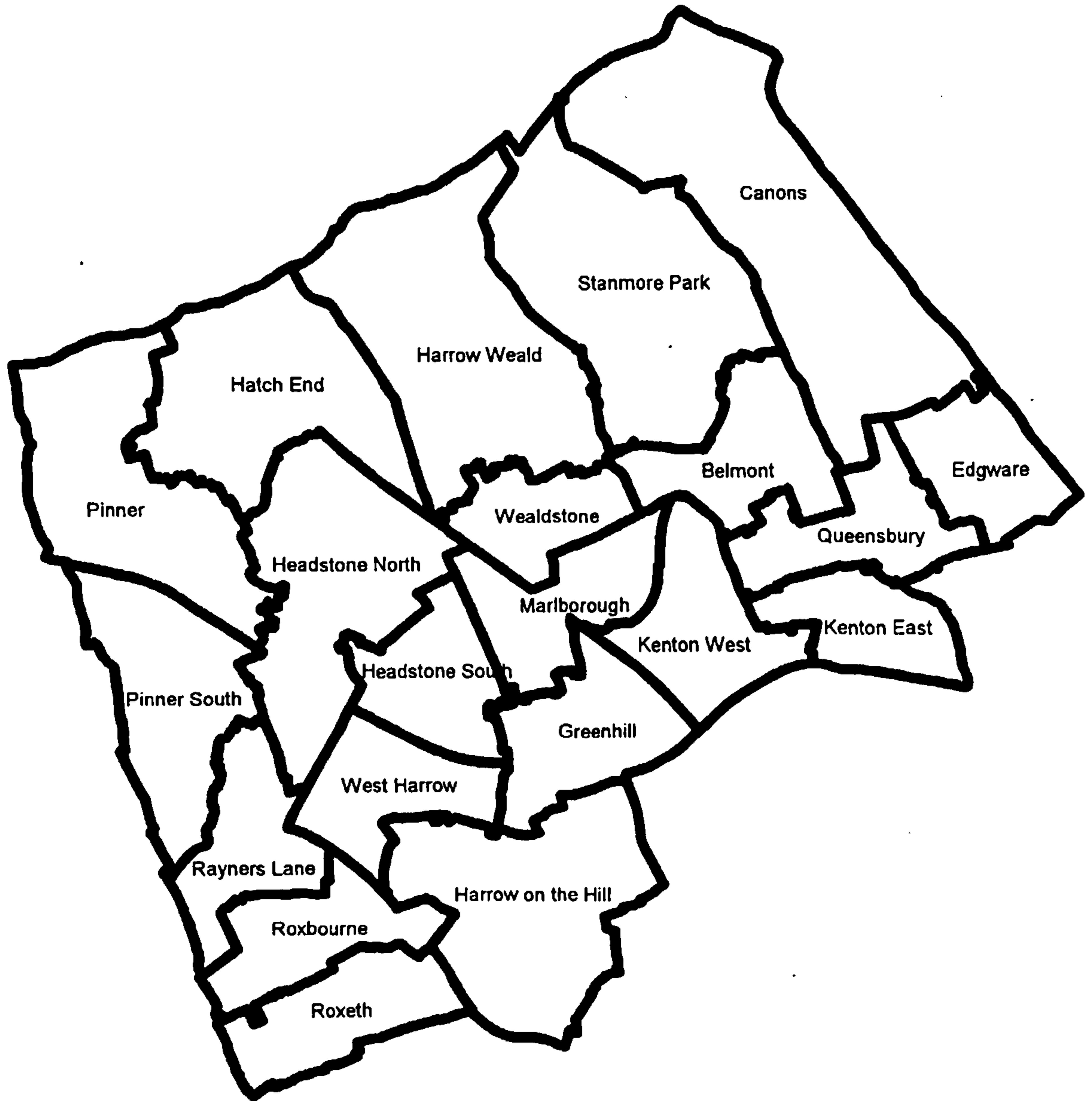


Figure 1. London Borough of Harrow: Ethnic Groups Statistics 1997 (Kaminska 2000).

LB OF HARROW – ETHNIC GROUP STATISTICS

In 1991 the ethnic group composition in Harrow was as follows:

White	147,699	73.8%
Black-Caribbean	4,411	2.2%
Black-African	1,699	0.8%
Black-Other	1,349	0.7%
Indian	32,145	16.1%
Pakistani	2,339	1.2%
Bangladeshi	546	0.3%
Chinese	1,797	0.9%
Other Asian	4,533	2.3%
Other Groups	3,612	1.8%
TOTAL	200,100 (rounded)	100% (rounded)

Source: 1991 Census, Local Base Statistics
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The 2001 Census results will give updated ethnicity statistics, as well as some information on religion, which was a voluntary question in the Census. However, this information will not be available until early 2003.

Government Mid-Year Estimates for 2000 for Harrow give an overall resident population of 214,900 for Harrow (no ethnicity breakdowns available).

In June 1997 the London Research Centre (now part of the Greater London Authority) published some **projections** by broad ethnic groups in a report entitled "Cosmopolitan London: Past, present & future".

The projections contained in this report, for 2001, for Harrow show:

Projected percentage of ethnic minorities in Harrow: 36.7%

Projected number of Black People in Harrow: 11,700

Projected number of South Asian (Indian, Pakistani & Bangladeshi) in Harrow: 49,700

Projected number of Chinese, Other Asian & Other ethnic groups in Harrow: 13,500

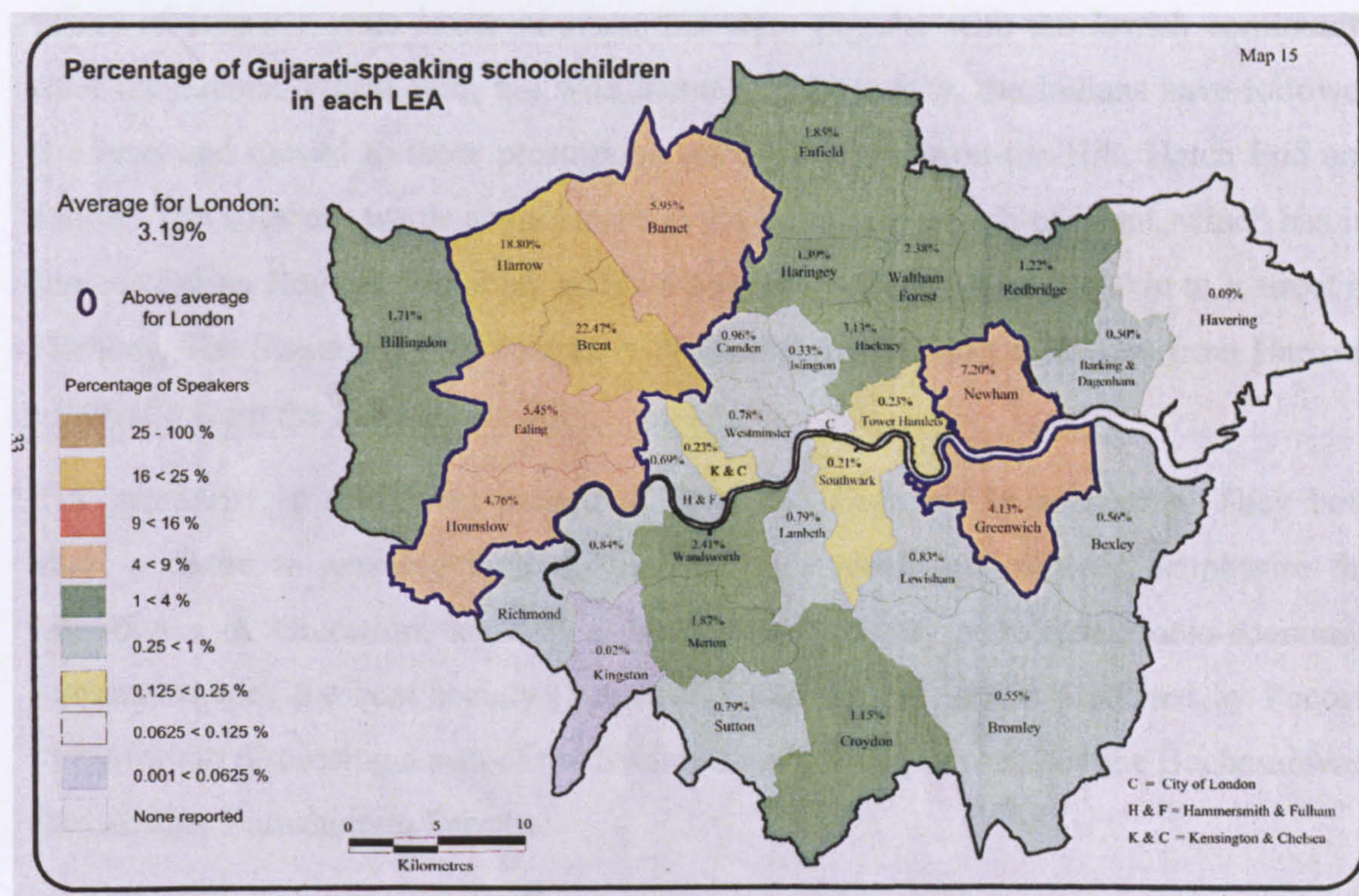
Projected number of White people in Harrow: 129,300

Sue Kaminska
Research & Information Officer
Planning Services

Tel: 020 8420 9651 (x5651 internal)
Fax: 020 8424 1551
email:sue.kaminska@harrow.gov.uk

ethstats.doc

Map 4. Gujarati-speaking school children in Greater London (Baker and Eversley 2000).



Within a few years after the arrival of the first Gujarati settlers, Harrow was established as an area with a substantial South Asian population. Men came first followed by women and children. Most families were prohibited from bringing money out of Africa and many arrived with only £50-£200 in their pockets, but businesses were soon established by means of money borrowed from lenders within their community (Tamblyche 1980). Local people have told me that within three years of their arrival in Harrow, Gujaratis in some areas had purchased whole rows of shops. This was reflected in the Census data on employment, which showed a high level of self-employed residents amongst the Indians. Kalka argues that this group should not be seen as an 'ethnic group at the edges of society', but as a 'major element of society' (Kalka 1991:203). A more recent publication (Baker: Eversley 2000) estimates that 18.8% of Harrow's school children speak Gujarati as a first language (see Map 4). Personal communication with the Local Authority Education services in July 2000 indicated that 20% of children entering school in Harrow are from Gujarati families. Following recent trends, through older people living longer and movement into the borough through arranged marriages from elsewhere in the UK, East Africa and India, it is likely that these figures will rise.

At first the Indian populations were concentrated in the south east of Harrow, where the prices of property were lower in areas that were popular with the Jewish community after the Second World War, but with increasing prosperity, the Indians have followed the Jews and moved to more prestigious wards of Harrow-on-the-Hill, Hatch End and Pinner. The southern wards are adjacent to the London Borough of Brent, which has its famous Ealing Road in Wembley with its lines of Indian shops more akin to a street in Bombay. The Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden attracts many followers from Harrow, especially from the Patel community.

This similarity in settlement pattern of Jews and Gujaratis is interesting. They both share a desire to preserve their distinct religious ideas and customs, emphasise the importance of education, as well as achieving a highly successful socio-economic integration with the host society (Vertovec 2000:31) – a pattern predicted by Pocock (1976) when discussing a sect of the Swaminarayan movement called the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha:

The Sanstha is faced with the dilemma to the extent that the Gujarati culture becomes *the* culture of religion and succeeds in establishing this conception in the minds of its youngest adherents, it can ensue its own continuity and emerge not unlike the Jewish orthodox and conservative congregations in Great Britain. But the parallel with the Jews would break down to the extent that such an assimilation of 'culture' to 'religion' could isolate the Sanstha member, and thus frustrate the second part of the advice, 'Emulate the Jews' which urges not only the preservation of religion but also the maximum degree of integration compatible with that (Pocock 1976 quoted in Vertovec 2000:32).

Religion becomes an integral part of everyday life – so much so that it is difficult for the observer to separate religious and secular life, but this is certainly not a concern of my informants. *Dharma* (moral duty) to kin is linked to spiritual relationships with the gods and a person's *karma* or the progress of the soul through life. The title of this thesis reflects this progress and the continuity of *dharma* from one generation to the next through all areas of social life.

The background to religious beliefs

Religion plays a central part in my informants' lives so an understanding of some of the main sects of Hinduism and some background to Jainism is essential to understanding

the details of the ethnography. I review below some of the anthropological literature on religious beliefs and practices and their implications for day-to-day life and examine the work of three authors on Gujarati religious practices.

Rachel Dwyer (1994) explores the way religious observances are linked to caste membership. Pocock's depth of understanding gained from systematic fieldwork over time enables him to situate religious beliefs within the pantheon of the supernatural world of ghosts and evil influences (1972). Banks (1992) also paints a vivid picture of Jainism in Britain and Gujarat.

Rachel Dwyer describes the importance of religion in the lives of Gujaratis.

Yet apart from business enterprise and their highly developed and distinctive cuisine, Gujaratis are also known for another great love: religion (Dwyer 1994:165).

She describes the way the Gujarati temples, with their flags and spires, have brought a distinctive architecture to British cities. Gujarati religion encompasses the whole range of Hindu beliefs, but the two Vaishnava sects that are particular to them are the Pushtimargis, or followers of Vallabhacharya, and the Swaminarayans. Members of these two sects offer their devotions to Vishnu in the form of his incarnation in the form of Krishna. Pocock argues that in most parts of Gujarat, Krishna is chosen as the divine embodiment (1973:108). Both these movements would seem to have had profound influences on social organisation, moral values, and law and order in Gujarat.

The main greetings used by Hindus reflect these observances. *Jayse Krishna* and *Jay Swaminarayan* convey the respective blessings of a god and a guru (who is often given the status of a god) and indicate how religious beliefs pervade social interactions. Some Brahmans follow a Shaivite path, but Dwyer does not include *Mataji* worship, which is particularly important in life-cycle rituals and during the festival of Navratri; Pocock does mention these, however, and they will be discussed in a later chapter. Pocock gives an interesting account of how Vaishnavism has been incorporated into social life:

Vaishnavism provides the idiom for what seems to be a special area of Gujarati social life, a section in which universalist values can be expressed through the *bhajan* and individualistic values asserted through *bhakti*. Instead of obliging us to see as *shaktipuja* does, purity and impurity, Brahman and Untouchable, linked by a symbiosis which makes this life meaningful, this language speaks of an equality brought about by each individual's dedication to a single lord (Pocock 1973:107).

Although Hinduism has had a profound influence on the way Gujarati social life has developed, Buddhism and Jainism have also been influential, the latter especially with the twice migrant Gujaratis from Africa. Gujarat has also been under Muslim rule for many centuries, but only 10% of its population converted to Islam. My impression is that Gujarati Muslims still remember their Hindu roots and maintain similar joint family arrangements and kin relations. Many Muslims chose not to come to Britain and migrated to North America.

In order for the reader to understand the references I will make below to caste membership in my research findings, I have to explain the names and origins of the main groups. The hierarchy of caste status may still be a reality in classificatory terms, but strictly speaking the caste system no longer exists in so far as there is no hierarchical interdependence of occupations and previously held purity restrictions would seem to have been considerably relaxed. In short, Ghurye's (1952) observations about caste in India, would seem to hold true for contemporary Harrow:

Ghurye points out that hierarchy is attacked by the non-Brahman movement (p.193), notions concerning impurity being much weakened (p209) and the rules concerning food and drink considerably relaxed, especially in the towns. The freedom of the new professions means that the caste no longer prescribes occupation. As a counterpart endogamy continues to hold sway with undiminished force save for certain differences of nuance (p186) (Dumont 1980).

This quote from Dumont makes us realise that 'hierarchy', 'impurity', 'freedom' and even 'endogamy' are all relative terms – no doubt they meant something rather different to Ghurye, Dumont and their respective informants than they do to me and my informants. Even so, in contemporary Harrow, commensal restrictions may still be an important issue for some older people and certainly there still exists a sense of difference between castes such that references are commonly made to persons as being 'one of us', 'in ours', or 'in our community'.

Brahmans may still see themselves as 'top community' and feel they have superior religious knowledge to other castes, because they are the priestly caste and wear the sacred thread, so are called 'twice born'. Most are Vaishnavas and worship Krishna in his incarnation of Vishnu, while the remainders worship Rama, and a few are Shaivite. Of those who worship Krishna, some are Pushtimargs and some are Swaminarayan (Dwyer 1994:171).

Bania (or Vaniya) is considered an overarching caste group by Gujaratis, although the term means merchant. They form a large group in Harrow and many Bania members migrated from East Africa; included in it are Jains (often referred to by others as 'Shahs') as well as Hindus, and some inter-marrying occurs between the two groups. The Hindus are Vaishnavas, many are followers of the Pushtimarg and have a reputation for adherence to strict codes of ritual purity and vegetarianism and for wearing the sacred thread. 'True' Banias are those who have a long history of merchant activity, but other groups such as Bhatia, who were originally Rajput, have made claims to be Bania through successful trading and adoption of the Bania life-style. Kshatriya were previously a caste consisting of landowners, warriors and chiefs in Gujarat, but its power has now been over-shadowed by the Bania, whose success in business has allowed it to gain more social influence. Even the priestly Brahmans, who are now often relatively poor, have less power than the Bania. Some artisan castes such as the Mochi (leatherworkers) have aspired to become like the Kshatriya and marriages have been arranged with Mochi girls marrying into Kshatriya households. Rajput forms the kingly caste but often have strong links with the Kshatriya caste.

Lohana and Bhansali are two closely related castes and form another large group in Harrow. The Lohana were successful grain-dealers and shopkeepers in Bombay in the nineteenth century and the Bhansali were successful traders (Dwyer 1994:170). Many became successful businessmen in Kenya and Uganda and migrated to Britain from there, maintaining close links with India. They are devotees of the Pushtimarg and enthusiastic followers of the Lohana saint Jalaram. Many were shopkeepers after arrival in the UK, and have become upwardly mobile businessmen and women, some accumulating considerable wealth.

Mochi (leatherworkers), Mistry (also leatherworkers), Luhar (blacksmiths), Suthar (carpenters), and Kumbhar (potters), are some of the artisan castes represented in Harrow; they have joined together in a joint caste association.

Patels (as they are commonly known) are sub-divided according to their place of origin. The Patidars come from the Kheda district, south of Ahmedabad and were originally Leva Kanbi; through upwardly mobility they became the dominant group. This caste group is further divided according to membership of marriage circles that link certain villages. In Harrow there seem to be many Surti-Patels who have originated from the

area around Surat in the south. There are popular caste associations in Harrow and Wembley – for example the Patidar Association –that offer a variety of cultural and social events.

There are some Gujaratis in Harrow who are unskilled workers and have jobs such as cleaning shops and business premises, unloading containers at Heathrow Airport and cleaning stations at London Underground. They do not mix socially with other Gujarati castes and often have English or Muslim friends. Here it appears that social class biases in terms of economic and educational distinctions may be more important than caste.

Shahs (as they are commonly known) are mostly Jains so are not normally included in the Hindu *varna* hierarchy, but are recognised by other Gujaratis as a separate ‘community’. Banks describes Jains as a ‘first order division’ in society, not a caste or caste category and argues that the divisions of caste have been used extensively in the literature but may not be important in people’s lives (Banks 1992:5). Jains became successful traders and businessmen and have become some of the wealthiest groups in India and the UK. Banks argues that this may be due to their strong internal social organisation, which encouraged credit associations. They have achieved a high level of educational success resulting in entrance for both men and women into the professional groups of law and medicine.

Jains see themselves as superior to Hindus because they believe their religion to be more advanced and more modern:

Most Jains see themselves as superior to Brahmans, simply because they believe Jainism to be a superior religion to Hinduism (particularly Shaivism with its stress on sacrifice) and because they consider themselves better traders than Brahmans who have entered into trade and with whom they come into close contact. Vaishnavism is generally seen as a religion of equivalent worth, perhaps, because the Jains have always had a very close association with Vaishnavites in this part of India; several *jatis* (the Dasa Srimalis, for example) have both Hindu and Jain members (Banks 1992:52-53).

There are two main divisions: Oswals and Scrimalis. The Oswals arrived in Britain in the early 1960s and set up an association in 1968 that now represents well over 15,000 members. I have been told there are a total of 85,000 Oswals in the world and that only 34,000 of them live in India. The Oswals have a large community centre and temple in Potters Bar, north of Harrow, which is visited during festivals and weddings by most

families; it is situated in a rural setting with an adventure playground for the children and there are plans to build a new temple on the site. The Scramalis arrived in Britain in smaller numbers after the African crisis and although they do not have a large centre, they have a temple in Wembley and meeting place in Harrow.

Gujarat (along with Bombay) has the largest number of caste associations in India. The earliest were formed in Bombay in the middle of the nineteenth century among migrants from the urban, upper castes from Gujarat, such as Bania (Vaniya), Bhatia and Lohana, and then spread to the homeland among all castes (Shah 1982:28). Caste associations are popular in Harrow and Wembley; they provide places for people of all ages to meet, for festival celebrations, for language classes and classes in Indian dancing and crafts. The success and popularity of the associations or *samaj* has contributed to a continued sense of difference between castes.

The Patidars were described by Pocock as an upwardly mobile caste that made claims to become Bania, by emulating their concern for ritual purity. Dwyer reported that most are now members of the Pushtimarg or the Swaminarayan movement. In my experience, Patidars (or Patels) continue to be concerned about differential status and this is reflected in complex marriage arrangements between descent groups organised in village marriage circles and accompanying large dowry payments, which will be further described in Chapter 2.

During the sixteenth century there was a rise in the devotional *bhakti* movement and two important leaders emerged: the Bengali Chaitanya, who had most influence in North and East India, and Telugu Brahmin Vallabhacharya, who developed a considerable following in Gujarat. Vallabhacharya encouraged a path of devotion through participation in congregational worship and surrender to Lord Krishna. Worship is known as *seva* (service) not *puja* (worship) and is conducted in a special room in the house set aside for it; the sacred plant *tulsi* (sacred basil) is always present. The Pushtimarg (name of the sect that follows Vallabhacharya) has been popular with the urban rich, mostly the merchantile communities of Gujarat and Rajasthan, where even the Mughul emperors became followers, but most were Bania, Bhatia, Lohana and also some Patidar, Suthar (carpenters) and Luhar (blacksmiths), as well as a few Brahman, Jains and Muslims. The Swaminarayan movement, which followers believe is a reformed version of the Pushtimarg, is also grounded in the Vaishnava movement. Dwyer suggests that there are now five million followers worldwide and says that

devotees are drawn from a wide variety of castes including the Brahman, Bania, Soni, Kanbi, Suthur, Rajput and Luhur. In Harrow the Patels, both Patidar and Surti-Patel, also appear to attend regularly at the Swaminarayan temple and help with its maintenance on a voluntary basis. Recently I was told that there are now three hundred Swaminarayan temples in countries throughout the world.

Although I agree with Rachel Dwyer's analysis and the links she draws between religion and caste membership, there appears to be a good deal of movement between different religious sects. A Brahman, for example, may visit a Shiva temple one day, the next a Swaminarayan temple, then a Krishna temple and worship *Mataji* (the goddess) during life-cycle *pujas* at home. Likewise, a Jain woman has told me that she attends a specific Jain temple, but her daughter has just had a baby so of course they will be doing *pujas* to *Mataji*.

Pocock's description of life-cycle rituals is limited because of his restricted access to women. He gives vivid descriptions, however, of the Swaminarayan movement and the strong influence it has had on social life. It became popular during British rule in India and its teachings on law and order gained approval from both the Indians and the British, and considerable mutual respect was achieved. Bishop Herber, a Church of England bishop in Bombay met with Swami Narayan on several occasions in the early nineteenth century and mutual admiration was established. Although Herber could not accept that Swami Narayan was god, he was impressed by the ethical teaching of the movement and decided not to send missionaries to Gujarat (Williams 1984: 81). The rules were written in the *Shikshapatri*, which became a sacred scripture that was recited daily by followers. Magic, superstition, ghosts, demons and evil spirits were rejected and followers had to give allegiance to Krishna and worship the five important deities of the Hindu pantheon: Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati, Parvati and Suriya. All followers had to observe a strict vegetarian diet and the doctrine of *ahimsa*, which they shared with the large Jain population. Swami Narayan worked with Governor Malcolm to try to stop infanticide and sati. The British produced law and order in Gujarat that encouraged the growth of this new religious movement. Williams reported an old Gujarati saying that "the *topi* (the British pith helmet) and the *tilak* (the characteristic mark worn on the forehead) came together, and they will leave together (Williams 1984:24).

In the iconography I saw in temples in Gujarat there appeared to be a Christian influence. Akshadham, the temple at Gandhinagar (the capital of Gujarat) is the largest

Swaminarayan temple in the world and the place of the recent massacre of worshippers. The temple stands majestically in formally laid gardens, courtyards and cloisters. The pictures and figures of the *guru* appear to have halos over his head, and portray him teaching the people in poses similar to those depicting Christ. Swami Narayan who was born in 1781 near Ayodhya and was known as a boy as Ghanshyama (a form of Krishna). His parents died when he was eleven years old and even at a young age he was reported to perform miracles. He travelled to Gujarat as a young man where he gained a considerable following and he set up the *Satsang* or society of the true. Although there was no direct teaching against caste divisions, obedience to the *Satsang* was more important than caste regulations and Brahmanic rituals. Allegiance to a *guru* – usually a Vaishnavite ascetic – was also viewed as appropriate. Swami Narayan was seen as having divine qualities and many referred to him then as a god, as people still do today.

The change from caste membership to sect fellowship and the adoption of a *guruji*, has had a profound effect on reducing inequalities and promoting a more egalitarian spirit in Gujarat. A *guruji* is a man who has achieved a degree of enlightenment, but remains a mortal. Pocock argues that this effect has been experienced beyond Gujarat and has followed the people's migration to East Africa, Fiji and Great Britain. He maintains that caste divisions and hierarchy are disappearing as a result of these belief systems, especially in urban areas of India and the countries to which Gujaratis migrated, and that possibly they are being replaced by educational elitism and class. Many people have spoken to me about the *guruji* they have adopted. Meera told me of the profound effect her female *guru* she calls *Mataji* has had on her life. This *Mataji* comes to Harrow every six months and talks to groups of women about religious texts. Afterwards she asks Meera to give her a massage. Through the bodily contact Meera has with this highly religious woman, she feels she gains spiritual strength and positive energy. The *gurujis* I was told about in Ahmedabad are linked to the villages of their ancestors and perform miraculous tasks of healing. Pocock concludes that morality and non-violence are deeply rooted in concepts of purity and Vaishnavism, which affect the lower castes as well.

Marcus Banks' book has achieved a picture of corporate Jain identity and the meaning of this identity through ethnographic analysis of Jain institutions and organisations in India and Britain (Banks 1992:3). He describes Jain beliefs and their impact on the lives

of many people in Gujarat and the UK, the way the religion is organised in the two countries and the main festivals and ceremonies. He shares with other male anthropologists working in South Asia the problem of lack of access to women, who play such a central part in the religious life of the family, but admits more openly than Tambis-Lyche (1972), that his approach is 'androcentric' (1992: 14). He refers the reader to his colleague Josephine Reynell's studies of Jain women in Gujarat and Rajasthan for a greater balance. He sees a need for more work to be done on men and women together to get the whole picture.

Banks' intention is to avoid using the term caste or *jati*. He does not, however, escape its use entirely and suggests that the term 'community' is used by people themselves to describe a section of society that may be the same or different from their own. This accords with my own experience: Gujaratis in Harrow use 'community' to differentiate sub-groups and there is a definite reluctance to refer to caste. Whenever I asked directly about caste, people replied that it is no longer important.

Jains became successful traders and businessmen, as previously mentioned in reference to Rachel Dwyer's work, and have become some of the wealthiest groups in India and the UK. Banks argues that this may be due to their strong internal social organization, which encouraged credit associations. Some writers say that their philosophy of non-violence (*ahimsa*) has excluded Jains from farming or joining the army and forced them into business. Banks is not convinced by this argument because Jains in South India are farmers. In India and the UK, Jains are economically very successful and now compose the wealthiest group of Gujaratis in both countries. They have achieved a high level of educational success, with both men and women entering into professions such as law and medicine in both countries.

Banks (1992) describes how Jainism has developed alongside Buddhism historically. Beginning at a similar period, they both achieved the status of state religion in the pre-Moghul period. Jains show respect to Vaishnavism however, and some of their ideals have been shared. I agree with Banks about the influence that one has had on the other. For example, Jains have told me that they believe in a special type of Hinduism. In Jain temples I visited in India, the references to Hindu gods in the form of austere carvings on pillars or doorways indicated a strong connection between the two. Banks reverts to the concept of caste divisions when he refers to the two *jati* of Jainism: Visa Srimalis and Oswals. *Puja* worship of idols by laity is practised in similar ways to that done by

Hindus, and my observations indicate that life-cycle rituals done to *Mataji* are also conducted in a similar way. Banks sums up the beliefs of Jains by saying:

Jainism is what we might call a non-processual religion: it does not progress, nor is there a cosmological 'end-point'. Instead the universe is eternal, time is cyclical, and adherence to religion remains entirely a man's or woman's responsibility- no god or higher being enforces it. No soul automatically reaches salvation, and the rise and fall of the quality of the universe over time ('light' and 'dark' halves) means that opportunities to do so are rare. Although none of these factors is a logical justification for the concept of eternity, merely that the universe (and hence mankind and society) will continue for a very long time, nevertheless Mahavira is said to have claimed that the universe is eternal and there will never come a point when it is emptied of all souls capable of achieving salvation (Banks 1992:99).

The way to enlightenment for Jains is based on the insights of twenty-four Jinas or 'conquerors' commonly known as *tirthankaras*, which means ford-builders. Mahavira is the first; the *tirthankarus* show the way across the turbulent oceans to enlightenment and perfect bliss. Their nine-line mantra or *namaskar* is always recited at Jain religious ceremonies in which the *tirthankarus* are praised and revered for their special qualities and attributes (Banks 1992:15). Jainism is basically a system of practices for enlightenment and all other aspects such as temples, idols, clothes, food and customs are subsidiary. Jains believe the pure soul is contaminated by the non-soul or *karma* that ties them to the world, and links them to the life-death cycle. All souls can be enlightened, however, through austerities, when the *karma* drops away and the souls are released. Below our universe are seven hells and sixteen heavens and the gods inhabit the heavens and the first of the hells, but demons inhabit the other six hells. Rebirth into any of these realms can occur following good or bad actions in life; there is no supreme being who assists the salvation of the soul and no distinction between the mundane and the transcendental.

Banks tells us that the essential principle is *ahimsa* – the lack of desire to inflict harm, respect for life; the most serious sin of all is to deprive another being of life or stop a soul from residing in a body. This idea has had a considerable impact not only on all Jains, but also on social life at large in Gujarat. Not only are Jains strict vegetarians, but so too are the majority of Hindus in Gujarat. Jains will even avoid leafy vegetables in the rainy season for fear of killing insects on them. Many wear handkerchiefs over their

mouths in case they are breathing in insects and, in my experience, many temples require that worshippers remove leather garments or watch straps before entering.

Ascetism is a central to Jainism and those who have renounced the world and taken *diksa* become chaste, homeless and possessionless *sadhu* (monks). They wander, wear few clothes, cannot use public transport, are forbidden to be in close proximity to the opposite sex, and the wandering journeys are known as *vihar*. The *diksa* is the only truly Jain rite of passage; all the other life-cycle rituals are Hindu in origin practised in a Jain style. Many Jains see their beliefs as a code of ethics, not a religion, and I agree with Banks that many see it as more modern and 'scientific' than Hinduism. Banks' 'rubber ball' approach, which bounces ethnographic data gathered in India off those gathered in the UK, works well and avoids direct comparison (1992:219). Below I try to employ such an approach with my observations here and in India.

Life-cycle rituals are an important aspect of the religious life of the family and always involve the meeting of kin. The goddesses or *Mataji* are called upon during these rituals, in both Hindu and Jain families. Pocock described how belief in *Mataji* helps to link several aspects of the Hindu pantheon of deities, not only to each other but also to the other forces in the supernatural world.

McDonald (1987) describes some of the religious practices and life-cycle rituals practised in East London by Gujarati women. She distinguishes between transcendental religion, which involves the worship of higher gods such as Vishnu and Shiva, and pragmatic Hinduism, which is the worship of local gods and goddesses, involves ecstatic and possession states and is more likely to involve lower castes. I have seen no evidence for this divide, however, nor any link between *Mataji* worship and lower caste status; rather I would argue along the lines suggested by Pocock for the existence of an integrated system whereby different deities are called upon at different times. Some of McDonald's observations of life-cycle rituals are similar to mine, especially her description of the *chhati*, the sixth day ceremony after birth.

Pocock (1973) argues that *Mata* (goddess, without the respectful suffix, *ji*) worship may be the remains of a much older worship known as *shaktipuja* that was linked with Shiva. Most of the people known to Pocock saw themselves as Vaishnavites, followers of Lord Vishnu, but the commonest sacred sites in Gujarat are devoted to the *Mata* and Lord Shiva. My experience in Gujarat would reinforce this view. The temple at Ambaji

in the North of Gujarat is one of the most important pilgrimage sites; it is devoted to the *Mata*, Ambika. I visited villages around Ambaji, and almost all have a temple devoted to Shiva. Pocock gives a graphic description of Shiva temples and worship and sees the link with the *Mata* as being through Shiva's consort who takes one of two forms: peaceful or fierce; in her peaceful form she is known as Himavati, Jagan and Bhavani, and in the fierce form can be represented as Durga, Kali, Chandi and Bheiravi. Each of these *Mata* has different legends, habits and is associated with different places, but all can be linked together as one. People speak of *mataji* as one goddess, or as a collective of goddesses, and when questioned about which one they are referring to, look surprised and wonder why I am asking, as if it is irrelevant.

At the same time every *Mata* can be equated with any other, all can be reduced to one, and that one in turn merged into the ineffable (Pocock 1973:89).

Ambika or Ambajimata belongs to the pantheon of the *Mata* and is very popular in Gujarat. I observed several rituals devoted to her during Navratri (the festival of the nine nights before Diwali) and worship of her is often associated with fervour and possession states. The special earthenware *garbo* (pot) used in the nightly *puja* in the home during Navratri becomes the *Mata* and is decorated with garlands of flowers and joss sticks, given *prasad* (offering) of fresh fruits, and called *Mataji*. Special songs are sung to her to ask for her blessings on the family. At the end of the festival, the pot is taken to a temple, and afterwards is to a flowing river where it is disposed of as sacred. Life-cycle rituals often involve rituals to another *Mataji* called Randalma, who is considered to have special powers to protect young children and pregnant women. Pocock argues that Shiva is linked to the local area through the *Mata*, who may be peculiar to a certain village, and yet he is also unlocalised and general and worshipped throughout India. The divine female energy or *shakti* is seen as pure yet impure, peaceful yet violent; which Pocock argues reflects the traditional caste society of pure and impure castes (Pocock 1973:90). One *Mata* might be pure for one caste and impure for another and a custom or practice that might be a mark of a high caste one day, may become that of a low caste tomorrow. He suggests that everything in Indian society is relative and regional and purity is judged only in relation to others. Pocock has noted that some of the wealthy, educated Patidars see *Mata* worship as evil superstition, but this has not been my experience; many educated people in Harrow and Ahmedabad practise *Mata* worship.

The house or *ghar*

The Gujarati *ghar*, or house, is the starting point for addressing my own field data, for it is central to Gujarati ideas of the person in kinship. The spirit of the person is attached not only to people with whom there is a consanguineal or affinal link, but also to the house itself. After death the spirit has to be freed from these attachments so that it can move on to its next reincarnation. The implications of these attachments for kinship are profound because ties to others are centred within the spirit, which is itself closely bound to a person's bodily substance; indeed during a lifetime one's kinship obligations and duties are, as it were, an aspect of the substance of the person. Concerns about substance inform one's choices of what to eat and whom to marry, as well as the day and time chosen for a ritual and the relationship with a god. Daniel (1984) suggests that for Tamils the equilibrium of bodily substances needs to be maintained and balanced; body boundaries are fluid, linking not only with other people but also with the house or with the soil of the village.

Parry contrasts ideas of the Western and the South Asian person:

By contrast with the Western concept of the individual as an independent and autonomous actor with a unique and unchangeable biogenetic makeup, the South Asian construct of the person postulates a far more malleable and protean entity (Parry 1994:5).

The Gujarati person is also not seen as a bounded individual but as one linked and attached to others through common substance; these links may extend through kinship into sociality networks. Food choices and preparation are essential aspects of one's ties to others and may be of particular importance at inauspicious or vulnerable times in the life-cycle – i.e. times that require special rituals seeking the blessings of a goddess or foods that will ensure continuation of the common substance.

Shrikala Warriar's PhD research (1994) in London shows considerable insight into Gujarati kinship and sociability networks in the UK. She looked at the active roles women played in the migration and resettlement process, but her main emphasis was on employment issues affecting women. She has attempted to redress a perceived gender imbalance by studying women's perspective within the Gujarati Prajapati caste. Warriar explained that this caste was originally kumbhar or potters, who claimed a status higher

than that assigned to their occupation. Migration to East Africa enabled them to branch out into more lucrative occupations.

This account, by focusing on women as active participants in the migration-settlement process, seeks to restore women to their proper place at the centre of family life (Warrier in Ballard 1994:191).

Warrier provides an insightful account of the role of women in the *ghar* or Gujarati household and their increased involvement in economic activity and employment outside the home and suggests a move to nuclear family units, where she sees women gaining more autonomy than they have in a joint family arrangement. Her research data were, however, collected at a time when Asian women in Britain were only beginning to enter the world of paid employment and, because of the unreliability of employment statistics in their countries of origin, their previous contribution to the economy was difficult to measure. Although there is little doubt that in rural India women's contribution to work on the land is enormous, as is their work in the domestic sphere, the work may have been confined to family concerns and no payments were given. In the 1970s researchers saw women as tied to their maternal roles, and Warrier seems to agree with this when she says:

Within the patricentred Hindu family system, for instance, the position of women is founded on their maternity. Brides enter the patrilocal households as strangers and legitimise their place through the birth of children (Warrier 1988:134).

This research is now nearly twenty years old and although the joint family is still popular and women still move into their husbands' home after marriage: Warrier could not have predicted how much things would change for Asian women who are now in paid employment. Although a woman's position in her husband's household is still legitimised through the birth of a child, her position is also influenced by her work status. Women are now achieving a high level of success in education and entering the job market at all levels, and securing top positions in professions such as law and medicine. The Fourth Survey of Ethnic Minorities (1998) confirms the positive attitude that Indian and African-Asian families have towards the education of women and their work outside the home. But even for professional couples the *ghar*, the patrilineal household, remains the centre of kin activities and household rituals, even if they no longer sleep there.

This ethnography examines how beliefs in the supernatural inform concepts of health and disease, and how the protective powers can be obtained through life-cycle rituals. The inter-play between the gods and the forces of evil is a continuing concern in most Gujarati households, especially for women. It would seem that the performance of household rituals according to rules laid down by the ancestors is crucial for the maintenance of religious belief and indeed for what it is to be Gujarati. The data discussed below address the central problem how members of Gujarati households in Harrow constitute their 'difference' from other South Asian groups in the UK and the rest of the population. The ethnography will be informed by data from Ahmedabad but not directly compared with it. Because I am a woman and a health visitor, most of my data come from women, some fathers and some elderly men in Harrow. I begin by looking at kinship and in subsequent chapters I trace the theme of moral continuity through activities in the household, especially rituals, food, concerns about the evil eye, children and life-cycle rituals.

Chapter 2 Caste, Marriage and Kinship Obligations

‘Is she one of us?’

Mr and Mrs Pandya, an elderly Brahman couple, were telling me how friends had asked this question about their son’s fiancée. We were sitting in the front room of their semi-detached house in Harrow. Mr Pandya went on, ‘People want to know if the girl is Hindu and Gujarati and if this is the case, today, most will be happy.’ It is still very important, he said, that the two families are not related, which was more of a problem in the past, when everyone married within the caste. Then you had to trace the family back seven generations through the male line to the *kula*, the ‘root’ (their word) or common ancestor; anyone not related within the fifth generation in the female line was considered a very distant relative, and marriage was permitted. People within the *kula* usually worship the same *Mataji* (goddess) and call her their *kuldevi* (family goddess). Mr Pandya said that many people found it difficult to trace their families back so far, so a thousand years ago sages set up the *gotra*, which is a clan-like unit in which everyone is related to one of the six Rishi, so consulting this is easier and this way you can ensure there is no close blood relation. He said that today things are changing and many people are marrying outside their caste, which is acceptable to most, so long as the girl is Gujarati and Hindu or Jain, not Muslim. The joint family arrangement – the *kutumb* – is still popular; it includes all sons and their wives. They may not always sleep in the one house, but the bond of interdependence between members remains.

The complexities of these arrangements are at first confusing for the researcher. What constitutes a ‘household’, an ‘extended’ family, a ‘joint family’?

In much ethnographic description as well as theoretical discussion, ‘extended’ or ‘joint family’ is a very ambiguous term because it is not always clearly specified in precisely what sense the natal and conjugal families are not separated, or in what sense they remain joined together (Holy 1996:67).

Below I attempt to convey how UK Gujaratis in Harrow use and understand terms such as ‘household’ and ‘joint family’, how they see themselves and what it means to them to be ‘one of us’. Some marriages may still be arranged, albeit loosely, and ideas of caste, moral obligations and reciprocity continue even while they are inevitably being transformed by a UK-born generation that has grown up and been educated here and

sees itself as British. The centrality of kinship to all these issues has also been addressed by Holy:

Kinship ties which people acknowledge and distinguish determine who to marry, where to live, how to raise children, which ancestors to worship, how to solve disputes, which land to cultivate, which property to inherit, to whom to turn for help in pursuing common interests and many things besides (Holy 1996:13).

Is caste still important?

My informants did not often mention caste spontaneously but did refer frequently to their 'community' or 'in ours'. I have used 'community' in the context my informants used it but I am aware of the multiplicity of meanings attached to this term. Bauman (1996) argues that within the discourse of 'community' in Southall there are communities within communities and cultures across communities (Bauman 1996:1). He warns the reader that:

In the dominant discourse 'community' can function as the conceptual bridge that connects culture with ethnos. It can lend a spurious plausibility to the assumption that ethnic minorities must share the same culture by necessity of their ethnic bond itself (Bauman 1996:16).

The context in which my informants used 'community' made it generally apparent whether they were referring to caste or to Gujaratis in general, but if there was any confusion on my part, then I asked them to clarify the term for me.

The central position of caste in anthropological literature of South Asia meant this was a subject I had to explore with my informants. Sometimes people implicitly referred to caste within the context of 'our community' but this could not be always read as such, because 'community' might also be referring to the wider Hindu, Jain, or the all-encompassing Hindu/Jain Gujarati community. The Gujarati word for caste is *gnat*, the Hindi term is *jati*, which means variety or type. I realised early in my fieldwork that I had to clarify 'community' whenever it was used, or my understanding would be severely limited. I decided to identify my informants' *gnat*, because of the sense of difference associated with it, although people were often reluctant to refer to caste without direct questioning, perhaps because of the historical connotations linked with structural inequalities. Among my informants there was also considerable ignorance about caste in the generation of Gujaratis who had been educated in Britain.

Caste has been described by writers on South Asian societies as a rigorous system demanding adherence to hierarchical categories that determine whom one marries and with whom one eats or lives, as well as which deities to worship and the level of purity attainable in this life. I will not attempt here to review the enormous volume of literature on caste, but will attempt to place in an historical context and address work that looks specifically at Gujarati concepts of caste and follow that with the views of some of my informants.

Sharma (1999) argues that colonial rule ensured that caste continued. The colonial administration in India saw caste as 'backward', 'other', and mired in history; caste was taken to be a static structure that made Indian society unchanging and unchangeable – radically different from European society. Sharma discusses Inden's description of the 'Orientalist view' of caste:

That is, it [caste] constitutes Indian society as an object for scrutiny, constructing it as an 'other' to a western self, and then privileges the knowledge so produced as superior to that of Indians themselves (Sharma 1999:6).

Ethnological writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew on descriptions by historians, philosophers and sociologists (reviewed by Inden 1990 and referred to by Sharma 1999:7). In this heterogeneous work, the recurring theme was that caste was the defining social institution that made India different from Europe.

If colonial rule did not actually invent caste then it certainly ensured its continued existence and exerted a powerful influence upon its modern form... Some have claimed that effectively this discourse denied the Indians a history of their own. A timeless society steeped in tradition has no history other than what can be done to it by others, in terms of conquest, invasions and pillage. More specifically, Inden argues, the orientalist view of caste denies Indians agency (Sharma 1999:9).

Ahmedabad is the city where Gandhi set up his Ashram on the banks of the Sabermati River, and where he first spoke publicly about the injustices of the caste system and the plight of the Harijan (untouchables). Gandhi's influence on life in India has been profound. It led directly, for example, to changed attitudes towards the 'backward class and tribal groups' (terms commonly used by people and used in Government literature) who are now supposed to receive priority treatment when applying for Government jobs and entrance to university – a directive that causes some resentment from other castes. Even so, Gujaratis have told me how proud they are that through Gandhi's work,

Gujarat has led India in the fight against the injustices of the caste system.

In *Homo Hierarchicus*, first published in 1966, Dumont argued that caste was reinforcing itself in a different form and agreed with Ghurye (1952) that caste was adapting to new conditions, undergoing a transition from structure to substance.

In short, Ghurye ... has put his finger on an essential phenomenon, which may be called the substantialization of caste. In fact a number of the features quoted together indicate the transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on inter-dependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* ... as a substance (Dumont 1980: 222, italics in the original).

Later on in the same work, Dumont finds evidence in a paper by Bailey (1963) for his view that:

'there has been a transition from a structure to a juxtaposition of substances. There remain groups that one continues to call 'castes'; but they are set in a different system' (ibid: 227).

It seems that Bailey saw the creation of caste associations – *sabha* – as effectively transforming castes as categories (as opposed to subcastes) into real groups that competed against each other; castes became 'political units' and competition came to be substituted for interdependence.

In the first place, the substitution of competition for interdependence is only one aspect of the phenomenon, the behavioural aspect. It could just as well be said that the caste seems to accept equality or that from the ideological point of view, structure seems to yield to substance, each caste becoming an individual confronting other individuals (Dumont 1980:227).

In respect of Gujarat, Shah (1982) argued that hierarchy was changing with increasing urbanisation and was critical of many anthropological and sociological village studies focused on village life, viewing caste as static. He argued that the integration of the study of caste in urban areas with that of rural areas is essential for a full understanding of caste and its implications for Indian society and culture (Shah 1982:3). In urban areas, he argued, castes were becoming more like ethnic groups, with a shared sense of difference, where hierarchy was less important and inter-caste marriage becoming more common. Dumont's three basic principles of caste – hierarchy, separation and interdependence associated with levels of purity – appeared to be less important in urban areas of Gujarat. Pocock, working with Gujaratis in East Africa, saw hierarchy and structure as being replaced by a new, non-structural sense of difference.

Castes exist ... but the caste system is no more (Pocock, quoted in Dumont 1980:226).

Michaelson in her PhD thesis (1983) in North London found three main Gujarati castes: Patidar, Lohana and Visa Halari Oshwals; her research focused on the latter two groups and described how structural and ideological differences between the two expatriate castes led to differences in their ties to India and their patterns of marriage alliance. She argued that the caste system as it occurred in India could not exist in Britain or East Africa, but that there were continuing perceptions of ritual inequalities, with Brahmans at the top, Vaniyas in the middle and artisans at the bottom of the hierarchy; commensality only occurred with people of similar level. She emphasised that Vaishya models, as well as Sanskritic, Brahmanic, or Jain ideals influenced the East Africans including the importance of thrift, the support and endowment of temples and religious shrines, personal piety and strict vegetarianism – ideals to which many Gujaratis still aspire. Caste associations became more important as a source of reinforcing difference once the caste ‘system’ of interdependency disappeared. Michaelson described how all *gnati* (castes) had their own associations or *samaj*, except the Patidar, who were the largest caste but at that time, the least successful in establishing an association. The Patidar do now have a thriving caste association with its centre in Wembley, in which many social events, classes for children in dance, day nursery, old people’s clubs and youth groups are held, as well as special events at Navratri (festival of nine nights) and Diwali.

Michaelson (1983) suggested that Gujaratis have stereotypical views about caste identity and this is certainly still the case; many would say they can recognise which caste a person comes from by the way they walk, what they eat, how they dress and speak. She reported that Patidars are said to speak ‘proper Gujarati’ and eat spicy foods, whereas Lohanas are ‘onion people’ (many stricter Vaishnava Hindus abstain from eating onions and garlic). The Jains are strict vegetarians and avoid root vegetables, onions, garlic, carrots and beet and are known as Shah. Like Michaelson, I found that the term Oshwal is not recognised by most Gujaratis, likewise that Patidars are known as Patel by the Gujarati population at large and outside the caste there seems to be little knowledge that there are different kinds of Patels, of whom the Patidar is just one group. It is also commonly said that Patels as a group of sub-castes like gold and at their weddings gold will be expected to be given by both the groom’s and the bride’s families. Caste identity and difference is emphasised at Navratri and Diwali, in both

Ahmedabad and Harrow, when separate events are held. Many events are not closed, being open to other castes as well but they will nevertheless be recognised as, for example, a Patel *garba* (special dance celebrating Navratri).

This sense of difference exists but appears less important for young Gujaratis today in Britain, because it is not so important in determining whom they marry, whom they have as close friends, and with whom they share meals. Mala, a woman in her mid-twenties, who was born into the Patel community but had a 'love marriage' into the Lohana community, described her feelings about caste and how it can determine job opportunities:

The caste system is underneath everything and was a big issue for our parents, but not so for us. In India it was more to do with the type of jobs you do, with the Brahmans at the top. In this country things have changed.

This sense of difference may still be hierarchical, especially for those who see themselves at the top or the bottom, but as there is no caste system, that superior status cannot be upheld. In socio-economic terms, Brahmans have not been as successful in Gujarat or the UK as *Vanias*, or *Banias* (the merchant caste). An elderly Brahman woman still felt, however, that she was superior in conceptual terms:

We are top community because we are Brahmans.

Sapna, who lives in the same street as this Brahman woman, does not speak English very well and has not received much formal education. She will not tell me to which caste she belongs, but she works as a cleaner in a department store and her husband unloads containers at the airport. Many households on her street are Gujarati but, she says, no one will speak to her, everyone thinks they are superior to her; she says it is not a caste issue. She came to the UK fifteen years ago from India when her marriage was arranged with her husband. Although she is a Hindu, she has made friends with a Muslim woman in the next street. Sapna, like the educated more liberal women, feels caste is no longer an issue. Even so, she is being denied any relations with Hindus who are her neighbours. Perhaps the low status attached to her work is what is important here; she has no kin living in the area and has had to make friends outside her religion; her exclusion may have more to do with class status than caste, but her reluctance to tell me her caste is surely suggestive.

Hierarchy still seems to be an issue among the older generation, but less so for people in the twenty to forty age group, as demonstrated by the following group discussion. A group of nine Hindu and Jain women offered to help me with my research: in March 1999 we all met up at one of their houses, sat in the front room and talked. I tried to tape-record what became a heated discussion. Three of the women were from Jain families, although one was born a Hindu, but had married a Jain; one was a Kshatriya (warrior caste), one a Lohana (merchant caste), one a Suthar (carpenter caste) and three came from the Patel caste: one a 'pure' Patel from the *chhogam* (six village) marriage circle, one from a mixed sub-caste Patel marriage, and one a Surti-Patel or Prajapati (Patel from the Surat area). I began by asking them whether caste is still important today. Bina Dodhia, a Jain woman about thirty years old, said:

Caste is not important in our generation. The older generation, yes it was important to them.

I asked whether castes are still important for the older generation. Deepa Patel, a woman of forty replied:

No not so much. I think they have come to realise that it is not so important to have castes.

Seema Suthar a younger woman from the carpenter caste suggested:

We are more open than we used to be.

These women were suggesting an idea of openness that was not there in their parents' time, more social mixing, leading to a feeling of belonging to a wider, all-embracing Gujarati community. Pocock described specific Gujarati caste groups (1972,1973) for Gujarat and Tambs-Lyche (1980), Dwyer (1994), Michaelson (1983) and Warrier (1994) for the U.K. There are studies of Jains by Banks (1982) for Gujarat and by Britain and Laidlaw (1995) and Reynell (1985) for Rajasthan. None of these authors have studied interaction across caste or what people have in common in respect of ideas of kinship and interdependency. Perhaps this is more important in a diaspora where shared history, language, and moral codes lead to a sense of difference from the rest of the population.

Tambs-Lyche (1980) studied the Patidars at a specific time in history, soon after men had migrated to the UK: multi-generational households had not yet been established as the women and children arrived at a later date. His study was limited to the business transactions that he claimed dominated social life and he had little contact with women. Dwyer (1994) identified the Gujarati Baniyas (or Vaniyas) as a distinct 'caste-category'

through their common concern as merchants and traders, but she describes several separate castes as belonging to this overarching category. Bania comes from the word *vania*, meaning merchant. Some are Jains and many are Vaishnavas and some are followers of the Pushtimarg. They are an upwardly mobile group, which has been economically successful in East Africa in the past and in Britain today. Shrikala Warriar (1988,1994) studied a small caste called Prajapatis, more commonly known now as Surti-Patels, who originate from a small town called Navsari, near Surat in Southern Gujarat. Warriar explained that the Prajapati *jati* (caste) was originally kumbhar (potters) who claimed higher status than that assigned to this occupation.

Vertovec (2000) argues that what happened initially in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, was that Gujarati traders who settled there had originated in Kaccha or Kathiawad from a limited set of castes so there was no complete cross-section of ranked castes. Control of resources and exchange was so different from India that no system of caste relationships or ranking could occur (Vertovec 2000:25). He compares the way caste identity has been retained and the caste system has disappeared in other Hindu Diasporas around the world, as a response to differing social and economic situations.

In Britain, the transformation of caste-related phenomenon among Hindus has proceeded in ways paradoxically similar to both Trinidad and East Africa. The disparate caste origins of some migrants, and especially their inability to control resources on a corporate basis, have contributed significantly to the lack of a viable caste system in Britain. In some Punjabi or Punjabi/Gujarati neighbourhoods for instance, caste identity is of little matter to most daily affairs, and a more generalised sense of 'Hindu community' has been established. Yet particularly among Gujaratis from East Africa, a caste consciousness is little abated due to the presence of caste associations and the continued importance of caste identity in matters surrounding family status, patronage, marriage, leadership and voluntary organisations (Vertovec 2000:25).

Knott (1994) has drawn similar conclusions from her study of Gujarati Mochis in Leeds. This small artisan caste traces its ancestors to certain villages in Gujarat and like the members of other Gujarati castes they refer to themselves as a 'community'. Allegiance to caste is second only to that accorded the extended family and entails a strong duty of reciprocity. The complex web of interdependency that existed in India is, however, no longer relevant in Britain (Knott 1994:213). Michaelson argues similarly and suggests that caste status is open to negotiation and change according to the secular power of the caste. She sees three processes that happened in East Africa. People

organised themselves into bureaucratic associations for political and legal purposes, they created boundaries from which other castes were excluded, and the caste association that developed mirrored those that were developing in India at the time (Michaelson 1983:120).

The caste system as such may not exist in Britain, but caste is still salient when arranging marriages, or when performing certain festivals or rituals. Its importance in determining levels of purity or social mixing has apparently largely disappeared and is no longer responsible for structural inequalities. The presence of sizeable 'communities' in the UK and their close links with India has enabled the continuation of a strong sense of caste identity among Gujaratis in Britain.

Marriages – arranged or introduced?

I asked the group of nine women about marriage arrangements and whether they are arranged within caste. Ameeta Amin said:

To some extent, but not a lot.

Seema Suthar disagreed with this:

If it is an arranged marriage, then yes. They are quite open to seeing other boys, but they do try within their community. We tell our children straight away, do you have anybody? Then if you want to have an arranged marriage, then we can do something about it too. We give them the option.

Dina Shah explained:

In arranged marriages it doesn't mean you see each other at the last minute and you are married off. These days and even in my time [Dina has been married for 20 years] we would see each other quite a few times and go out quite a lot. When it is arranged, what they mean is that they help you to find a boy who is suitable.

Seema Suthar agreed, saying:

There is nothing wrong in that, in case we haven't met anyone.

Uma Morjaria, a woman of thirty-five from the Lohana caste insisted that:

The person has the right to say yes or no. They can see ten boys or ten girls if they want.

Everyone in the group had much to say about this subject and there was a noisy debate, the general conclusion of which was that women and men have a lot of choice today, even when marriages are arranged within caste. Dina summarised:

Arranged means introduction on both sides. Having a society, it just helps you tell what sort of people they are. Not so often now because individually children are so much changed, you cannot tell if a family is good. Those days are gone. We could trust them [the parents] and say OK fine, it is a good family, and this guy is coming from a very good background. But nowadays the girls are so educated and they like equal rights, so they say OK fine, the family is good, but we have to get to know the boy properly. Things are changing and women are more demanding and wanting to know the boy much more.

Ameeta Amin, a young Patel woman of twenty-five, who is a graduate and had an arranged marriage herself, added:

It is difficult for families though, because if the parents don't know the family, they are trusting you, that you are 100% sure you know what you want to do. In arranged marriages the families know each other and the parents base how good the boy or girl are according to what the family is like. Here they are basically trusting the individual to know what they are doing. They don't have the background about the family and that is difficult.

This sense of the responsibility being shared in arranged marriages and the background of the person making him or her 'good' continued as a theme throughout the discussion. The responsibility resting on the individual in 'love marriages' is seen as more difficult. This may reflect a wider concern about how other decisions are made with family consultation and responsibility being shared with other members.

In general the women felt that arranged marriages were the safer option and it was important that families know each other and get on well. Puja Patel, Deepa's sister, is in her late twenties, the mother of two small children and also a graduate. She married for love – another Patel, but he was not from the same Patel caste (there are two main castes that relate to the area of origin). Puja said:

When I had a love marriage, it was very important for my family to know that the boy's family was a good family. It was very important to my mother and father. We had a difficult start, but in the end it all worked out well. The families get on really well, and that is important I think.

The other women in the group seemed surprised by this and appeared unaware that there were different Patel castes. Uma Morjaria asked:

Do Patels get married to Patels?

Puja replied:

I got married to a Patel, but he was of a different caste, so that still caused a problem.

I asked about the different castes in the Patels and Deepa said:

It depends on the villages they come from, especially with Patels. If you are from the same village you can't marry a Patel, because you might be linked by blood.

She explained that she is a 'pure' Patel because her family comes from one of the six-village marriage circles, or *chhogam*. You cannot marry someone from the same village, but only from one of the others in the circle. She married a man who came from one of the other villages, not from her own family's village. Within my group of informants, there are two women who have had arranged marriages within the six villages. Deepa explained that there are other village marriage circles and one of these has twenty-seven villages: she agreed to an arranged marriage to keep her parents happy, but for her children things will be different.

But now with our children, we keep an open mind. We don't mind anything, they can go to Shah or Patel. I told them that in the end, it is in their hands, we cannot judge them. We see to our children and give them the best of our knowledge, keep it to our community. In the end, if they are going to marry an outside caste, it is in their hands, nothing to do with us in the end.

This comment reflects a large shift over one generation, Deepa married within the marriage circle to please her parents, but is suggesting that her children will be free to choose, providing they stay within the 'community', which here refers to the Hindu/Jain Gujarati community (see Figure 2). This implies a movement from an identity linked to a caste, beyond the caste association suggested by Pocock, to a wider one encompassing all Hindu/Jain Gujaratis: the interdependence of the caste structure moving to the substance of what it is to be Gujarati.

The discussion moved away from that of accepted patterns of arranged marriages and enabled Dina to explain that she had an arranged marriage to a Shah, who is a Jain, even though she was born a Sangani and a Hindu. Arranged marriages between Jains and Hindus are common and acceptable and in many aspects of kinship and ritual observance, they share common ground. Dina felt she was moving into a more sophisticated, forward-thinking family, but religion was not so important to them. (Jains are often said to be more modern and Western in their outlook.) Dina continues to give her children a Hindu education and take them to the temple, so that later they can

choose for themselves. Dina suggested that being Gujarati is more important than caste, or perhaps more important even than the religious differences between Jains and Hindus.

Basically, we are Hindus and we believe in Lord Krishna as opposed to the Shahs who are Jains. We have slight differences in what we believe. I have come from India and my husband has come from Kenya. There are cultural differences in the way they conduct their lives. So it was different and at one point I thought, am I doing the right thing? Am I marrying a too sophisticated family? They were quite forward in their ways, so much so that my mother-in-law and father-in-law don't believe in any religion and they haven't told their children to believe either.

This last remark caused surprise and concern from the rest of the group, indicating their different attitudes.

Yes, and sometimes my husband tells me not to tell the children to follow religion, and I say, look I will tell them now and when they grow up, and if they want to then, they can stop doing so. But I will try and give them something.

Within this heterogeneous caste group there was some difference of opinion: everyone did not share Dina's views. They agreed, however, that while changes have occurred over the last generation, arranged marriages are still popular. Caste may still be important when arranging marriage, but not as a hierarchical category ordering general social relations among their generation. Caste associations exist and ceremonies and special social events are arranged, but in the everyday lives of these women social contacts are made across caste divisions.

At the end of the discussion we shared a meal cooked by several of the women and there seemed to be no concern about who had cooked which dishes. The women involved in this debate were all well educated and attitudes may be different in less educated families, but there was consensus on the acceptability and usefulness of arranged marriages based on introductions, where there was a large element of choice. They agreed that it was rare for anyone today to be forced into marriage. Caste did not seem important to them in everyday social life, as it was for their parents, but it would be a factor in arranged marriages where introductions would be made initially within caste. The women in this group stressed that today arranged marriages means making introductions, allowing the couple time to meet over a period of time, and letting them decide whether they want to marry. They are aware that forced marriages among South Asians are strongly disapproved of by white British people. This topic has recently

received Governmental comment, when unfortunately no distinction was made between arranged and forced marriages and South Asians in Britain were effectively represented as a single homogeneous group.

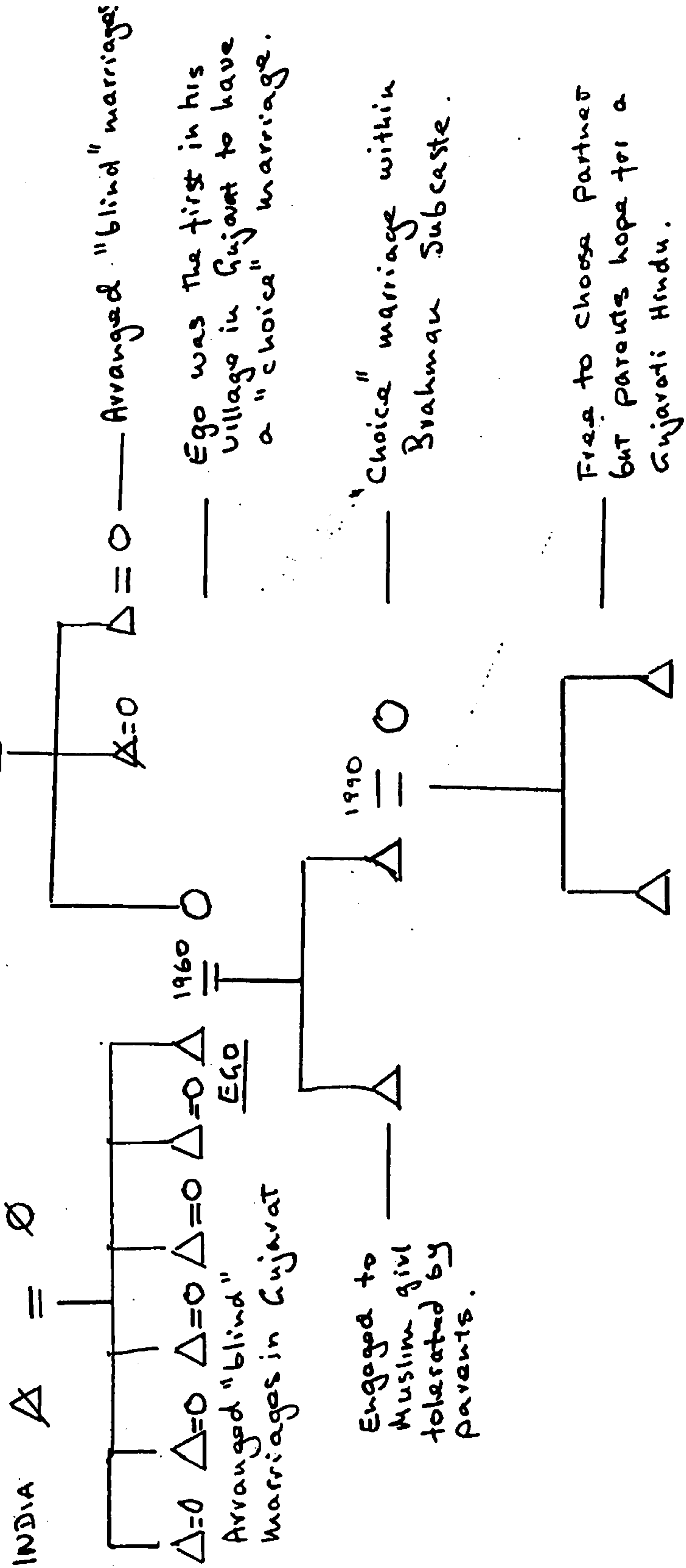
Marriage patterns in North India have been widely discussed in the anthropological literature, especially the general acceptance of within-caste endogamy and hypergamy, where the bride marries into a higher status family. Pocock's description of the Patidars' desire for hypergamy demonstrates how this was linked to an improvement in the socio-economic position of the family. Michaelson (1983) identified a system of sister exchange among the Oshwals, a group of Jains, in East Africa, which was more akin to the South Indian system. Personal communication with Marcus Banks suggests that this was practised by the Halar only and abandoned on their move to East Africa. Usually Jains follow the Hindu rules of marriage and no marriage is allowed within seven generations of the male line and five generations in the female line. This unusual practice of sister exchange appears to have arisen for economic reasons – i.e. it avoids the cost of a dowry. I have found no evidence of sister exchange in Britain and there is no longer any pressure to give large dowries; there is however a complex system of present exchange between the two families at weddings.

Figure 2: Generational changes in marriage patterns

MARRIAGE - HARROW.

PANDYA - BRAHMAN.

PATRILINEAL DESCENT



The search for suitable marriage partners is a frequent topic of conversation between young people and their parents and forms the major subject of gossip. Marriage partners are found through personal connections between families, or through a person, male or female, acting as a go-between. The go-between can check whether the family is 'good' by asking people who know them or by consulting the network of gossip. My enquiries into how you can tell whether a family is 'good' were usually met with surprise: if a family is Hindu and Gujarati, then of course someone will know them. The emphasis is on the family being 'good', not the individual boy or girl; and in discussion there is surprise that Western marriages may take place without the families knowing each other.

Young people are encouraged to attend *samaj* (caste association) functions where they are more likely to meet others from the same caste. Suman Prinjha argued in her PhD on young Gujaratis in Brent (1999) that Asian marriage bureaux organise dinner dances where certain tables are designated for different groups. She also found that young Hindu women are different from their mothers and are strong, independent, and successful in education and careers, but pointed out that this may hamper them in their search for a suitable husband, who should be of higher status. Many saw love marriage as more appealing with the possibility of choice, romance and personal happiness. Prinjha agreed with Gillespie (1995) that attitudes to courtship are influenced by TV and films, that young people wanted to fall in love first and matrimonial lists were seen as a 'cattle market'. Prinjha concluded that caste-endogamous marriage is still common, but young professionals were more likely to marry exogamously and more likely to be involved in the *samaj*.

Women looking for husbands use several Internet sites, where a head and shoulders photograph appears with some personal details of age, caste, employment and interests. I discussed several sheets printed from the Internet with a group of three women and two men, whose ages ranged from twenty-seven to fifty. There was much laughter and many sexually explicit comments were made, pointing out the potential problems of most of the men photographed. One of the older women, Manju Shah was looking for a match for her daughter and son, and told us on 17/5/2001 of some of the problems she had.

My son was told by an astrologer that he had a blockage which stopped him finding a wife, and he was told he had to take a vow to get rid of it. We belong to the *Bania* [merchant] caste, but are

Hindus, not Jains. We do not worry so much about whether the astrologer thinks the *Rasi* [stars signs written at birth] are compatible. One of my friends has a daughter who met a boy she really liked and they saw each other quite a lot, but the astrologer stopped the relationship. We would not do this. Sometimes a boy sees a girl for several months, but usually after about six meetings they have to decide on marriage. If they meet for longer than this, the two families must keep it secret from the community otherwise gossip will start. If anyone visits the house when the girl or boy is there, the boy or girl must hide in a cupboard.

Manju was explaining her own family's views about the astrologer, which are not indicative of a pattern amongst Jains or Hindus. As with adherence to ritual practices, the degree of reliance on astrology varies from family to family and is an expression of its *sanskar* (religious and moral beliefs), which will be continued from one generation to the next and will be discussed in chapter 7.

A twenty-seven-year-old professional man in the group, Chirag, who comes from one of the Patel castes, said how hard it was for him to find a wife. Even though he had met several girls at university, he still wanted to have an arranged marriage, so that his Hindu/Gujarati traditions could be carried on to the next generation. He described to me on 17/5/2001, some of the introduction scenarios arranged for him:

The go-between person checks the ages, astrology, whether the family is good – that is law-abiding, religious and professionally/educationally compatible. The telephone number of the girl is given to the boy and he contacts her and they chat. After talking a few times they decide to meet. There is an obligation to do this or the other family will be offended and the community will hear about it.

One girl I contacted was quite cool on the phone and whenever I rang, she would be distracted by things, such as watching Brookside. So I thought she didn't seem interested, so there was no point in continuing, but she insisted on meeting. We arranged to meet in a coffee bar and she turned up 45 minutes late, wearing a dirty sweatshirt and trousers. She had not done her hair and had no make-up. I felt it was obvious that she was trying to put me off, but when I said that she didn't appear interested, she became very angry and said I was rude and she would tell her family.

Another girl I telephoned when she was at work in a travel agency. The first time I called, she seemed friendly, but the second time her work mates made excuses. Eventually when I spoke to her, she said she had a headache and was going on holiday. Later I met her at a function and she seemed interested in me, but only when I told the story of how rude this girl had been to me, did she realise I was the same person. I had my astrology checked to see if there was a block in the way of me finding someone, but there was not. Sometimes if there is a block, you have to do

something, like wear a special ring to get rid of the obstacle. Sometimes you have to do a vow to the goddess. It is easier if you find a reason, because you can do something about it.

Clearly there are difficulties in meeting girls even when introductions are made and as time goes by the pool of available girls diminishes and people begin to think you have a problem. Prinjha (1999) reported that the average age for men to marry is 26 years, compared with 28 years for white men; for Indian women in the UK the average is 24 years and for white women 26 years. She also found that the men in her sample wanted young, slim, attractive women who were educated and smaller than them. Women wanted men who were well educated and had good career prospects and many preferred those who were vegetarian, teetotal and not divorced. Gujarati parents in Britain are said to be more restrictive and controlling of their daughters' whereabouts than their counterparts in India and Kenya, according to Prinjha (1999). She was told that in Bombay brothers encourage their sisters to go to pubs and nightclubs and in Nairobi they are more modern than they are here. Mumbai (Bombay) is a busy, cosmopolitan city compared with Ahmedabad, where there appeared to be more restrictions on the social lives of young, unmarried women and only during Navratri were these lifted to an extent. My own experiences with the joint family with whom I stayed in Ahmedabad reflected this concern. I was expected to tell them where I was going each day and with whom, and when I would be back. Although I am a married woman with grown-up children, the older members of the household treated me like a daughter.

Kinship obligations

Older people are usually cared for in the *ghar* but while they are able they will look after grandchildren, while the children's parents work. They expect no payment in monetary terms but do it out of a sense of family duty and obligation. An elderly grandfather in Gujarat told me he would like to spend time visiting temples and going on pilgrimages, especially to Dwarka and Dakor, two Hindu temples which have the special meaning of spiritual peace and are popular places to visit in old age. Men are often not so involved in spiritual matters while they are working, but once they retire these become particularly important. He has a moral duty, however, to look after his young grand-daughter while his son and daughter-in-law are at work; he expects that when he becomes infirm they will in turn care for him in his own home. Family duties and expectations remain central to kin relations in Ahmedabad and Harrow and mutual

reciprocity is taken for granted: the giving and the return may not always be equal, but there is an expectation that it will be so in time, even if not in this life.

Among kin, it is anticipated that help and favours will be given freely, but there is always the expectation of return. Older people expect to be able to give more freely to younger people, as Madhu Patel, a forty-five year old man who is an accountant and a member of the organising committee of the Patidar Association, explained to me:

I have an 80-year-old aunt who lives in Gujarat. I cannot challenge her because she is senior to me. She will not come here to stay, because I will have to give to her and elders are supposed to give to younger people... She will expect us to care for her when she cannot live on her own.

The close relationship is acknowledged both in word and practice there even though the old aunt lives in another place. One is obliged still to look after older kin. Madhu then referred to kin at large when he said:

Financial help is always there. It is our duty always to help relatives.

When the help and support of kin is not forthcoming the result can be devastating as shown by the following case.

Maya, a Hindu, married Fahad, a Muslim. She was born in Nairobi into a middle-class Lohana family; her father owned a shop and she was the only child. Her early childhood was happy and she had many friends. She enjoyed school and was one of the best in her class, but her life changed when her father died:

My Dad passed away when I was very young, about twelve years old. Then my mum and I went to live with her two sisters. The younger one was married and had a son called Nilesh. He was a real *bhai* (brother) to me and we were very close. When I was fourteen my mother passed away and I stayed with my two aunts. I was very close to the older one who never got married, I told her everything. She knew I was seeing Fahad and so did Nilesh, but they knew they were not allowed to talk about it, that was a secret we had. When I said I was going to marry Fahad, I had to leave the house because my uncle did not want me anymore. I had nowhere to go in Nairobi, so I came to live with my mother's other sister in Harrow.

Maya lived with her aunt in Harrow for six months, but her uncle would not talk to her because she was intending to marry a Muslim and the atmosphere in the house became intolerable. She decided to rent a flat in the area and shortly after that Fahad joined her and they were married in the registry office. Her relationship with her *masi* (mother's sister) and her *masa* (mother's sister's husband) became very difficult and she was no

longer accepted in their house. Her aunt used to telephone her every week when her uncle was out, but that was the only contact she had with them, her only relatives here, and Maya felt increasingly isolated. She felt this most acutely at times when kin support would usually be taken for granted, such as after the birth of her two children and when her husband was critically ill.

Maya and Fahad had two daughters and after each birth Maya's *masi* made special food for her for the first week, but offered her no other assistance or support. The following is an extract from my fieldnotes in May 1997:

Maya's second daughter was born a week ago and the baby appears healthy. Maya seems happy and relaxed today and enjoying breastfeeding. The flat is now very crowded, with two children and both parents in one small bedroom. Fahad now has a job working at the Post Office in the evenings, so is able to take the older girl to nursery school in the mornings, because Maya must stay inside for the first six weeks. A neighbour has been helping by collecting their daughter from nursery school and keeping her for the afternoon at her house, but she now says she wants to be paid for this and the family cannot afford this. Maya's *masi* has been doing the cooking for her and delivering the food in metal cans every night, but she says she can only do it for the first ten days because she has to go into hospital herself.

When I returned to visit the family on May 19th the situation had changed:

Maya looks tired and feels let down by her husband, who is expecting her to do the household chores less than two weeks after giving birth. He will not Hoover the carpet or wash dishes for her and expected her to do the ironing for him. Her *masi* had already stopped cooking for them and Maya was tearful about how alone she felt, without the support of her family or her husband's family. Her aunt has been rude to her about the name they have chosen for the baby, because it was a Muslim one and she wanted her to be called Meera. She had a secret *Chhati* (sixth day ceremony) with her *masi* for the baby, about which neither Fahad nor her *masa* knew. Her *masi* consulted the Gujarati calendar and decided on the auspicious time to do the ceremony, which was between 9pm and 10pm when it was still light and the weather not 'heavy'. During the ceremony they wrote baby's name in a book with a red pen and placed it under the mattress of her carrycot. Now the book has been put in a safe place for when she is older. Maya explained that this is the book of life and no one can look at it because God has written in it. Her *masi* will give her black threads to tie on the baby's wrists to protect her from evil. Maya worries that the baby makes unhappy faces in her sleep and this may be the evil trying to enter her body. When the child laughs in her sleep Maya sees this as the influence of the fairies.

Later that year, Fahad was seriously ill in hospital with an infectious disease and Maya's *masi* did not offer to help her at all, even by looking after her children, so that she could visit him. She was treated as if she were unclean and her *masi* told her that her *masa* had to have a cleansing bath after speaking to her on the telephone. After two years she still sorrows over the fact that no one helped when she needed it and even her husband's family did not come from Kenya to help. This has left her very bitter. She says that feeling deserted by your kin makes you feel there is no point in living any more. She is reluctant to seek help from the local Indian women's support group, because she does not trust that what she says will remain confidential and thinks that via the gossip network her family will find out. Maya values my friendship and support – so much so that she tells me we are kin that I am like her mother. The relationship with kin is so central to feelings of self and the meaning of existence that its lack can have a profoundly negative effect on the person's psychological well-being.

Usha Patel's story is different from Maya's because although they both had 'love marriages', Usha married a Hindu man from a different Patel caste and although her family have now accepted him the situation was strained at first. Usha is a lively woman who wears Western clothes; she is a university graduate and enjoys reading Indian novels. She lives with her husband in a luxury flat in Harrow, has one two-year-old daughter and is expecting another child soon; she has close natal-kin support from her sister and mother. Usha was also born in Kenya and came to Britain when she was five years old with her parents and three older sisters. The following is an extract from a taped interview with Usha in March 1999, when I asked her to tell me about her family.

We came to the UK in 1974 and had no blood relatives here as such. My father was the only one in his family who ventured out of India. He had five other brothers and he was the second eldest. He worked hard and sent money back to India to his family. Whereas my mother's side is completely different, all her family are in the States. We didn't have any relatives here, just friends and friends of friends and people my Mum and Dad called relatives, but they were just people they had known from the villages. We stayed with them for a few weeks and then my Dad managed to rent a house and get a job pretty quickly. Then we moved to south London, that's where we were for five or six years, and then my Dad did the usual thing, he bought a shop. We moved to Reading and that is where I grew up. My Dad continued with the shop in Reading until about seven years ago. It was doing really well, it was a huge shop – a supermarket, but with all the competition the rent went sky high in the late 80s and he could not maintain it. So he handed the lease back and is now retired and is quite old and he called it a day.

I asked Usha whether her sisters had arranged marriages.

My oldest sister is disabled and lives with my parents, but the other two had arranged marriages within the caste. One of these worked well and they are very happy, but my other sister ended up getting divorced. It wasn't the man who was the problem, it was his family. She was expected to live with them and she did not have much of a say in what went on. He did not really fight for her, so she decided after six months that it was not for her. It was very difficult, because my Dad would not speak to her for two years after the divorce, even though they were living in the same house.

What about her own marriage? How had her family reacted?

When it came to me, I think I was expected to go for an arranged marriage, but I didn't. It was quite strange because I have always been the youngest and in my Dad's eyes I could do nothing wrong, I had always been spoilt. The most difficult thing I have had to do in my entire life was to tell my Dad that I wanted to get married. It was just like, he had always seen me as this innocent girl, and then one day I go home and say Dad I have met someone and want to marry him. It came as a big shock to him. I had led quite a private life really. For six years I was away from home and just came back at weekends. There was a problem. Although my husband is a Patel, he is a different type of Patel to me, we are different castes. To me, I had not even realised. When my father asked me what type of Patel he was, I said I didn't know. He did not know either what type he was, so he asked his family. He came back and said they were Gouri Patel, my Dad said no, you can't marry him, they are a lower caste. I said what do you mean? For a month, my father refused to meet them, but then eventually he agreed to meet him and his family. I had already met his family and they were happy about us.

Did Usha's father want her to marry into a higher caste?

Yes he did, but in the end he came round and now they absolutely love my husband. But to begin with it was very difficult. His family was pretty upset by my Dad's response, when he told them I was not marrying into that family. Although they are a really lovely family, very respectable, but because in the past they had this name attached to them and my Dad saying no, no, made it very difficult for them. The first year, it was difficult between the two families. I didn't have the ideal wedding because we just wanted to get married, we just let our parents get on with everything. They arranged the wedding and we did everything by the book, which I regret now and wish I had more say in it. We just wanted to get married and we went along with what they said. Now both families get on really well.

Usha received help from her older sister, Dipti, when her two children were born. Her mother is elderly and has to care for a disabled adult daughter, so was unable to have her to stay in her home, so she went to stay with Dipti for the first six weeks after birth.

The children call Dipti 'mummy' and she has remained involved in the children's care, co-sleeping with them when they stay the night. This intensive involvement by female kin in the care of children, will be addressed in chapter 8, but this help and support is expected and taken-for-granted.

Gift exchange between kin

People say that gifts are given to cement relationships between the two families at weddings and with the wider community, but these gifts have to be planned carefully according to strict caste conventions so as to reflect the social relationships entailed. Some women have told me that many families today give gifts because they want to. There are some general conventions that most people seem to follow, For example, the numbers of gifts given must be auspicious – that is three, five or seven; if you give money, you would give £11 not £10, or £51 not £50, or £5.25 not £5 because any rounded number would be considered inauspicious. A man sits at a table in the wedding hall, making a careful written account of all presents given. Alison Shaw (1997) describes a similar process at Pakistani weddings, where the type, amount and value of the gifts are written in a record and announced to everyone. When I arrived at a wedding with my wrapped present, I was told that I was not to give it to the bride or groom but to a man who would ask what it was and how much it cost. Reflecting on this now, I realise that no thank-you letters are written either, because the expectation of reciprocity in other ways stands, as a man in his late fifties explained to me:

There are no words for please and thank you in the Gujarati language. There is always the expectation that any help given will be returned. Your reputation depends on it.

The dowry system still exists but not in the extremes described in the 1960s by Pocock (1973), where families never recover from the financial effects. Prinjha (1999) reported that many young people had not heard of dowries, but refer to the exchange of gifts of money, jewellery or saris at weddings. The Patel community today still has a reputation for insisting on gold being given as presents to wider kin. From my observations at other weddings, however, one a Kshatriya and one a Brahman, the presents between the bride's and groom's families consisted mostly of large numbers of saris, which were displayed for all to see, as at Pakistani weddings described by Alison Shaw:

The display... represents the web of relationships in which any household is entangled, and as such is also an important indication of a family's standing among its relatives and friends. To receive only a few gifts from others in *lena-dena* would cause shame and would be a measure of the poverty of that family's inter-household ties. If gifts are not forthcoming, there is considerable ill-feeling on the part of the bride's family, in much the same way that a groom's parents are dissatisfied if they do not receive the amount of dowry expected (Shaw 1997: 148).

The exchange of presents begins at the engagement ceremony and then continues through the wedding ceremony, the bride's family being expected to give more than the groom's. After the wedding, the bride's family has to give her presents at special times, such as Diwali and Rakshabandhan. Mr and Mrs Pandya told me that if groom's family is wealthier than the bride's, then expensive presents, like gold, are expected. Although many people will say that the dowry system has disappeared, this system of giving continues until the death of the parents. Mr Pandya saw this as an unfortunate practice in Gujarati society, which can cause great hardship in poorer families. Visiting by kin during festivals, especially Diwali, is expected and if not followed people risk losing kin status, as I found last year. Mita, one of my informants, who has adopted me as a member of her kin group because I stayed with her family in Ahmedabad, rang me after Diwali.

Alison, where were you last week? Were you on holiday? Was someone in the family seriously ill? I couldn't believe that you did not come to our house during Diwali. You know you were expected to come and eat sweet foods with us. What happened?

The anger in Mita's voice shocked me. I had seriously failed in my duties as a member of their kin group. My British reserve about not visiting unless invited had made me act in a way considered rude and left me wondering whether I would have behaved differently in India.

Alison Shaw also mentions the wider aspects of reciprocity demonstrated in the *lena-dena* arrangements. The Pakistani women she describes spend much of their time and energy negotiating these kin and wider sociability networks, but I have not found the same arrangements between Gujarati women.

Central to *lena-dena* is the creation of trust and the expectation of reciprocity. A gift is given in the knowledge that at a later date, at the next appropriate occasion, a return will be made. To break this trust involves considerable loss of face and, indeed, may even result in the termination of an inter-household relationship. As a result, the system is rarely abused (Shaw 1997:148).

Pocock sees gift-giving among Patidars as more complex and involving no simple reciprocity. Relatives who give gifts may be thanked coolly and at their next visit given special attention. Receiving of presents must always be done without emotion, lest the receiver appears greedy.

It is proper to demur when the gift is offered, but to refuse outright is an insult (Pocock 1972:100).

I gave a small gift to an elderly Brahman woman, when invited for lunch with her and her husband. She took the gift, an embroidered tea towel I had brought back from holiday, looked at it and put it down on a table without saying anything. She gave the impression of being somewhat offended by the gift and certainly not grateful and I felt that I had in some way failed to behave correctly; perhaps, as a Brahman, she expected to be a giver rather than a receiver, or perhaps it was an age discrepancy and she, being twenty years my senior, should be giving to me? The rest of the meal was friendly and relaxed and this episode has not spoiled our long-term relationship. This incident happened early in my fieldwork and marked the beginning of my understanding about the complexity of gift giving. Laidlaw (1995) describes a similar reaction in the giving of gifts to Jain ascetics in Rajasthan.

They show no pleasure in receiving what they accept, and leave without expressing any gratitude (Laidlaw 1995:321).

Before I went to Gujarat I got detailed advice on appropriate presents, some of which I gave to my host family's patrilineal kin whom I met at a ceremony held in their flat for a two-year-old child. They all seemed pleased by my gifts and accepted them openly; indeed these gifts seemed to help my being accepted as one of the household.

Presents are given by *bhai* (brother) to *bahen* (sister) at Raksha-bandhan when she ties a *rakhi* (bracelet made of woven, coloured threads) on his wrist for protection and he reciprocates by giving her a present. At Bhaibij the *bhai* visits his *bahen's* house and gives her a present and she cooks him a meal. I will describe these in more detail in the following chapter.

Hospitality in Gujarati households is always generous; food is supplied in abundant quantity and more is usually given than can be eaten (see Pocock 1972). To give food to guests is a way to gain favours with god, because you can never be certain that the guest is not a god in disguise, so he or she has to be honoured like one. The treatment given to guests carries with it no expectation of return, so is not seen in terms of normal

reciprocity. Punjabi Hindus in Delhi told me that Gujaratis have a reputation with other Indians as being very hospitable; honouring their guests, and this practice went with them to East Africa and the UK.

Historically, when Gujaratis first arrived in the UK, the reciprocal relations they had with kin and wider sociability networks proved invaluable to them. Most came with very little money and those from East Africa were allowed to bring only £50, even though many had left considerable wealth behind. Close kinship ties enabled pooling of resources and borrowing of money to set up businesses here, which in many cases has led to successful enterprises. One man explained the anxiety involved in borrowing money:

Your relationship with the money-lender was vital. We never went to the bank, we went to people. We had no collaterals, you lost sleep until you paid your debt. Your wife, brother, everyone gave what they could to buy the shop. Your reputation depended on it. Returning help is understood and vital.

Gujarati people have high expectations that kin will always help in whatever way possible, in emotional, practical and financial terms. When working well, kin support and reciprocity can benefit all age groups, childcare leading to care of the elderly, sharing of duties as well as the pleasures of festivals and rituals. The conventions surrounding gift-giving are complex, however, and involve careful understanding of status, in caste or social class terms, and future obligation. Many younger people today have told me that they give presents on special occasion because they want to, and this has nothing to do with convention. Perhaps there is a move towards a more Western pattern of giving, which may need further investigation.

To be 'one of us' today in Britain may mean sharing the same *atak* (surname) or caste, but is becoming increasingly related to being Gujarati and Hindu or Jain. The word 'community' when used by Gujaratis usually refers to caste or *samaj* (caste association) membership and sense of difference, rather than their place within a hierarchical system, but the term can also be used to refer to the wider Gujarati community. *Gnat* and *jati* (caste) are rarely used and many prefer the terms 'community', 'in ours', or 'class', which may be thought of as more progressive and not stuck in the structural inequalities of India. Class inequalities and associated socioeconomic differences may be posing more problems than caste in Britain today.

Caste identity is still important as a sense of difference with caste associations enabling a corporate caste identity to continue. Vertovec (2000) argues that, in Britain, these identities have produced a barrier to joint Hindu activity, other than that which takes place at a superficial level. The leaders of caste associations, who may be elected to represent Hindu interests, identify so strongly with their own castes that people of other castes may deny they have any power. Vertovec suggests that the divisions caused by caste identity are stronger among Gujaratis, especially those from East Africa, than among other South Asians, such as Punjabis. Caste difference centres around matters of family status, patronage, marriage, leadership and voluntary organisations. In mixed Punjabi/Gujarati communities, however, the sense of a joint Hindu community has emerged (Knott 1986; in Vertovec 2000:25) where caste identity becomes unimportant. In Harrow and Wembley, this sense of caste difference among Gujaratis continues to be strong and may be perpetuated through the influence of the caste associations. Jain interests are also strongly represented by caste associations and notably the Oswal Association in Potters Bar in north London. Vertovec contrasts the British situation with that in Trinidad, where caste identity has become insignificant within the Hindu diaspora, and a sense of 'general Hindu communalism' has developed, together with a single religious tradition, 'facilitated commensality, congregational worship and other patterns of consociation' (Vertovec 2000:26). He suggests that commensality among Gujaratis in Britain may be limited to large, public events but may be uncommon in the domestic setting. My data indicate that there may be a generational change here with younger people happy to eat with any caste, but older people still reluctant to do so. I have observed people of different castes sharing food together at temples during festivals, both in Britain and Gujarat but within the household commensality tends to be confined to kin groups, including close friends.

Kin ties continue to be strong in Britain and India and joint families the ideal, although members do not necessarily reside in the same building. The husband's family home or *ghar* is where all important kin activities take place, where food is eaten together, where children learn what it is to be Gujarati and especially where they learn the conventions of respect and reciprocity. Present-giving and exchange of favours follow complex patterns within the household, outside kin and wider community, reinforcing relations of hierarchy and seniority, within a moral framework, adding to a person's *karma* and standing with their god. More investigation is required to establish whether there has

indeed been a generational change here, with younger people who have been educated in Britain changing their ideas of gift-exchange. Kinship is strong in all South Asian groups and Gujaratis here may be following similar networks of dependency and obligations to others (Bauman 1995:736; Shaw 2000:227), but without comparative studies it is impossible to suggest that one is stronger or more intricate than another.

Chapter 3 Women in Kinship

Rekka, our thirteen-year-old daughter gets angry with us, because she says we are not using the correct terms. We tell her that there is no such thing as cousins – they are considered brothers and sisters. She tells us that these are not correct terms, that is how she is taught at school. For us, the brother-sister relationship is unique, all other relationships are built around it.

Rekka's parents reflect some of the confusion and resentment felt by some Gujarati children educated in the UK, who find their parents' and the schools' definitions of brothers, sisters and cousins do not agree. The words used indicate not only the relation between kin, but also obligations entailed, as do all other Gujarati kinship terms (see figure 3, p.72). The special relationship between siblings across sex is the starting point from which others arise and extends across *kutumb* (joint family), caste, and clan. The bond between *bahen* (sister) and *bhai* (brother) is celebrated every year in the festivals and rituals of *Rasksha-bandhan* and *Bhaibij*. There is enthusiastic support for these two events from women and men as well as from children of all ages. The people identified as one's brothers or sisters may not be consanguineal brothers or sisters, because cousins will be included here, as will those friends who are considered close enough by virtue of friendship, common locality of origin, or common relatives.

This chapter concerns itself with these links between brothers and sisters as well as with other people in the household, wider kin and sociability networks, and the wider Gujarati population. It explores the way children experience kin relationships in the household and come to realise that the moral codes of respect and duty are an integral part of the bonds that are made there. Women arrange the meeting of wider kin around special rituals and festivals and are responsible for transmitting moral knowledge to the next generation. A festival that all women look forward to and enjoy is Navratri (nine nights), and this is described below from my observations in Britain and Gujarat, as are the conventions surrounding clothes and colour symbolism.

I argue that women are not only involved in household matters, as suggested by Tambs-Lyche (1972:7), but are concerned with the moral and spiritual well-being of the wider kin group. Similarly Josephine Reynell has reported how Jain women in Rajasthan were seen as mediators channelling supernatural forces for the benefit of their families (Reynell 1985:275). The oldest woman in a Gujarati *kutumb* is expected to offer advice on all occasions from weddings to funerals and all life-cycle rituals. Mrs Pandya is an

elderly Brahman woman whose mother died in 2001; for her this responsibility weighs heavily at times.

I am expected to be wise and know all the answers to everyone's questions. I have to attend all important events. I was recently in Birmingham for my niece's wedding and had to be there for five days. I was so tired when I got home, I slept for two days.

Men attend rituals but tend to gather on the periphery and talk together, as I have observed at weddings, *bhajan* (hymn singing gatherings) and life-cycle rituals where, apart from the priest who is always a man, women conduct the proceedings. At the *chhati* (six day ceremony after birth) held for his new grandson, Mr Shah told me that men were not involved at all in these rituals in the past; they did not even come. Now they attend, but are not allowed to take part; the women arrange everything and call upon the goddess.

Moral continuity can be seen through the way these rituals continue through the generations. Gujarati kinship terms used in rituals and elsewhere represent the roles and obligations of participants as kin. For example the *foi* (father's sister) plays an important role at the *chhati*, but if the father does not have a sister, another woman who has not lost a baby will become the *foi* in the ritual and will take on future obligations to the child. Kinship terms used at other times represent the closeness of the relationship rather than the consanguineal or marriage link. Close, valued friends may be called by kinship terms that accord with the nature of the relationship and take into account age, sex and so on; the expectation is that those so-called will take on the obligations appropriate to the kin-term by which they are addressed.

The bond between *bhai* and *bahen* (brother and sister)

The bond between *bhai* (brother) and *bahen* (sister) is the most important and the one around which others revolve. The relationship entails certain obligations, as well as warmth and expectations to follow specific rituals that I describe below. The bond can be between two *bhayo* (brothers) or two *baheno* (sisters) as well as between men and women. When there is no blood or marriage relationship it can cause confusion for other British people and Gujaratis, along with other South Asians, may be heard trying to explain the relationship as cousin-brother, or cousin-sister. Madhu, Deepa's husband, described the confusion this caused at his work when he asked for time off to go to a funeral.

I had a cousin in Ahmedabad who died last year. I never called him cousin because he was a real brother to me. When I asked for time off to go to his funeral, I was told that he is only your cousin, why are you so upset? They were reluctant to give me time off, but did in the end.

The festival of *Raksha-bandhan* (the tying of threads), celebrates the special relationship between *bhai* (brother) and *bahen* (sister), and is held every August. A small ritual is performed during which brightly coloured threads, which have been twisted together to make bracelets called *rakhi*, is tied by a woman on her *bhai*'s right wrist. This is an outward expression of close emotional ties and obligations and the *bhai* is offered protection by his *bahen*. I have been told that women used to perform this ritual for Rajput men before they went to fight in battles and that wearing *rakhi* kept them safe. A woman in Britain may send *rakhi* to her *bhai* abroad in India, East Africa, the USA, Canada, or elsewhere. A man in Ahmedabad proudly showed me the *rakhi* he was wearing – sent from England by his *bahen*. He would wear his *rakhi* until *Dussehra* (the day after the end of *Navratri*) and then tie it on a tree or put it into a flowing river; it must not be thrown away. The following is an extract from my field notes (4/8/2000):

Maya tells me she is going to Ealing Road in Wembley to buy *rakhi* for her *bhai*. On the way there she tells me about the significance of *Raksha-bandhan*. She says you must send *rakhi* to all your brothers every year, even if you do not see them or like them. One of her brothers is in hospital and she must send one there. She will buy more expensive ones for the ones she likes and some for her *bhabhi* (brother's wife) as well. She says if you see your brother that day (August 15th 2000) you must put a *chandlo* (red spot) on his forehead with your right ring finger, with some grains of rice on top, and then give him some sweet food, like *penda*, which you must put straight into his mouth, and then tie a thread around his wrist. *Penda* is a sweet ball made of wheat and is used on

special, happy occasions. If your *bhai* is married and has sons, you will give *penda*, but if he has daughters you give *jalebi* (sweet strands of wheat deep fried). *Jalebi* is also used on happy occasions but does not have the deep significance of *penda*. Maya looks radiant and excited about the whole ritual and I ask her why this is so important to her. She tells me that this is the most important relationship in families; it makes everyone warm and close and binds everyone in the family together. If she were to forget one, she would risk losing her relationship with the whole family. We arrive at Ealing Road and it is a bright sunny day. There are stalls everywhere in front of shops decked with brightly coloured *rakhi*, and an array of cards with sentimental messages on them, such as: 'Rakhi ties a brother and sister in a relationship beyond time and above any measure' and 'No distance is a barrier when the thoughts, feelings and souls of two people are united, especially if they happen to be brother and sister.'

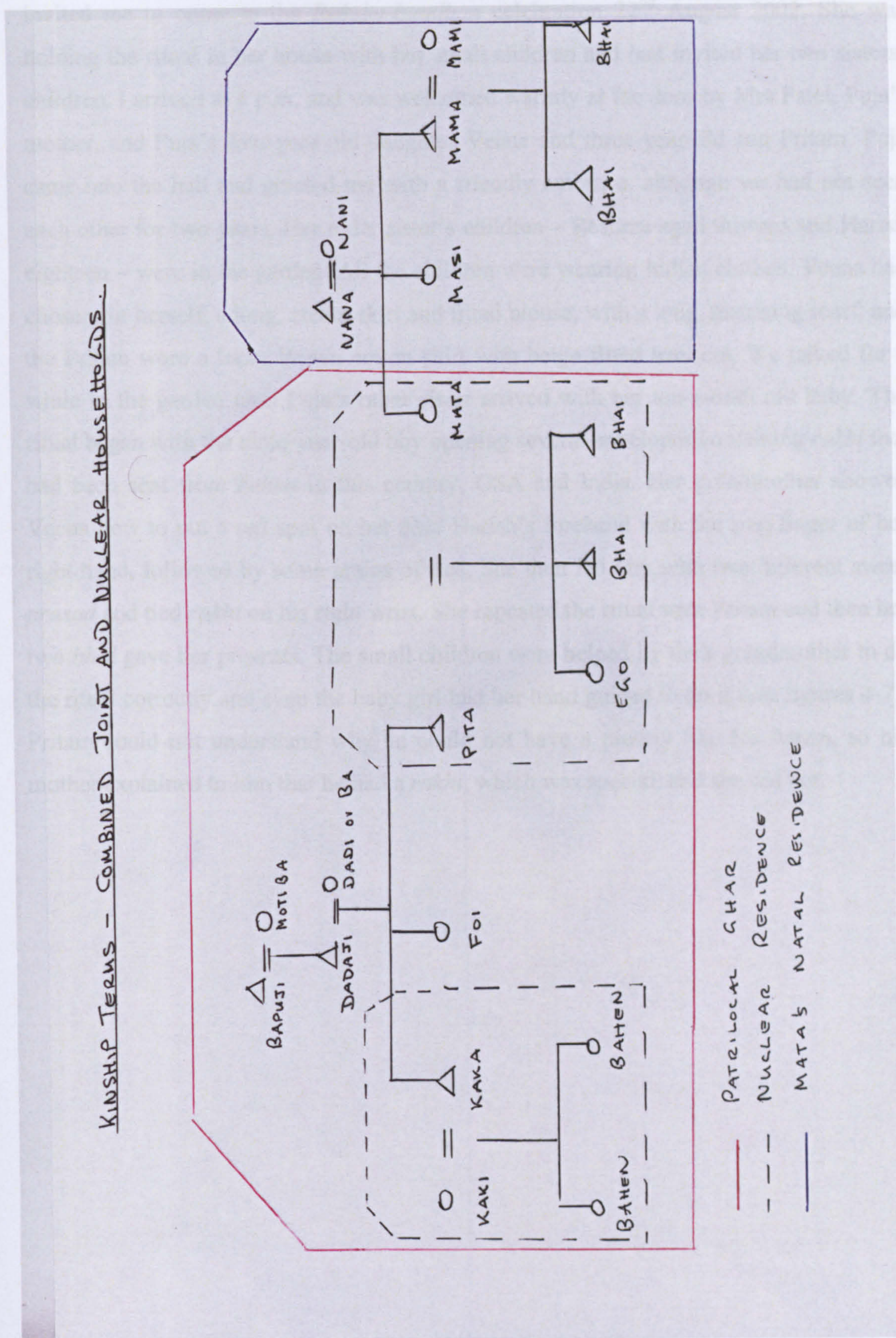
The next week Maya telephoned me to invite me to go with her and her two daughters, aged seven and three, to the house of her *Masi* (mother's sister) where she would tie *rakhi* on the wrists of her *bhai*'s sons. She was doing the ritual on behalf of her daughters who were too young to do it themselves; the little girls call these three boys aged ten, eight and six, *bhai*, and their mother's aunt *Nani ma* (maternal grandmother, in a respectful form). Maya explained that her mother's sister is the only woman who has cared for her in the UK, because her real mother died in Kenya, twenty years ago, and this is why her daughters call her *Nani ma*, because they have no other grandmother here, and their father's mother (*Dadi ma*) lives in Kenya. Her aunt is part of a household belonging to the Lohana caste; they occupy a detached house in a street where wealthy business and professional families live. Maya herself lives four miles away in a two-bedroom council flat; she said she found the contrast of their wealth and her relative poverty hard to take. She has a difficult relationship with her uncle, who disapproved of her marriage to a Muslim; he does not like her visiting the house. The following account is taken from my field notes on 15/8/2000:

On a sunny day in August, I walk with Maya and her two daughters down the tree-lined street to her aunt's large, detached house. Maya is wearing a yellow Punjabi dress, decorated in the front with pink and green diamond shapes and a pink scarf. Her younger daughter is likewise wearing a turquoise Punjabi suit with pink patterns on the front and a pink scarf, but her older daughter prefers a black and white T-shirt and leggings. The two girls are excited about seeing their *Nani-ma* and ask their mother in Gujarati which family members they will see. Maya rings the doorbell, which is answered by a well-dressed businessman in his thirties, who says *kem chho* [how are you?] to us and leaves. We walk into a large, carpeted hall, with an untidy pile of shoes by the door. We remove our shoes, leave them in the pile and walk into the living room, which is spacious, with two

sofas and matching chairs around the walls, religious pictures on the walls but few ornaments. Maya's aunt, wearing a green sari, is standing in the middle of the floor in a commanding manner. She greets us by putting the palms of her hands together and bowing her head, saying '*jayse Krishna*' and we respond by doing the same. We repeat the greeting to an elderly lady sitting on a sofa; she is wearing a pale purple and white sari with a floral border, indicating that she is a widow. I am told later that she is Maya's aunt's mother-in-law. She seems surprised that I greet her in Gujarati and Maya explains that I am a friend who is learning about the way Gujaratis live and that I have come to watch her tie *rakhis* and she seems happy about this explanation. Maya leaves the room and I follow her into the kitchen, where she assembles a tray of *kanku* (red powder), rice, a *divo* (candle made of *ghee* and a wick) and some Quality Street chocolates and *penda* (sweet, dough balls), she explains to me that children do not like *penda* very much, so she gives them chocolates. Neeta, the wife of Maya's aunt's oldest son is a woman of about thirty-five, dressed in blue trousers and a white shirt. She comes into the kitchen to meet us, smiling broadly and Maya's two daughters run into the hall to meet her three sons. Neeta's husband was in hospital at the time, so Maya will send a *rakhi* to him. Once the *choka* (tray) had been assembled, with a *satio* (Hindu swastika) drawn on it and a *sopari* (betel nut) in one corner, we move into the living room to begin the *rakhi*-tying ritual. Maya begins by lighting the *divo* and summoning Neeta's oldest son to come to her. She puts *kanku* on his forehead and sticks a few grains of rice on it, ties the *rakhi* around his right wrist and then places a chocolate straight into his mouth. She repeats the process with the other two boys ending with the youngest.

Once the ritual is over Maya blows out the candle and indicates to me that it is time to leave the room. She says '*jayse Krishna*' to the old lady and prompts me to do the same. She took the tray into the kitchen and I follow her. There her aunt is preparing food and insists that we have some with them. I apologise, saying I have to leave, but I agree to have some *kerino ras* (mango juice). She hands me a plastic box to take home, it contains small pots of vegetable curry, *puri* (fried puffed wheat balls), rice, lentil cakes and *jalebi*. Maya and her aunt say goodbye to me at the door as I thank them and put on my shoes, while the aunt invites me to return soon. Maya says she will stay and eat the meal, but will leave before her uncle returns.

Figure 3: Kinship terms



Puja, a Patel woman who was a member of the group of nine women I met in 1997, invited me to come to the *Raksha-bandhan* celebration 22nd August 2002. She was holding the ritual in her house with her small children and had invited her two sisters' children. I arrived at 4 p.m. and was welcomed warmly at the door by Mrs Patel, Puja's mother, and Puja's four-year-old daughter Veena and three-year-old son Pritam. Puja came into the hall and greeted me with a friendly embrace, although we had not seen each other for two years. Her older sister's children – Reshma aged thirteen and Harish eighteen – were in the garden. All the children were wearing Indian clothes; Veena had chosen for herself, a long, cream skirt and fitted blouse, with a long, matching scarf; and the Pritam wore a loose brown cotton shirt with beige fitted trousers. We talked for a while in the garden until Puja's other sister arrived with her ten-month old baby. The ritual began with the three-year-old boy opening several envelopes containing *rakhi* that had been sent from *bahen* in this country, USA and India. Her grandmother showed Veena how to put a red spot on her *bhai* Harish's forehead with the ring finger of her right hand, followed by some grains of rice. She then fed him with two different sweet *prasad* and tied *rakhi* on his right wrist. She repeated the ritual with Pritam and then her two *bhai* gave her presents. The small children were helped by their grandmother to do the ritual correctly and even the baby girl had her hand guided to do it (see figures 4-7). Pritam could not understand why he could not have a present like his *bahen*, so his mother explained to him that he had a *rakhi*, which was special, and she did not.

Figure 4: *Raksha-bandhan*. *Bahen* puts grains of rice on her *nano* (small) *bhai*'s forehead.



Figure 5: *Raksha-bandhan*. *Bahen* gives her *moto* (older) *bhai* sweet food.



Figure 6: *Raksha-bandhan*. *Bahen* ties a *rakhi* on her *bhai's* right wrist.



Rakhi is the last day of *Dussehra* and is the day when a *bhai* goes to his *bahen's* house to give her presents and she cooks him a meal, accompanied by a great deal of excitement, love and light-hearted teasing. During the evening festival of *Rati*, normal conventions between men and women are relaxed and *bhai* will chase their *bahen* and try to throw *chandan* powder over them. Unlike other South Asian languages, Gujarati only has one word for brother and one for sister; younger brother is *chhota bhai*, older brother is *moti bhai*, younger sister is *chhoti bahen* and older sister is *moti bahen*.

In January 2002 I asked Maya to tell me more about the special relationship between *bhai* and *bahen*.

Figure 7: *Raksha-bandhan*. *Ba* guides baby *bahen*'s hand to put a *chandlo* on her *bhai*'s forehead.



Bhaibij is the last day of *Diwali* and is the day when a *bhai* goes to his *bahen*'s house to give her presents and she cooks him a meal, accompanied by a great deal of excitement, fun, and light-hearted teasing. During the spring festival of *Holi*, normal conventions between men and women are relaxed and *bhai* will chase their *bahen* and try to throw coloured powders over them. Unlike other South Asian languages, Gujarati only has one word for brother and one for sister; younger brother is *nano bhai*, older brother is *moto bhai*, younger sister is *nani bahen* and older sister is *moti bahen*.

In January 2002 I asked Maya to tell me more about the special relationship between *bhai* and *bahen*:

If a *bahen* has a problem that she cannot tell her own family, then she will go to her *bhai* and he will help her. He will also tease her and joke with her sometimes, but she will always have respect for him. If he is younger than her she will call him by his name, but if he is married or older she will call him his name and *bhai* afterwards, such as Nikhil-*bhai*.

I asked if a *bahen* can ever marry a *bhai* and Maya looked horrified, as if even suggesting such a thing was unacceptable. She said:

A *bahen* can never marry someone she calls *bhai*. You would never marry your brother would you?

Would her aunt mind if one evening Maya went out on her own to visit her *bhai*?

She will not mind. When you are with your *bhai* you are always safe.

She added that as her husband is Muslim, he would like their daughter to marry his brother's son in Kenya, but this practice goes against everything she has been brought up to believe about who you can marry and she would never agree to it.

This special relationship between *bhai* and *bahen* gives a woman freedom to socialise with and obtain support from a man with whom she feels safe because any sexual relationship between them is out of the question and is regarded as incest. By the same token, any solitary meetings between women and men who do *not* stand to each other as *bahen* and *bhai* are unacceptable. Such behaviour in a woman would meet with severe disapproval from her female kin. Bauman's (1995) description of cousin bonds among young people in Southall makes an interesting parallel here. He reports that cousin claims were made across 'different kinship traditions and marriage practices, and also with regard to different migratory histories and post-migration agenda' (Bauman 1995:734). This plural process included youth from Sikh, Hindu and Muslim South Asians, Afro-Caribbean and some 'white' backgrounds. Many Punjabi parents felt that if their children insisted on going out at night, if they went with a cousin, whether genealogical cousin or not, they would be safe, because they would know the parents and their whereabouts could be checked. Gujaratis tend to refer to *bhai* and *bahen* bonds, whether genealogically related or not, but rarely refer to cousins. The annual tying of the *rakhi* (thread bracelet) emphasises the mutual protection symbolised through this action.

Networks of Gossip.

Women commonly talk together about each other and if a woman's behaviour meets with disapproval or contravenes social convention, she may become the target of gossip – something every woman fears. Gossip is the penalty even for relatively minor mistakes; thus Mina, a young mother of twenty-two from the Lohana caste, told me:

My great aunt passed away in Windsor and I will go to the funeral tomorrow. I will wear a black and white sari; black or white can be worn but no bright colours. If you do not do this, people will talk and say you do not respect the dead.

The fear of 'talk' compels women to follow behavioural and dress conventions when at public gatherings, such as funerals and festivals and after life events such as births and deaths.

Maya told me in 2001, that she could not attend a *garba* (dance) during Navratri because her uncle had just passed away and people would see her, talk about her and ask how she could enjoy herself at such a time.

Maya spoke to me (on 19/5/1997) after the birth of her second daughter, about how unhappy she was because she was not receiving support from her aunt because her uncle disapproved of her marriage to a Muslim.

Maya feels resentful that her husband's family have done nothing for her, and do not care. She is tearful about how she feels and says I am the only person she can talk to. Her aunt has been rude to her over the name they have chosen for the baby, because it is a Muslim name and she wanted her to be called Meera. She feels that everyone is now gossiping about her.

Marie Gillespie (1995) in her study in Southall of television viewing and social change reports that the pervasiveness of gossip and rumour makes these powerful instruments to control behaviour.

Gossip and rumour are seen as one of the greatest threats both to a young person's freedom and to family honour, or *izzat*, in Southall. Gossip among adults is seen to be more pernicious, malicious and harmful than among young people since it usually has more far-reaching and dangerous consequences. It is very rare that peer gossip will be revealed to parents because complicity among youth is high. One of their consistent condemnations of Southall concerns the pervasiveness of gossip among adults and the instrumental role it plays in social control, especially in the surveillance of gender relations (Gillespie 1995:150).

Gillespie emphasises that gossip and rumour are not peculiar to South Asian groups and anthropologists have reported on the pressures put on women to conform to social norms in studies ranging from working class women in London (Bott 1957) to the Tikopea (Firth 1956). In the former, she argues that gossip is 'one of the chief means whereby norms are stated, tested and affirmed' (Gillespie 1995:150). The Tikopea however, she suggests that 'certain types of rumour serve as social instruments by which individuals or groups attempt to improve their status' (Gillespie 1995:151). My female informants commonly refer to their concern about what people might think if they behave in an unacceptable way, or dress inappropriately. *Izzat* is a Muslim term not used by Hindu Gujaratis, although Katbamna (2000) also reports it used by Gujaratis. The social standing and honour of a family can be seriously affected by the spreading of bad rumours and gossip about an individual.

Attachment to the house

Some of my Brahman informants have also described a close attachment not only to the kin with whom one lives, but to the house itself and to inanimate objects associated with it, such as the car. This is *varsna* – an attachment that has to be broken after death, through a special ritual, so that the spirit can be freed to move on to the next reincarnation. The implications of *varsna* for kinship are profound, because these material ties are centred within the spirit and the moral obligations and duties they entail continue throughout life to be anchored in the substance of the person. Mrs Pandya, an elderly Brahman woman explained to me on 12/5/98 how she felt about *varsna*:

Varsna is the attachment you have to the house, the family, the car and all material objects in the house. After someone dies a special ceremony is conducted so that the spirit can be freed from the attachment to kin and released from this life to travel to the next. During this ceremony a piece of dough is cut into three, one for the brother, one for the father and one for the grandparents.

Mr Pandya had a different view on necessity for this ceremony:

I do not want this ceremony done after my death because I feel I have done nothing wrong to anyone in my life, so I will not bother anyone after my death.

At a later visit to the house in 2002 Mrs Pandya told me more about *varsna*:

Varsna is tied up with the four stages of life. In the first twenty-five years you gain knowledge; in the next twenty-five you marry; in the third stage you delegate and give up your material possessions

to your children, so you give up your attachment to these objects; in the fourth stage you give your last twenty-five years to prayer and meditation. Now I am old, I am not buying any more saris. I am giving my jewellery to my daughter-in-law; these things are no good to me in the next life.

Some Hindu Gujarati people see their bodies and spirits linked through *varsna* to kin, the house and the material possessions in it, and the person is constituted through these. To know a Gujarati person, you have to know the personality of his or her kin, house, and possessions; this is not a static state, but one that is constantly changing and adjusting itself to shifting kin obligations, stage of life and wealth. A comparison could be made here with Daniel's description of the Tamil person, which suggests that the equilibrium of bodily substances needs to be maintained and balanced, and body boundaries are fluid, linking not only with other people but also with the house, or the soil of the village.

One begins to know the person by knowing the personality of the soil on which he lives. (Daniels 1984:9)

The attachment to worldly objects and kin has to be weakened as old age approaches so that the spirit may be free to pass on to the next incarnation; if this does not happen the spirit may linger and worry others as a ghost. The spirit of the person is one linked and attached to the *ghar* (house), its contents and to other kin and obligations to them. Moral duties such as respect for elders and obligations to kin, close friends and the wider Gujarati community, become part of the person and the standing he or she has with the gods. One who fails in *dharma*, moral duties, has not only let down a relative or close friend, but has ignored the wishes of the god and lost status position at death.

Shared substance and respect

Kinship is embedded not only in personal relationships, caste, sociality networks and wider Gujarati community concerns, but is central to the spiritual procession of a person through life. Children learn about relationships, obligations and respect through the dynamics of their early contact with kin. To view kinship purely in structural terms of marriage, caste and social obligations is to miss this central core, which informs not only the relationships but also the motivation for them.

The complexities of these relationships and the processual nature of kinship in India have been addressed by Inden and Nicholas (1977) and Lambert (2000) who give a

dynamic view, rather than the traditional rather static approach via caste, hierarchy and status roles. Inden and Nicholas suggest that 'one's own people' could be family, caste, patrilineage or clan, and also people with whom one shares a close social relationship. Lambert argues that, in the Rajasthani context, relatedness can flow with shared substance in common locality, adoption of children, nurturance and feeding. These close ties can be more enduring and extend beyond personal relationships and carry with them rights and responsibilities as though the persons involved were biologically related (Lambert 2000:75). The intricacies of relations between kin who shared no consanguineal or marriage link, became a real challenge to me during my fieldwork. Through my own personal relationships with families, and by virtue of being 'adopted' as kin by two families, I have some understanding of the moral code expected of me. Kin who have no affinal or agnatic relationship have been referred as 'fictive kin' in some anthropological literature. I prefer to go along with the views of my informants and to see such people as kin who may belong to different castes, who are given this status because of close, enduring social ties.

The domain of intracaste affinal and agnatic relations, which has conventionally been taken to comprise the whole domain of kinship in northern India, does not encompass all the forms of relatedness that are locally recognised and valued (Lambert 2000:74).

Close friends who enjoy a warm, enduring relationship are given kinship status. The extracts below from a discussion I had with two eleven-year-old girls shows how close their two families have become. Both girls belong to the Patel community, but to different sub-castes. We decided to meet on April 4th 2001 after school, in one of their houses.

Reshma is wearing trousers and a T-shirt. She sits on a low chair with her hands folded on her lap, in a respectful manner, looking somewhat nervous about what I was going to ask her. Prina, her close friend, sits next to her; she is dressed in jeans and a sweat-shirt, but looks more comfortable, smiling in a welcoming way. The girls are close friends and attend a local primary school and Prina often comes to Reshma's house after school. Despite her nervousness, Reshma starts by telling me about how she learnt about religion, even though I had asked her to tell me about the relationships in her family.

She says: I grew up learning about religion and things from my *Ba* (grandmother). Because when I was little she used to tell me all about the different gods. I used to ask her to tell me a story every night before I went to bed. I literally slept with her, I never had a cot. It was better that way.

Reshma recognised the importance of her grandmother in telling her religious stories and ‘things’ and how she became close to her through co-sleeping, which will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter. This close involvement in child-rearing of female kin other than the mother, and especially of *dadi* (paternal grandmother), but in this case *nani* (maternal grandmother), involves the child in the wider kin network of dependency that implicates a religious and moral context.

When I asked Prina about her family, she told me how she missed the close contact she used to have with her *ba* (grandmother) who ‘passed away’ last year:

I used to have a *ba* and was attached to her as well. She used to live in India and I used to go there and make the most of it, but then I had to leave.

Reshma explained that it is not only the *ba* who is involved with young children; in her family her mother’s younger sister’s children are very close to her mother.

Mita is now three years old and she calls me *bahen* (sister) and my mother she now calls *masi*, (mother’s sister) but when she was younger she called her mummy. She didn’t really know names like *masi* because she was too young. She spent a lot of time with my mum and slept with her, so she was like her mum.

It is through these relationships with older women that religious knowledge and ritual practices are conveyed and the Gujarati language is learned. Certain values such as respect for elders are communicated through kinship terms and respectful suffixes. I asked the two girls if they spoke Gujarati at home and Reshma replied:

My *dada* [father’s father] understands English, but I still speak to him in Gujarati, but my *ba* [father’s mother] hardly speaks any English, so I have to speak to her in Gujarati. Sometimes I get my sentences muddled up.

Prina added:

When you speak to someone older, it is different from speaking to a friend. I am trying to speak to my dad’s brother, my *kaka*, because he is here at the moment from Saudi Arabia. I end up saying words which mean you are talking to a friend. My parents keep correcting me. You make mistakes, you just slip. When I speak to my mum’s family, I have to speak Gujarati. When I go to India, at first my Gujarati is not very good, but after I have been there for a week or more with everyone speaking, I become fluent. I just need a week in India and come back speaking Gujarati. I used to be very good when I was little, I learned Gujarati before English. My parents used to speak Gujarati to each other, because my mum originally came from India, so I must have picked it up from them.

When children first begin to talk they are told to address their elders respectfully and these terms will vary according to age or status and, like women, they always use respectful terms when referring to men. When women greet each other, after asking *kem chho* (how are you?) or a more formal *jayse Krishna* (the blessings of Krishna) or *jay Swaminarayan* (blessings of Swaminarayan) or, for Jains, *jay Mahavira* (the blessings of Mahavira), they will ask *tamara puti sara chhe?* (is your husband well?). The *a* ending of *tamara* and *sara*, rather than the normal *o* ending, indicates that the person being addressed or referred to is of higher status than the speaker. While I was living with a Brahman family in Ahmedabad, the two-year-old child Radhika, was expected to call me *Alison-auntie* as a sign of respect and was severely scolded by her mother if she missed out the *auntie* suffix. She referred to her father as *papaji*, her grandfather (father's father) as *dadaji* and her grandmother as *ba*. (Many children refer to their father's mother as *dadima*, but *ba* is associated with an older woman and carries with it a special relationship that will be discussed in another chapter.) Her mother's mother and father she called *nanima* and *nanaji* respectively but her relationship with them was not so close and although they lived nearby, her mother took her to visit them only once a week. They were not invited to her hair-cutting ritual and it was only the father's relatives present and in my three months there I did not see them in their daughter's household. Her *masa* (mother's brother) and *masi* (mother's sister) visited the house once a week, but tended not to eat with the family. Her father's older brother or *kaka* came to stay while I was there and was referred to respectfully by Radhika and her mother. The more formal, respectful nature of the relationship between Radhika and her father's relatives reflects their superior status. She had a more relaxed relationship with her mother's relatives but had less contact with them. Her recently deceased great-grandfather, aged 106, she called *bapuji*, a term usually reserved for gurus or highly respected members of the community. His photograph was on the wall above the dining table and was often referred to before or after meals and a fast was observed for him once a month. Through the use of the *ji* and *ma* suffixes, old people are elevated to a level nearer the gods, for example the goddess *Kali* is known as *Kalima*. It is usually the Brahmans and other higher castes who use this convention and it is not only considered bad manners to omit the endings, but an insult to the person and his or her standing with the gods. The moral codes implicit in the language not only reflect kin relations and hierarchy within the household or community, but also a person's progress through the *dharma* (moral duties) that will affect his or her eventual re-birth through reincarnation.

The house or *ghar* is the centre for close kin relations and is called by the name of the eldest male member, such as *Madhubhainu ghar*, Madhu's house, including the respectful suffix, *bhai*, after his name. All Gujaratis use this respectful address and it is a practice strictly observed, men having *bhai* and women having *bahen* after their names. These suffixes may reflect the respect and importance accorded to the centrality of the brother-sister relationship. The respectful form of 'you' is *tame*, and is always used when addressing older people, or when women are speaking to men. Younger women and men have to behave in a deferential manner with their elders, should refer to them first and would consider it unacceptable to smoke or drink in front of them and, in some stricter families, would always eat after them.

Learning Gujarati is not only important for communication with older kin, but also provides a sense of belonging to a wider Gujarati kin and social group and it is often the older female members who consistently speak to their grandchildren in Gujarati. Most parents I have known through my research use Gujarati in speaking to their children before they go to school, or else Gujarati interspersed with English words. Mrs Chavda, a grandmother from the Kshatriya (warrior caste) believes it is important that children learn Gujarati: 'If we teach them the language, they will know the culture.'

Parents may attend evening classes in Harrow or Wembley, if they have not learned the language adequately as children. Many parents are concerned about the language disappearing in Britain and feel that it is important for children to learn their mother tongue. Many schools run Saturday classes for GCSE Gujarati and some schools are offering Gujarati GCSE and A Level as an alternative to French. Speaking Gujarati allows one to understand Gujarati kinship terms, which are used as to indicate the relationship between any two people, but the importance of understanding and using the language goes beyond assertions of its 'usefulness'. To speak Gujarati is to be 'one of us' in the broad sense and knowing the language brings with it certain subtleties of knowledge: about kinship, about morality and religion, about the art of participating in kin and social networks.

Close, enduring friendships may be converted into kinship, even if there are no other linkages, such as common locality of origin. Reshma's and Prina's families have been close friends since their older brothers met at school ten years ago and although they both belong to the Patel caste they are not related consanguineally, or through marriage,

or through shared locality of origin, but they use kinship terms when referring to each other. Prina explained how kinship terms are used:

I call Reshma's mum *masi*, [mother's sister] and her father *masa*, [mother's sister's husband]. Our parents call each other *bahen*, [sister] and *bhai* [brother]. I call Reshma's brother *bhai* too. We see each other a lot and Reshma and I do the *Gauro* ritual [annual five-day fast for girls to pray for a good husband] together.

These terms convey the closeness of the relationship and imply certain moral obligations and responsibilities. In this case of Reshma and Prina's families, their brothers first met at school and are close friends, then the two girls became friends and then the parents, but in some cases links are found through common origins from a village or town in India, or by having a close association with a certain area. Common non-bodily substance will be shared through eating together, sharing rituals, and festivals and this embeds the relationship within a moral framework of obligations.

***Bhajan* - gatherings of wider kin**

Commensality provides a reaffirmation of kinship and Gujarati food is always shared at the end of all festivals, rituals and *bhajan* (hymn-singing gatherings). Hindus refer to *bhajan* and Jains to *satsang* and although different hymns are sung, the act of coming together for a common purpose and a uniting of spirit is similar. Many Jains in Harrow rarely attend the temples, except at Diwali or the summer festival of Paryushan, so through the *satsang* a feeling of 'communitas' (Turner 1974) and continuity is shared. *Bhajans* and *satsangs* are held in homes and their whereabouts spread by word of mouth. In November 2001, I attended a *bhajan* in celebration of the birthday of the Gujarati saint *Jalaram*, in a house that is also used as a temple for a wide network of kin, both patrilineal and social (see photographs). *Bhajans* are held every weekend, sometimes in Hindu temples or in people's homes and the more devout worshippers will try to attend every week or at least twice a month. The gathering of people in a ritual to celebrate a saint's birthday gives a sense of order and predictability and continuity. The meaning of the ritual may be different for each person present, although it is assumed that it is shared. Children will follow the rules as they see it and each adult present will have some rational reason for the performance. The ways in which rituals are

conducted, and how things are done link the present with history and the ancestors (Toren 1999:123).

The *bhajan* I attended on 25/11/2001 was held in the house of a retired Lohana couple, Mr and Mrs Morjaria, and I was told that their two sons, wives and children had recently moved to their own houses in the vicinity. Among those at the *bhajan* and were Mr Morjaria's three brothers and their families, but the other guests were also considered family, although there were no blood or marriage ties. A woman of about forty told me that since she came to the UK thirty years ago, Mrs Morjaria has been her mother. She calls her *ma* (mother) and Mr Morjaria *papa* (father). Their two sons she calls *bhai* (brother) and their wives *bhabhi* (sister-in-law). Mrs Morjaria is like a real mother to her, she said, and in many ways closer, because when she married and had children she could still stay close and did not have to move away from her, as she would have been expected to do with a 'blood mother'. At the *bhajan* Mrs Morjaria expected this woman to do the chores with the other women of the house, in the way of food preparation and serving.

Figure 8: *Bhajan*-Women sit on the floor, in the front, near the shrine.



Figure 9: *Bhajan*. Men sit at the back on chairs.



As people assembled, the women sat down on mats on the floor in the front of the long living room and the men sat on chairs at the back and started talking among themselves. A small band positioned itself in the front of the room, with an electric keyboard, a small drum and some clappers, some of which were handed round to the guests, including me. The ceremony began with great enthusiasm, the women singing songs written down in books, which were distributed among the participants. Different people were invited forward to lead the singing; they included one young man, but the rest were women. The singing continued for two and a half hours with only a short break, but no food or drink, and I must say that I admired the participants' enthusiasm and stamina. The hymns were sung according to their order in the special book and were familiar to most people present. The words seemed unimportant, but the coming together as kin and joining in the music created a strong sense of 'communitas' (Turner 1974). Bloch (1989) suggests that song or hymn singing is not the same as everyday propositional language, it is not simply a different way of saying something that could also be conveyed in speech.

In a song ... no argument or reasoning can be communicated, no adaptations to the reality of the situation is possible. *You cannot argue with a song*. It is because religion uses forms of communication which do not have propositional force, where the relations between the parts

cannot be those of the logic of thought, that to extract an argument from what is being said and what is being done in ritual, is in a sense, a denial of the nature of religion..... Religion is the last place to find anything 'explained' because as we have seen religious communication rules out the very tools of explanation which, when reintroduced, are considered sacrilegious or irreverent (Bloch 1989:37).

The hymns are sung to Jalaram because that is what is always done; there are no logical explanations for them. Likewise, food is given to the Saint which then becomes *prasad* (blessed offerings) recognising his status as almost a deity. This offering included the usual nuts, fresh fruit and sugar crystals but also the first piece of birthday cake. 'Happy birthday to you' (a Western aspect of the ritual) was sung, before the cake was cut by five boys, who gave the first piece to *Jalaram* and then fed each other, putting a whole piece of cake straight into their mouths, as people do at weddings. The sight of large pieces of food going into the boys' mouths causes the others watching to laugh. The sharing of *prasad* unites people in their rite to the saint as they incorporate his blessings into their bodies, and the shared meal brings kin together.

Figures 10 and 11: *Bhajan*.



All celebrations, religious rituals and festivals involve the sharing of food at the end and this includes initially the sharing of *prasad*, usually nuts and fresh fruit brought by the attendees, and then a hot meal is served. It is considered very poor manners to leave before you have eaten, but once you have done so you are free to go. The *bhajan* and

the meal emphasise the closeness of this kin group, although fewer than half the guests have any consanguineal or marriage relationship and the rest are kin within the sociality network. The women are more actively involved in the singing, some of the men play in the band, but the rest tend to sit in the background.

Joint households

Many women and men of all ages agree that the joint household is still the ideal way of living, although with increasing prosperity, the option for young married couples to move out into a flat or house of their own is now a reality for many. Living together as a *kutumb* (joint household) with both consanguineal kin and women who have moved into the household on marriage is still viewed as a source of strength. Mr Shah, an elderly Jain man, boasted to me about his family arrangement, when I visited their house following the birth of his new grandson, in June 2001:

I have lived in a joint family since 1954. My sons have all stayed here even after they were married and until four years ago my father lived here, until he passed away aged ninety.

Young couples in Britain may move into a flat or house of their own, but still tend to live locally and return to the *ghar* (household) for many of their meals and rituals. Relationships within the joint household are constituted in part through the sharing of food – a kind of physical unity is attained through the sharing of this non-bodily substance – and also in part by virtue of the attachment of a person's spirit to the *ghar*. Mala, a Patel woman who lives with her husband in a flat that is only the next street away from her husband's family *ghar*, told me:

Eating together is almost like saying we are one.

Within a joint household the marriage of a son heralds a period of adjustment and change for all members. The new wife joining her husband's home is a stranger from another family and perhaps comes from another caste and even religion, who brings with her a different *sanskar*, or moral background. She may initially be treated with suspicion and may be blamed for any mishaps that occur. Her mother-in-law (*sasu*) will attempt to teach her about the religious practices of the family and the food she is expected to prepare. The physical space in the *ghar* may be limited, with several sons, their wives and children, their parents and possibly grandparents, living in a two- or three-bedroom house. The younger wives are expected to do most of the domestic

chores and cooking, but as they become older or have children, this pressure lessens. Tensions do arise between women in the household, especially when younger women, who have been educated in Britain, may have expectations of autonomy and choice. Some young couples may choose to live separately after marriage, but usually in the same area as the husband's family, so that they can join them regularly for meals and rituals.

Mala described her situation after she had a 'love marriage' with a man of a different caste. Her family is *Surti-Patel* (from the Surat area) and her husband is a *Lohana*. After her marriage she moved into her husband's household with his two brothers and their wives and children; she was expected to learn their way of life and worship their gods. Her parents-in-law were very strict and expected her to feed the children and make *rotli* (chapatis) every night, because she was the youngest woman, even though she worked full-time. Mala found the situation difficult and she and her husband decided to buy a flat of their own in the same area and told me on 13/7/2000:

At first they said we would bring shame on the family. The idea was brought from back home that if you are a good respected family, you live jointly in harmony. It is thought that if you live like this, you are good people, because you have to be able to share your lives and get on with people. People will say that my sons and their wives are so good that they live together. The move had nothing to do with finances, it was just that I couldn't cope physically, and we wanted different things from our lives. Eventually they agreed we could move out so long as we came for dinner every day. Now we eat together about twice a week, but my mother-in-law will ask us to come more often.

Figure 12: A joint Hindu Household

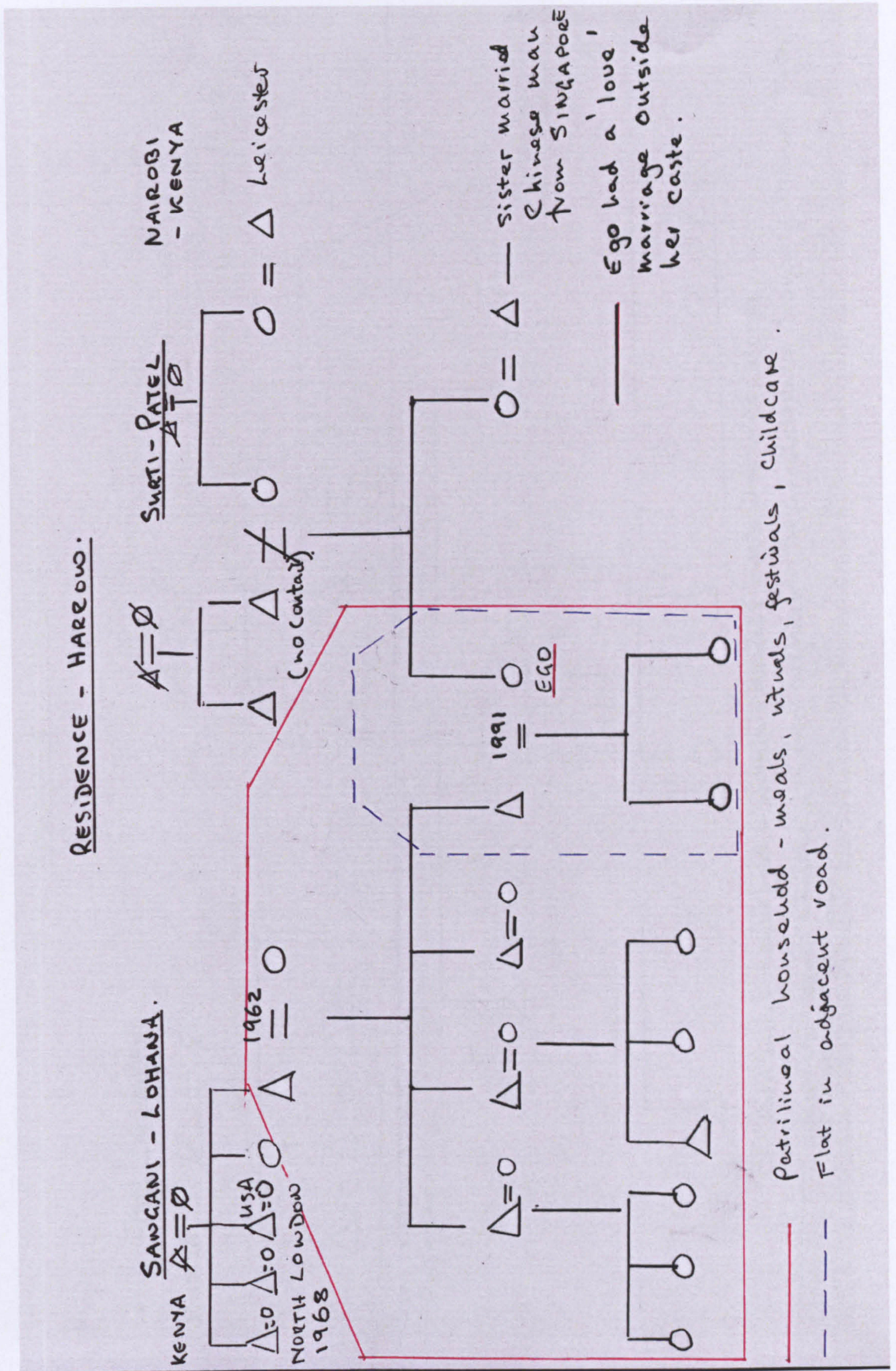
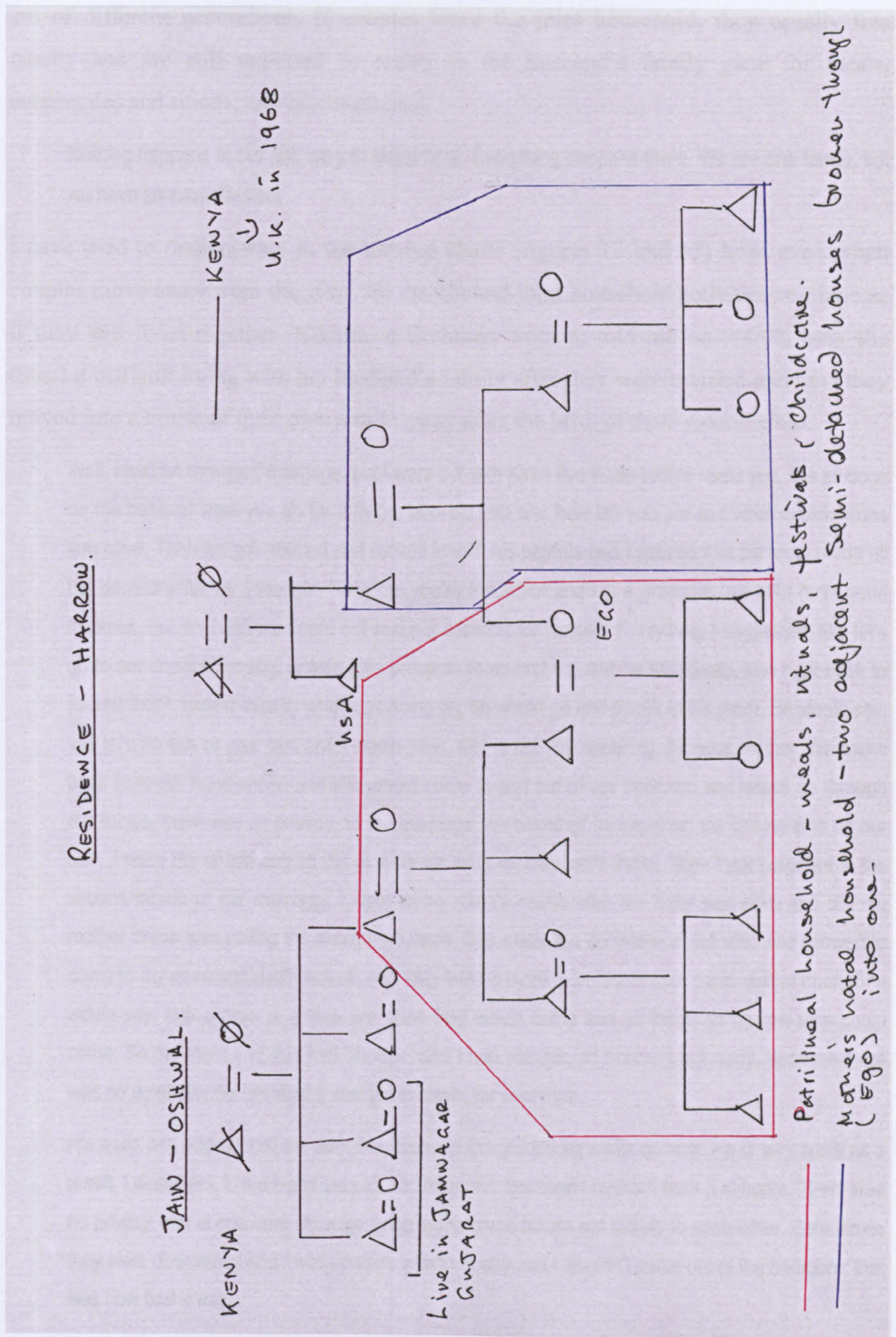


Figure 13: A joint Jain household



Relationships between women in the household can be difficult, especially when they are of different generations. If couples leave the joint household, they usually live nearby and are still expected to return to the husband's family *ghar* for meals, ceremonies and rituals, as Mala explained.

Nothing happens in our flat, we just sleep here. Everything happens there. We are one family, but we have an extra flat here.

I have tried to demonstrate in the kinship charts (figures 12 and 13) how, even when couples move away from the *ghar*, all the kin and joint household activities continue as if they still lived together. Nikhita, a Brahman woman, told me on 9/4/98, how she found it difficult living with her husband's family after they were married and how they moved into a house of their own a mile away after the birth of their second child.

Well, I had an arranged marriage, but I went out with Kiran five times before I said yes. It is all done on the basis of what you do for a living, how old you are, how tall you are and what qualifications you have. Then we got married and moved in with his parents and I noticed that his Mum made all the decisions for us. I thought, hang on, you're a solicitor and I'm a graduate, we both have good incomes, but my husband could not make a decision for himself. Everything I suggested, like let's go to our cousins' house, or let's give presents to so and so, and he would say, can I get back to you on that? I knew exactly what was going on, he would go and speak to his mum. He would say, yes let's do this or give that and I would think, this is not you speaking, it's your mother. We came back from our honeymoon and she would come in and out of our bedroom and would go through our things, there was no privacy. In the evenings, we would all be together; we had no time on our own. I need my space and all the dinners we went to, they were there. Then I got pregnant in the second month of our marriage. I went to my mum's house after the baby was born and still my mother-in-law was calling the shots from there. She made the decisions about who was allowed to come to my mum and dad's house, and said that no more than two people could visit at once. She would say, two people at a time and then they would come and sit there, so no one else could come. So my mum and dad had enough, and I had enough, so I came back early, because there was no point staying because it was too stressful for everyone.

His mum and dad adored our son; they worship the ground he walks on now. He is very spoilt as a result. I went back to work and they looked after him, because I couldn't hack it at home. There was no privacy and at one time we were living in the same house not talking to each other. Sometimes they were downstairs and I was upstairs with the baby and I wouldn't come out of the bedroom; that was how bad it was.

The major dilemma facing young Gujaratis in Britain today is how to choose between a 'modern' nuclear family life that offers the privacy that Nikhita wanted and a joint family living arrangement that offers support and close kin involvement. This dilemma maps fairly neatly onto Western values of independence versus the Indian values of dependence, which I will argue are themselves tied up with concepts of kinship, moral duties and continuity.

The British ideal of a home of your own after you marry is a concept young Gujaratis who have grown up in the UK have heard about since childhood, observed through friends and in films and other media. Central to this ideal is the high value accorded to having private space with no interference from relatives and possibly little contact with them; relative status can be assessed according to the size and price of properties. Many Hindus see nuclear family living as opposed to their central ideal of interdependency and sharing of space, property and goods. When I first arrived in Ahmedabad and began to experience joint family life, I was immediately impressed by the lack of any private space. Everything was shared, the public space, the household food, the bedrooms, the household items; the only privacy permitted was in the bathroom. My adjustment to this was slow and at first I wondered whether I would have space for reading and study. I soon found that writing field notes could be done in the afternoon when the old people and children slept and it was too hot to go out. Among much else, the elderly grandmother told me that if one buys fruit, it must be shared with all; she strongly disapproved of the practice they saw in Britain: children buying cans of Coke and drinking it in the home themselves, without sharing. Moreover, if I went out, it was good manners to say where I was going and if I visited a temple then *prasad* (blessed food) should be brought back to the *ghar* for everyone to share.

The joint household is still viewed by many young people as a convenient and economically sensible way to live. Food is cooked and shared and rituals are practised at the shrine for the benefit of all members. The success of a joint household depends on the relationships within it and how well the women relate to each other may depend on the way they relate to their respective husbands and how close the mother-in-law is to her son. Nikhita described above how dominating she found her mother-in-law and how her husband always consulted her before making decisions. This situation led to tension between the women, but was primarily due to the son's inability to break away from the strong ties he had to his mother. Pressure may be exerted on the son's new wife by his

mother to perform all the domestic chores that she herself had performed as a young wife in her the household of her parents-in-law and even though she may be working full-time outside the home, the new woman in the *ghar* has little power to refuse. Deepa told me:

The mother-in-law thinks the daughter-in-law should do the same as they had to do, that they have to continue that.

Sangita Shah, a Jain woman added:

I think there are families, like they cannot afford to move, they stay together and they cope. The women adjust themselves in the family, even if there are problems. There are families like mine who have a mother-in-law. We have problems, but she is alone, you have respect for the old mother, you can't go. When there are problems you just have to leave her alone and adjust. You moan, but still you adjust. If the husband is good, then I think it is fair.

The mother-in-law may be blamed unjustly for the failure of other relationships in the *ghar*. Thus Sangita's remarks suggest that relations between a mother-in-law and an in-married daughter-in-law pivot on relations between the son and his mother and the son and his wife. If the husband-wife bond is not strong, then the husband may side with his mother in disputes, which will exacerbate any tensions between his mother and his wife. Mintem (1993) reported similar findings in her ethnography on Uttar Pradesh; she also observed that the relationship between the new wife and her mother-in-law was changing, along with that between husband and wife:

The balance of power between *bahu* [daughter-in-law] and *sasu* [mother-in-law] is changing as modern innovations affect women's lives. With decreased *purdah* comes increased husband-wife intimacy. Wives have more influence on their husbands and are more likely to enlist their support in *bahu-sasu* disputes (Mintem 1993:306).

Old people are cared for and respected in the household and, when they are able, they reciprocate with childcare, which they view as an important duty. Close relationships are built up between kin of different generations and are tied up in this web of interdependency. Harmony can be generated through the respect and understanding between the women, 'adjustment', and a certain acceptance of hierarchy. The dilemma of whether to have a house of your own or live in a joint household faces most young married Gujaratis in Britain and urban Gujarat. Many choose to live jointly for the first few years of married life and then, when they have children and space becomes limited, to move into a flat or house of their own close to the husband's family. Interestingly

enough, in Harrow at least, the break-up of the joint household may be instigated by the older, rather than the younger, generation. Thus Mita told me of the way she and her husband persuaded her son and his wife to buy a house of their own.

My son wanted us to buy a bigger house so that he and his wife could continue to live with us. We like our house and want to stay there, so we told them that they have been married for two and a half years and should find a place of their own.

It is unsurprising; therefore, that Mita felt that the 'true joint family with three generations living together' was disappearing:

Today many young people do not see the true joint family. They have to go to Hindi movies, such as one being shown at the moment, to learn how obligations in these households are.

The other dilemma, which is closely related to the residence dilemma, lies in the apparent conflict between the moral imperative of inter-dependency between kin and the independence valued by Western society and perpetuated through the education system in Britain. Even professional women who are *not* living in joint households expect female kin always to be available at times of crisis and to offer practical help and emotional support when needed, such as after the birth of a child. A woman's aging mother will travel from India or Kenya and stay for several months with her daughter in order to help at such times and, on the rare occasion that she does not, the young woman may feel bereft of hope and energy and become depressed. These older women who come will perform rituals and make special foods designed to give positive energy and health to mother and baby and to maintain continuity with their heritage.

Joint household arrangements mean that running expenses of the house are shared as well as domestic chores. The oldest male member is usually responsible for the finances not only of the house but also of any family businesses. I asked a newly married couple who were both accountants, who made the decisions about money in their household. The woman replied that her husband would be expected to take control, but she would advise him. Many families started life in Britain owning a shop, which was run by family members, both men and women, so had no overheads. Usha described earlier about how her father's shop was bought by a supermarket chain, is a situation that now seems to be happening more frequently. When the oldest male member dies, the oldest son living in the *ghar* will take over the finances, but his wife will be in control of the daily affairs of the house. She will arrange the ritual observances, control the visitors and will direct the younger wives in the cooking. Although women appear to be gaining

more autonomy and more power in decision-making, men are often still referred to for a final opinion. For example, when I asked for permission to use a photograph of one of the Brahman grandmothers with her grandchild, the grandfather's approval was sought. Personality traits make it impossible to generalise about power and control, and every house will have different ideas about who has the power to make decisions. Nikhita's situation earlier showed how her mother-in-law had control over her husband, who could not make decisions without referring to her. Maya, who married a Muslim, has control over the household finances, she pays the rent and the bills.

Women educated in Britain may feel they want to live separately and may reject the close dependency network of the joint home, but they commonly live within a few miles of their husband's parents and have meals in their home several times a week and always join them for feast days and ceremonies. After the birth of a baby such women may become dependent on close female kin, sharing the caring and relying on the advice given by the wider female kinship network. Women may feel torn between the desire to live an independent existence and the deep need they have for the support and guidance of female kin. Pocock (1973) and Warriar (1988) predicted the demise of the joint household, but it still remains popular today among young, newly married couples in Britain. Rather it would seem that relationships in the household are being re-negotiated and that the *ghar* is, as it were, changing shape; women in Britain are finding a new autonomy and this in turn is changing kinship relations and (slowly) the status accorded younger women. At the same time one can argue that there is renewed emphasis on established ritual patterns, and many young people are today adopting some of the ritual practices of their grandparents.

Navratri – a festival for women

The festival of *Navratri* (nine nights) is a special time for women, both in London and Ahmedabad. Maya said:

Navratri is break time for us. You can wear heavy jewellery and clothes and you can go with your own brothers and sisters.

It is a festival that has special significance in Gujarat and Rajasthan and, for many women, it surpasses Diwali in religious importance as well as in enjoyment. Young,

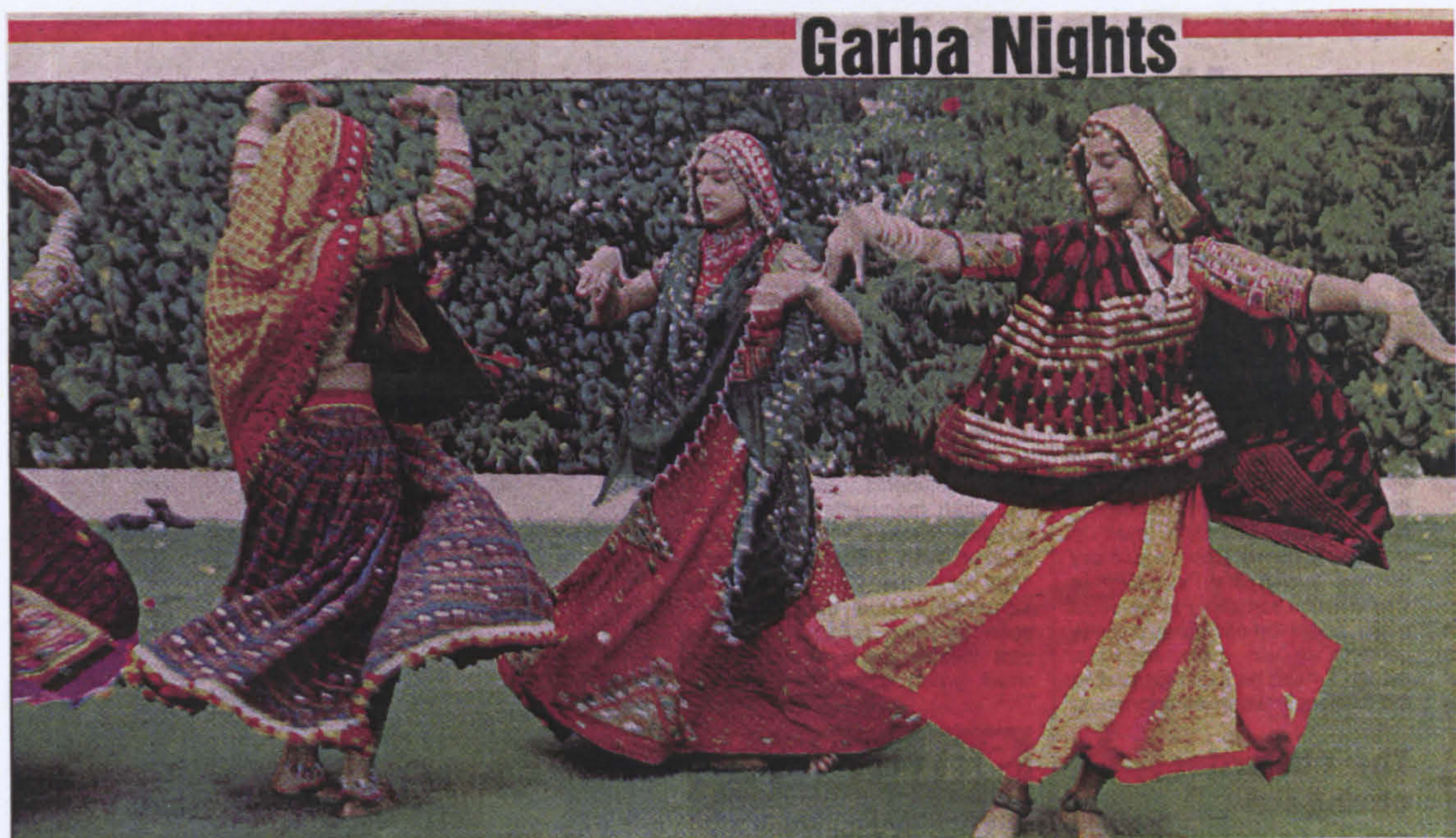
unmarried people are able to meet and dance in an approved venue and a degree of flirtatiousness is tolerated. For several weeks before the festival, clothes are discussed and tried on and the markets in towns and cities in Gujarat, and the clothes shops in north London display traditional Gujarati and Rajasthani dress, called *ghagra choli*, in bright reds, greens and yellows with flared shirts and tightly fitted blouses decorated with seashells or glass circles; some even have daring laced backs and no *chunri* (scarves). For these nine nights normal dress conventions are relaxed and women can enjoy themselves with their female friends. Married women may go with their sisters or female friends and leave their husbands at home. Older women tend to wear saris and sit at the side and watch the dancing, but become involved in the religious *arti* to *Mataji*. In Ahmedabad the *arti* took place before the dancing began but in Harrow it happens in the middle between the dances, before the *dandya ras* (the dance with sticks), which is the climax of the evening. Mothers, daughters and even grandmothers join in the fun of the occasion, meeting other patrilineal and natal kin as well as friends. Although men do join in the celebrations, they tend to be at the margins, but some younger men dance on the periphery in an energetic manner. In Ahmedabad expectations rise as Navratri approaches: the following account is taken from my field notes (3/10/99):

A week before Navratri, Nutan, the young Brahman mother in the household, decides to visit the market in the centre of Ahmedabad city with her mother and her two year old daughter, Radhika, to choose a new outfit for the *garba* (dances). I go with them in a motor rickshaw, on a hot, humid morning in October, through the thick clouds of traffic fumes of the city. The central market is full of people pushing their way between colourful stalls and shops with vendors shouting to attract us to their wares. The clothes shops have material draped over the floors, so you are expected to remove your shoes before entering. Most of the shopkeepers are Muslim men dressed in white caps and long *kurta* (loose tops). Women laugh and joke with each other as they try different styles and fabrics, all in bright colours – reds, pinks and greens, 'happy' colours for Navratri, the festival that celebrates the victory of the *Mataji* over the demon. At each shop, Nutan and her mother examine the clothes carefully and bargain furiously, but do not buy anything. After two hours Radhika and I are beginning to feel the heat, so we stop at a stall to buy drinks. We discuss the outfits we have seen and Nutan decides to buy the one we saw in the first shop. It is made of a green and white fabric with a tight blouse, laced at the back, white shells sewn into the front, and a voluminous, gathered skirt. They are pleased with their purchase and its price. We buy some vegetables and find a rickshaw to take us home.

Navratri celebrates the power of Durga, one of the most revered *Mataji*, over evil. Her three manifestations are worshipped at this time, in the form of Kumari, Parvati and Kali. They represent the three stages of womanhood: the child, the young girl and the mature woman. During the fourth and fifth day until the eighth day, Lakshmi Mata, the goddess of peace and prosperity is worshipped, and this is an auspicious time to have a *puja* for the family business, as I will describe in chapter five. On the fifth day Saraswati Mata, the goddess of knowledge and art is evoked, and books are displayed in the house. Women have a close affinity with the some of the *Mataji* and during ritual they invite them into their houses and treat them like guests. The story celebrates the power of the *Mataji* over evil through her female, divine energy (*shakti*) that in turn relates to the energy and power of all women. The achievements of women are celebrated through the household *puja* and public displays of dancing. *Garbas* (dances) are held in parks, open spaces, town squares and any other available spaces, all over Gujarat. At the climax of the evening's *garbas* comes the *dandya ras* – a special dance with sticks, which Hindu myth suggests was performed by Krishna when he danced with the *gopi* (milk maids or cowherds). Some men join in and often do so in a vigorous manner, which appears to portray a sexual element. Carstairs suggests that Krishna in his incarnation of Vishnu is seen as the great lover and in his worship, sexuality is idealised.

...but he [Krishna] is portrayed as an effeminate, seductive and yet divinely powerful youth. His devotees seem at times to identify with him as he makes his amorous conquests, at other times to identify themselves with the *gopi* (the girl cowherds) who are overcome with pleasurable anticipation at his approach (Carstairs 1968:163).

Figure 14: Dances performed at Navratri (Times of India Oct 1999)



Women are invigorated by this display of sexuality and freedom of expression. Some are able to dance for nine nights in a row and work during the day. Many have told me they feel energised by the occasion. The relaxation in the dress code for women in effect emphasises their sexuality that is further acknowledged and celebrated in their dancing; women dance with women and flirt with one another and any men who join them. The usual conventions that pertain between natal and patrilineal kin are suspended and a real feeling of 'communitas' (Turner 1974) is generated. Women may go out dancing all night with female friends and relatives, often without their husbands, relationships between women are cemented, natal female kin can visit the house freely, and women can celebrate the joy of having daughters. During the four years of my research I have attended three *garbas* in Harrow and five in Ahmedabad; the dances were very similar, with some individual variations.

In India in 1999, I travelled around Ahmedabad one night during Navratri on the back of a scooter, visiting the inner city areas. In every available street square a *garba* was taking place, with men and older women sitting around the edge and a small band playing, while the younger women and some energetic older women danced in a clockwise direction, following the recognised dance routines. There seemed to be no restrictions on which women dance and no link with fertility because post-menopausal women also danced, but I did not see any widows dancing: they wore their usual pastel coloured clothes and sat at the side and talked. Some young men, also dressed in

traditional dress of loose trousers and short, close fitting jackets, joined in on the periphery, and danced in a vigorous manner, sometimes in an opposite direction to the women.

In Ahmedabad, the evening began and ended with an *arti*, a religious observance to the all the *Mataji*, whereas in Harrow the *arti* came in the middle of the dances before the climax, the *dandya ras* (the dance with sticks). During the *arti*, people sing the usual hymn and a tray of *diva* (candles) is circled around in a clockwise direction and passed around so that everyone has a chance to touch the tray and run their right hands through the smoke and wipe it over their eyes and up over the hair line.

Once the *arti* is finished, in Harrow the *dandya ras* begins. Everyone holds one or two sticks and stands in a line of about ten people opposite another line. The aim is to hit the sticks of the person facing you three times in time to the music and then move two people to the left and repeat. It looks simple enough but is quite hard to master and any lapse of concentration leads to total confusion. *Dandya ras* lasts for over an hour with the music getting steadily faster, so it requires stamina as well. In Ahmedabad some *garba* are also held in parks and private grounds where an entrance fee is required and some are quite elaborate affairs, especially in the wealthier areas. In Vadodra (previously Baroda), a two-hour drive from Ahmedabad, I observed a very large *garba* in a central park. Here we sat on wooden benches around a large area where about two hundred people were dancing: the women clockwise in eight circles and the men anti-clockwise in two circles on the periphery.

In Harrow, *garba* are held in almost every hall and school gym in the Borough and an entrance fee of two or three pounds is usually requested. They are usually open to all but I have been told that some caste groups hold exclusive *garba*. I have attended *garba* organised by Brahmans, Lohanas and Patels in Harrow, but they all welcomed people from other castes. In Ahmedabad, we joined dances in the street squares in the inner city *pol* (high buildings around a central square, over a hundred years old) and were invited to join a Shah, or Bania caste *garba* which was organised with tables around the outside and food served. Others I attended were in Parks and sports areas or in grounds outside temples. The hot weather in Gujarat means that *garba* start later in the evening, because dancing would be too uncomfortable before then, usually they begin at 11 p.m., and last until 3 a.m. or later, whereas in Britain they start at about 9 p.m. and finish at midnight.

Women appear driven not only by the exhilaration of the dancing and through this their expression of sexuality, but also the strong sense that the act unites them in a feeling of 'communitas' that links them not only to one another, but produces a sense of continuity through generations with a past era.

Turner (1969:156) refers to the Bhagavata and its central theme of the childhood of Krishna, who is believed to be an incarnation of Vishnu. His love for the *gopi*, the cowherdesses, whom he charms with his flute playing, makes them leave their homes and husbands to follow him. The *garba* performed, especially the *dandya ras*, at Navratri represent the dances the *gopi* had with their divine lover, the blue Lord Krishna. Scenes of these dances are represented in Indian art throughout the Subcontinent.

As a calendrical ritual, Navratri can be analysed using Turner's ideas of liminality and communitas. Women are given the freedom to dress in tight-fitting blouses and gathered skirts and meet with their natal kin and female friends, possibly without their husbands. There is status reversal as women take the lead and display their sexuality in dance. This liminal freedom breaks down structural inequalities of gender, caste, class, and wealth and joins them in a sense of communitas that liberates them from the restrictions of their everyday existence.

As for those who are normally at the bottom of the pecking order and experience the comradeship and equality of joint subordinates, the liminality of status reversal might provide an opportunity to escape from the communitas of necessity (which is therefore inauthentic) into a pseudostructure where all behavioural extravagances are possible (Turner 1969:202).

Although structure is broken down through the liminality of the ritual, Turner (1969:201) argues that the system of social positions is not challenged. The gaps between the structures are reaffirmed in this type of liminality for example, humility reinforces pride and poverty affirms wealth. In the final phase of the ritual the disturbed social group is reintegrated with its structure reconfirmed but with a renewed sense of communitas and shared humanity.

Other processes are happening during the liminal phase when through dance and specific bodily movements a special kind of communication occurs. Dance follows specific routines, Bloch (1989) argues that the meanings conveyed are not as specific as in formalised speech, but may nevertheless be complex (Bloch 1989:37).

As with speech, the formalization of body movement implies ever-growing control of choices of sequences of movement, and when this has occurred completely we have dance. We therefore find dance, as well as formalized body movements, typical of religion. The implications of this transformation from ordinary bodily control to dance are the same as they are for language: argument and bargaining with bodily movements are replaced by fixed, repeated, fused messages. (Bloch 1989:38)

What Bloch ignores here is the powerful emotional aspect of dance; in the case of Navratri, younger women can assert and express themselves in a way that is unacceptable at other times of the year, and dress conventions and some gender restrictions are suspended. To the outsider it may appear that the religious element is lost in the fun and enjoyment, but one could argue that at Navratri fun and enjoyment *is* the message. People come together to participate in the dances of the gods, dances that celebrate female energy and sexuality and, by implication, their fertility. The message of Navratri is carried in and conveyed through the repeated bodily movements of the dance and through them a kind of female solidarity is generated and women feel united with one another. In affirming the strength of the female deities, the dancing brings this strength into being in the bodies of the dancing women themselves and produces in them feelings of closeness to the goddess. This affinity with the *Mataji* (goddesses) and the women dancing as the *gopi* with their divine lover Krishna, unites women in a sense of *communitas*, strengthens female kin ties and engenders a feeling of female power and effectiveness.

Figure 15. Calendrical Festivals.

Month	Festival Name	Description
March	Holi	7 days of celebrations- bonfires lit, <i>rangoli</i> (coloured powders) mixed with water are thrown.
July	Gauro	Young girls fast for 5 days for a good husband. Grow 5 different plants. Usually celebrated in a group.
July	Vrat	Once 5 years of <i>Gauro</i> completed <i>Vrat</i> begins. Fast for future husband or if married, health of husband.
August	Rakshabandhan	<i>Rakhi</i> (coloured threads) are tied by <i>bahen</i> on right wrist of <i>bhai</i> . He gives her a present.
August	Janmastami	Krishna's birthday. Fast then visit temple with kin.
September	Paryushan (Jain)	8-day festival. 6-16 days fast followed by gathering at a temple or community centre to share a meal and pray.
October	Navratri	Household <i>puja</i> at 7pm in India every night for 9 nights followed by <i>garba</i> - dances in open spaces in Gujarat and in halls in Harrow.
October	Dusshera	10 th night following Navratri. Celebrates the victory of Ram over Ravena and evil. Bonfires lit and effigies of Ravena burnt. Fireworks.
November	Dhan teras	House cleaning, grains put in the sun in India. House decorated with <i>rangoli</i> – patterns on floors.
November	Kali Chaudas	Night of darkness.
November	Diwali	Festival of lights. House decorated with <i>diva</i> . Fireworks. Lakshmi <i>puja</i> . Presents given. Household celebration with sweet foods.
November	New year's day	<i>Ankut</i> (donated food) given to temple. Prayers said in temple, gathering of kin in home.
November	Bhai Bhij	<i>Bhai</i> goes to <i>bahen's</i> house for a meal. He gives her a present.

Clothing – a public display of meaning

The clothes worn by women at Navratri and at other times evoke particular ideas of status, caste and respect and are controlled by strict conventions, especially in India. Colours carry emotional as well as auspicious meaning, with reds, pinks and greens being worn at celebrations and festivals. Green and red cloths are worn during rituals to invoke good deities and positive feelings amongst participants. Black threads worn around the wrists ward off evil attacks and black clothes are considered inauspicious. When I began my fieldwork I made many mistakes with my choice of clothes and their colours, and although no one actually told me so, I could tell when I was wrongly dressed and often enough too the meaning Gujaratis attached to the colour and type of clothes. Once I started wearing Punjabi suits – long tunic-type dresses worn over baggy, drawstring gathered trousers, with a *chundari* (scarf) draped over the shoulders and falling down the back – everyone around me seemed to become more relaxed and accepting.

Most young women in Gujarat wear Punjabi dress and older women wear saris. *Churida* are similar to Punjabi suits, but have trousers with a closer fit, with long tunic tops with stitching or braiding in the front, sometimes with glass beads or embroidery; they are worn on more formal occasions. Women living in slums, where there is no running water and no streams or sea always look well presented and clean. Women take great pride in their dress and say that it shows a lack of respect for others when dress conventions are not observed, especially in front of elders. The top of the arms and shoulders and the legs should not be exposed, but large amounts of midriff are exposed when a woman wears a sari. *Bungli* (bangles) must be worn by married women at all times, and especially when out of the house; likewise *chundari* (scarves) must be worn both in the house and out side when there are older kin present, which can be inconvenient when cooking. These scarves can be useful too in the street for shielding mouth and eyes from traffic fumes, or from bad smells from dead animals on the road.

Young women in Britain are not expected to follow these strict dress conventions except when attending rituals or festivals, when saris, *churida* or Punjabi suits are always worn. I have been surprised in Harrow to see young Hindu girls wearing mini skirts, shorts and off-the-shoulder sun tops and wonder how their grandparents view this type of dress. Emotion and auspiciousness are expressed in colours in the UK as well as

in India. Women who have been widowed in the UK should wear only pastel colours, but are not expected to wear the pure white that is worn in India.

The red wedding sari is used to decorate the shrine assembled by the priest at life-cycle rituals. Mrs Pandya told me that this sari is very precious and is either worn or used to decorate during ceremonies. The bride arrives at the wedding wearing a white sari, to indicate her purity, and then her husband's kin dress her half way through the ceremony, in the red one. Mrs Pandya explained when I spoke to her on 12/5/98:

The husband gives the red sari to the bride at their wedding. At the beginning she wears a white sari. Then half way through, we put the red sari on her, to say that you now belong to us. So the red sari is very precious to us, we always keep it. We always look after it. I am going to be married 41 years and I still keep that sari. If a lady becomes widowed, then she can't wear it. These days, widows can wear all colours but not red. Yellow, green- everything is changing, people do not stick to the rules so much. No one likes to wear white because if you do, everyone knows you are widowed. Sometimes in the society people will not look at you in the way they look at the married woman. Even we do not allow them to wear a *bhindi* [red spot on the forehead] when they are widowed. But in India, now they wear it, to keep the woman secure, so that people don't do any mischief. People know, oh she is a widow so she hasn't got anyone.

I asked what was the significance of the *bhindi* and Mr Pandya replied:

It is there so that the whole of society knows that this is a married woman. Sometimes they wear a black *bhindi* but widows are not allowed to wear it. Unmarried girls are not allowed to wear it. It has social significance.

A young *Lohana* women explained to me that now she is divorced, she cannot wear bright coloured clothes, just greys and whites. At funerals, white saris, or Punjabi suits are worn with black borders. The fifth night of Navratri is considered a happy night, when the demon was defeated, so it is a 'red night', when all the women except widows, or divorcees, wear bright reds or pinks. At weddings, the guests wear these colours and groom's parents give presents of saris in reds, pinks and greens to the bride's family. Strict conventions of reciprocity are observed by both sides in the exchange of saris and gold, which are usually given in multiples of three, five or seven – auspicious numbers. Women are responsible for buying, giving and receiving these presents and many women travel from the UK to India to make their purchases; there is a certain pleasure

to be had from this, but nevertheless the responsibility for gifts is an onerous one because it carries with it the responsibility for maintaining good relations between sets of kin.

Women may live separately from their natal and husband's kin but still involve themselves in the webs of interdependency, duties and obligations, both here and in Gujarat. The special relationship between *bhai* and *bahen* offers women a certain freedom of friendship and support outside the confines of the household. Joint family arrangements remain popular with all ages and although residence may be separate, close relationships are maintained through regular joining for meals, childcare and care of the elderly. Kinship is articulated through rituals such as those performed at Navratri and during *bhajan* and through these religious gatherings, become enduring over time.

Women's role in the household includes fostering kinship relations and conducting rituals and this gives them a powerful position perhaps undervalued in the past (Tambs-Lyche 1980). Research conducted by women in other South Asian groups has demonstrated the power women have in the household, which may have been underestimated in the past by male researchers (see Shaw 2000, Reynell 1985, Seymour 1999, Hanchet 1988 and Bhachu 1988.) Alison Shaw identifies the central role women have in Pakistani households in Britain in maintaining links with others, which has economic implications:

The centrality of women's roles in this process [inter-household exchange] also raises issues relevant to discussions of the status of Pakistani women and of women generally. How well a woman conducts domestic rituals has implications for her husband and her household in relation to neighbours and relatives. In western societies, a woman's status is most often assessed in relation to whether she has paid work outside the home, that is, in large measure, to her socio-economic autonomy. Many Pakistani women do not participate directly in the wage economy; they create and maintain status in relation to other Pakistani women primarily through their networks of reciprocity. Yet in exchanging goods and services, in building networks of obligation, they create 'value' which is only partly of a financial nature, but certainly has socio-economic implications (Shaw 2000:257).

Josephine Reynell in her PhD on Rajasthani women in Jaipur, documents the way religiosity links religious ritual with wealth creation:

This duty of ensuring family wealth through religious ritual is a female responsibility in that it is seen as an extension within the spiritual sphere, of a woman's nurturing and mothering role on the physical plane (Reynell 1985:130).

In Orissa, Susan Seymour (1999) reports that attitudes are changing even in villages. Women are gaining greater autonomy through education and the younger generation of women will not accept the financial sacrifices made for the household in the way their mothers did:

She would 'put her foot down' meaning she would not be able to sacrifice her own well-being or that of her children in favor of the well-being of the extended family (Seymour 1999: 267).

Suzanne Hanchet, who studied women in South India, argues that the festivals repeat and reinforce patrilineal and virilocal ties, as well as the kinship ties between mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters.

Some of the awesome powers attributed to women, however, can be related to their ambiguous position in the kinship system. Being ambiguous (compared to men), they are enigmatic, being enigmatic, difficult to control (Hanchet 1988:27).

Although the position of women is likewise changing in Hindu households in Britain the ambiguity in women's position can be seen the images accorded female deities who are associated on the one hand with *shakti* (female divine energy) and the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi and, on the other, with the destructive powers of the goddess Kali.

Women have a responsibility to carry out rituals to ensure the spiritual well-being of the household.

Chapter 4: Women and Spiritual Continuity

'It's the back of the mind that counts', said Mrs Chavda, a Hindu grandmother, talking of how Gujaratis in Britain today continue to be different from other South Asians. She sat in a commanding position in a high-backed chair in the centre of her daughter's living room, wrapping her sari around her. She directed her husband to take their two-year-old grandson out of the house to the nearby station to watch the train, referring to it as 'Thomas' – i.e Thomas the Tank Engine, an icon for many British children. I asked if she could explain in more detail what she meant by 'the back of the mind' and she replied:

Our children learn through us to be Gujarati, through the language, the religion, the food, the rituals and the family. The back of the mind is who you are, not something you think about all the time, but it is always there whatever you do.

Her daughter Sonita sat next to her on a lower chair, holding her ten-month-old baby on her lap. She has lived in this semi-detached house with her husband for the past two years, and now has two children. Her parents live in Birmingham and were visiting for a week and she values her mother's support, having almost daily contact with her on the telephone in between visits. Sonita, who was not in paid employment at the time, is a graduate and previously worked in a legal firm. Having been educated in Britain, she felt that things are different for her, and questions whether the moral ways of thinking her mother spoke about will continue through to the next generation. She saw women as having the prime responsibility for this continuation and now that most women work outside the home and have careers they will not have so much time to pass this knowledge on to their children. Sonita was born in Kenya and moved to Britain with her family when she was two years old. Her family, along with many others, was successful there. Having migrated from India thirty years before as poor, untouchable, leather workers, Mochis, they had become middle-income traders and set up their own business. They aspired to become members of the Kshatriya, the warrior caste, worshipped in the temples devoted to Lord Krishna and began socialising with that caste. They still eat meat, which distinguishes them from many other high castes, Gujarati Hindus, and may indicate their untouchable origins. Sonita's mother explained that, as untouchables, food was scarce for them, so if meat were available, they would eat it to survive. Sonita asked whether they should really be vegetarian and her mother

shrugged her shoulders and said they should believe in *ahimsa*, non-violence to any living creature. Sonita said she had never heard of it, although she knew that many Jains avoid killing small creatures. She recalled how she felt about being Gujarati when growing up in the UK.

I had gone to school here and thought I felt the same as everyone else in my class. I wore Western clothes and did things that they did. I was not really interested in my parents' traditions. When I went to university, I found I made friends with other Gujarati girls. We spent time watching Gujarati films and TV programmes, which made a special bond between us. I realised how comfortable I felt doing this.

Sonita and her husband, who was also educated here, speak English at home and Gujarati in the presence of older family members, so their children have exposure to both languages. Sonita's mother thinks speaking the language is important, but belief in God is more so, as is the accompanying fear that God will punish you if you do wrong. That is why she believes that marrying a Hindu is essential, because the couple will share similar moral codes and pass these on to their children. Sonita and her mother agree that it is preferable to marry a Gujarati of a similar caste, but the reality in the UK today is that this does not always happen. Sonita met her husband at university, and although they are of different castes – she a Mochi and he a Kshatriya – they had no problems with the families agreeing to the marriage. When they were first married they lived with her husband's family for the first year until they bought their own house and Sonita said she had no problems living with her mother-in-law and they still remain very close. She finds the support she receives from both her mother and mother-in-law invaluable, and feels she could not cope with her children without this.

Mrs Chavda explained to me how marriages are arranged today in Britain. A family will attempt to make introductions to suitable partners in the same caste. When the boy and girl are in their late teens, discussions between families will take place. If these fail, then a suitable Hindu or Jain partner is the next best thing. Continuing with the family rules, and a belief in God are the essential elements, which must be continued through to the next generation. Mrs Chavda added:

If the family is Hindu, someone always knows it and you can check whether it is good. But if your daughter marries a Muslim, even today, she is considered dead and no longer part of your family. She will bring shame to the family because she can no longer maintain the beliefs and family life she was brought up with.

Sonita spoke of the way the decision is shared:

Just because the family is good, the boy may not be. Finding your own partner, providing he is Hindu, is now becoming acceptable. The parents then cannot be blamed if things go wrong.

In the generation now looking for partners, there may be a shift of responsibility from the group to the individual, in line with Western ideas of marriage. There is more choice, and marriage becomes a contract between two people, not two families, caste or wider community. The search for a suitable partner dominates much conversation among young women and gossip among their mothers' generation. My Gujarati class consisted of two women in their early thirties, one in her forties, and two young men in their twenties. We met every week for a year and during this time there were occasions when there was considerable explicit sexual teasing and banter by the older women directed to young men, which I found surprising and rather embarrassing. On one occasion one of the women brought in a printout from the Internet of potential marriage partners, for her sister. Once the high spirits had calmed down, there was general agreement that marriages should only occur when the moral standing of the family is high and they are Hindu (or Jain). It is often said that the family must be 'good', meaning that it maintains high moral codes, not necessarily high religious ideals, but often they go together. It was emphasised to me again that knowing about the family is more important than the attributes of the potential partner.

Mrs Chavda's claims that it is 'the back of the mind that counts' and that a Gujarati person is distinguishable from another South Asian refer to those traits – at once personal and Gujarati – that make a person different. What is at 'the back of the mind' is taken for granted, not thought of everyday, but nevertheless determines how a person behaves in different circumstances. Among my informants women are explicitly held to be responsible for the continuation of Gujarati ideals. Here some observations drawn from Carstairs' study of Brahman families in Deoli, a village in Rajasthan, near the border with Gujarat, would seem applicable; they concern unconscious processes that can only be understood through close personal relationships, trust and observation over time.

That the key to understanding national character lies in the study of processes in the personality development of the individuals; that events which occur in the earliest stages of human psychological maturation have an enduring influence throughout later life; and that dynamic psychology provides the best available theory for the elucidation of personality development....facts

about their language, history, geography, economics, social structure and religion can take us only part of the way. Sooner or later we come up against the realisation that these facts mean something to them and to us. In order to fully understand a people's 'otherness' we must try to grasp the essence of these distortions; and this involves a recognition of subjective emotional factors in their personalities – and in our own (Carstairs 1968: 153).

Carstairs conducted his fieldwork with men because at that time the women were kept in Purdah, but he kept individual notebooks for each of the men he interviewed, recording their upbringing, personality and outlook. He gained considerable insight into the personality of his informants and also child-rearing patterns, considering how little work he was able to do with women and children.

Through my fieldwork I developed close relationships with families and particularly women. In Harrow, these have been women of different ages, some young women in their twenties and thirties from different castes and social classes and one older Brahman woman in her sixties. In Ahmedabad, I lived with a family for three months and became one of the household. Through close association over days, weeks and months I have begun to understand some of these 'subjective emotional factors' in my informants' personalities and in my own. Some refer to me in kinship terms as sister or aunty, depending on the age difference between us and one woman refers to me as like her mother, because her mother died when she was a child and she has very few female relatives to offer her support. Through these relationships I have found that there are times when I feel I can understand women's emotional responses to situations and yet other times when I am still surprised. Like Carstairs I think the ethnographer needs to use his or her own emotional responses to understand an informant's situation.

These irrational, emotionally determined quirks of behaviour and response are not wholly arbitrary. They are found to recur in many different contexts; and when studied carefully they reveal a pattern and an interconnectedness in which the connections are not necessarily logical but in many cases symbolical, and only subjectively meaningful. In order to interpret them correctly intellectual understanding of the facts of an informant's situation is not enough; one has in addition to empathise, to "feel with" him before one can identify his elusive patterns of emotional response (Carstairs 1964:152).

Kirsten Hastrup has also expressed the view that the relationship of the anthropologist with her informants is one of shared human experience. Reflexivity and relativity are part of ethnography and analysis and the anthropologist becomes her own informant.

While we cannot, obviously, experience the world from the perspective of others, we can still share their social experience. In fact there is no social experience that is not shared. Sharing implies that we are part of the plot, and it is this position that provides us with a unique key to an understanding of worlds, of how they are constituted and transformed and how positions are assigned to individuals within the plot-space under study (Hastrup 1995:51).

We cannot experience the world as others do, but if we live with people, spend stretches of time with them, and share experience, we can begin to understand their personalities and the way they react in different situations. Those women who have become good friends, some of whom refer to me in kinship terms, have given me insights into what it is to be Gujarati.

Women as mediators of spiritual continuity in the household

Mrs Chavda told me how a person becomes Gujarati, but her daughter Sonita was concerned that as women's lives are changing in the UK and they are now working outside the household, this could change in the future. Women are responsible, she said, for ensuring continuity from one generation to the next, through the passing on of moral codes in religion, kin relationships, food, language and observing customs and rituals; but will they have time for this in the future? A child learns through being included in every activity engaged in by female relatives: mother, aunt or grandmother. The child will observe ritual activity in the home and, if a girl, will begin to participate as soon as she is able. In the future, will women still have time to perform the rituals I describe in this dissertation?

Women in Gujarati households have obligations towards members that change with increasing seniority. The newly married wife is expected to do most of the domestic chores including cooking, but once she has children her status rises and she can delegate some of the work to a more junior wife (i.e. the wife of her husband's younger brother). Older women adopt a more supervisory role and assume more responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the household, in order to gain the favour of the gods and ancestors. Hindu women have been portrayed in popular literature, as well as in anthropological texts, as dependent on male protection throughout life: firstly from their fathers, then their husbands, then their sons, so at no stage are they fit for independence. Kakar argues that this is a male view of protection from sexual proclivities and is about controlling women's sexual enjoyment. He suggests that the patriarchal culture's horror

and scorn are heaped upon the hapless wife, as a female sexual being (Kakar 1989:18.). He sees a Hindu version of the mother/whore dichotomy as a mother/whore/partner-in-ritual trichotomy that is crucial in understanding attitudes towards women. The context in which women are viewed determines whether they are regarded as good, bad or divine (Kakar 1989:17). Images of woman as the needed mother or the feared whore are reflected in the proverbs of all the major Indian languages. Kakar sees the trichotomy he describes as fundamental to the way Hindu people view human relationships, not only between spouses, but also between siblings and between generations. His psychoanalytic view may give insights into the way women are viewed in different contexts: as close to the divine in ritual, as mothers, but at the same time as whores capable of unlimited sexual desire and the pollution it entails who have to be controlled by men. This may be a male perspective on women's lives and more recently female anthropologists have given accounts of the strength of women in family life. Susan Seymour's (1999) account of women in Orissa describes how influential women are in the household, how they reliably put the group's interests above their own, and how self sacrifice is an essential ingredient of being a 'good' wife: a woman has a moral responsibility to support extended kin (Seymour 1999:267).

Conflict between women of different generations

Nikhita is a Brahman woman in her late twenties, who was educated in the UK and has lived in North London all her life. She had an arranged introduction to Kiran and after meeting five times they became engaged. For the first three years she and her husband lived with his family and Nikhita found the relationship with his parents difficult. They moved into their own house a mile away when their second child was six months old I went to visit her in her new house one evening when Kiran was out playing football; he later returned and joined in the discussion. Nikhita began by telling me about meeting Kiran for the first time.

He was different and wore trendy clothes and I thought, this is fine! Then he took me to his Mum's house. All along when we talked he would say we would live on our own, because his Mum's house is too small and I thought, brilliant! Another plus point, not to live with the in-laws and no hassle. So on the fourth time we went to see his parents and I thought the house looked small, but his Mum was sitting there looking very sweet, and his father was very nice as well, so I thought OK. Then we got engaged and he would come and go into our house as he pleased and give my Mum hugs and

kisses. Everyone was really happy that we were going to get married and we went to look for a house. Then we found a house and arranged the mortgage and one day he told me that he could not leave his mother. At first I thought he would be OK because we wouldn't be far away. Then we would go out to look at furniture and he would say why don't you take my mum with you? I would say that it is our house not hers, but he would say that it would make her involved and happy. Then we got married and we moved in with his parents and I noticed his Mum made all the decisions for us.

Kiran returned home and, as I had met him several times before, he was happy to join the discussion; the subject changed from Nikhita complaining about her husband's family to more general areas of family life. Kiran explained why the relationship his two-year-old son has with his grandmother is so important.

Aran has grown up with my mother and is being taught by her. He knows where the temple is in the house and knows how to pray by watching her. I consider myself quite religious, but if you were to ask my friends who are 99% English, they would laugh. They do not know. It is a matter of heart and conscience. I pray twice a day and go to the temple every week.

Several women have spoken about the close relationship their husbands have with their mothers, aunts and grandmothers, and how difficult it can be for the men to move away from these older female relatives. Many women, however, find the arrangements in joint families life beneficial and supportive, but sometimes the responsibility for elder members weighs heavily on them. Sangita Shah, a Jain, lives with her two children, her husband and her mother-in-law who is elderly; it is her duty to look after her mother-in-law:

It is a bond we have to stay with the elders. Life is different for us and our children.

This duty to respect and care for the elderly implicitly reciprocates the care one received oneself as a child or indeed the care afforded one's own children. Thus Deepa Patel, a Hindu, says of the relation between her own two children and her parents:

It is mainly families with young children that stay together because it is very convenient for them. I mean, both my children were brought up by my parents because we stayed together and now there is such a strong bond there. Now we don't stay together, they live in Leicester. Whenever they come here, my daughter won't leave my mother alone, she just calls 'ba, ba!' [grandmother] all day. My sister's daughter won't have the same bond because she has never lived with them. You can see the difference.

The strong bond that develops between children and their grandparents through the care they give them is, as I shall show below, crucial to what it means to be Gujarati in Britain today since it is this relationship that provides for the continuity of moral values over time.

Gender relations and spiritual responsibilities

Men and women may participate in the daily household *puja* in many instances, but in others it may be left for the women to perform, on behalf of all. Men who are Brahmans and/or elderly are more likely than other men to observe daily *puja* in the home. In households where there is a high level of religious observance, children of both sexes are taught from the age of three, to get up in the morning and shower, or take an Indian-style bath (by squatting on a stool and using a jug to pour water over the body), brush their teeth, and then do *puja*. Yogesh's grandparents told me that he has been doing this from the age of two years. The Swaminarayan guru had told them that if you drink in the morning before doing *puja*, it is like drinking blood. They also told me that daily *puja* shows gratitude to god and indebtedness to him, as well as being a personal communication with him. Some households observe *gharsabah*, which is joint family worship at the end of the day involving men, women and children, where a *puja* is performed and then the issues of the day are discussed before eating the evening meal. Yogesh's grandfather told me that they believe that 'those who pray together and eat together will stay together,' and here men may have an active role.

Men are also actively involved in a special *puja*, at Navratri or Diwali, during which prayers are said for family businesses, and the account books are presented to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, or Ambaji (a popular *mataji* in Gujarat). I observed such a *puja* during Navratri in Ahmedabad, which involved only the male members and the following is an extract from my fieldnotes recorded on 17.10.99:

The *pujari* (priest) comes at 10.30 a.m. and sets up a special shrine on the floor in the office: a picture of the goddess Ambaji sitting on her 'vehicle', a lion. In front of this are food offerings of three bananas lying on betel leaves, some *ghol* (sugar beet), a coconut, and some uncooked sweet *prasad* (made from wheat, sugar and butter), *ghee*, grains of rice, as well as incense sticks, yellow flowers, a steel pot containing water, another with red spots in it, a *divo* (candle), a steel pot with

kan koo (red powder used for making the Hindu spots on the forehead), some orange marigold flowers, a pink rose and another steel plate with five *diva* (candles) on it. The *pujari* conducts the first part of the service with the grandfather and begins by putting a red spot, or *chandlo* on his forehead with grains of rice pushed on top with the ring finger of his right hand, and then the grandfather reciprocates by placing a *chandlo* and rice on the priest's forehead. The *divo* is lit and the smoke waved towards the goddess and then water is sprinkled into the old man's hands, which he let flows into a bowl and then sprinkles some around him. Then his son, who runs the business, arrives for the *mantra*, and the priest puts the red spot and grains of rice on his forehead. The reading of Sanskrit lasts about 40 minutes. Father and son both sit on mats on the office floor, one opposite the shrine and one adjacent to the priest. Later it is explained to me that the energy released by the *mantra* sends sound waves travelling around the world, uniting the cells that create animals and people by changing the atmosphere, like thunder, which you cannot see. This energy can be positive or negative and like lightning or electricity can be very powerful and can kill men. It is hoped that positive energy will be created through the goddess as *shakti* (divine energy) for the office to make the business successful. A red Hindu *swastika* is drawn on a steel plate, five *diva* are lit, the *arti* is sung and the candles circled in a clockwise direction; then we are all given the opportunity to run our hands through the smoke and wipe this over our eyes and head. Money is given to the goddess by the men in the form of a ten-rupee note and three rupee coins, which the priest takes afterwards as payment. The *puja* ends with the young man burning one end of the candle and breaking the coconut on the threshold of the office. He catches the coconut milk in a bowl and then some of the flesh is given to the goddess and everyone present is given some to eat. The sweet *prasad* is handed round and then taken to the neighbouring offices for them to eat. Water in the bowl is then sprinkled around the office on everything (including my bag) ensuring the removal of any evil influences that might be interfering in people's lives and in the smooth running of the office. The young man then takes the water back to his family home and does the same there. The priest clears up the shrine and leaves the picture of the goddess but packs all the raw foods into his bag along with the money.

Men leave the organising and conducting of life-cycle rituals to the women (see chapter seven). In the past, men did not attend these rituals and now they appear to have only a peripheral role and observe the proceedings from a place behind the women and children. The *foi* (father's sister) plays a central part in the *chhati* (six-day ceremony after birth) and the *balmuvāla* (hair-cutting) and usually chooses the child's name. The child's mother is present but not active in the ritual, leaving the *ba* (paternal grandmother) and *foi* to conduct it. A priest may be called upon to conduct the ritual and male kin attend and are involved in the Ganesh *puja*, which precedes it and in the

following *arti*, joining with the rest of the household kin. Women, however, perform all the specific details of the ritual.

Men have an active role within the *mandir* (temple), which contrasts with the more peripheral one they have in household rituals. They are actively involved in administration and are voluntary members of committees that organise maintenance, catering, fund-raising, special events at festivals and security, amongst others. Retired, skilled workers, such as plumbers and electricians, offer their expertise voluntarily and many temples are almost entirely run on this basis. Women also work in the temple but to a lesser extent than men, organising the cooking of food, making garlands and conducting security searches on women. Following the massacre of Hindu worshippers at the Akshadam in Gandhinagar in 2002, security is tight at all Swaminarayan temples through the World, and because of the strict gender division here the women have to deal with the women and the men with the men.

Within the Swaminarayan *mandir* men and women are kept separate to avoid any feelings of lust or sexual attraction, which might distract the worshipper. The worshipping areas are divided into male and female sections. In the Neasden temple, the entry to the large hall is through separate doors, directing men to the left side and women to the right. The temple priests here are called *sadhus*, they are always men and wear saffron coloured robes, and are strictly prohibited from having any physical contact with women. If by chance a woman inadvertently touches one, or her shadow falls across him, he must fast for a day. In Gujarat men walk in front of groups of Swaminarayan *sadhus* to clear women from their route. While visiting the Narmada River in Southern Gujarat in September 1999, my female informant and I were suddenly directed down a side street, to avoid a group of *sadhus* who were heading towards the sacred river to worship and bathe in the waters. These strict gender separations within the *mandir* contrast with the joint *puja* conducted in the home, where men and women worship together.

The gender divisions in the Swaminarayan *mandir* begin early in life, with small children between the ages of two and eight in their *shishumandal* (small children's gathering) being separated into boys' and girls' groups. Then the *balmandal* (gathering for children eight to fourteen years) which is also separated into girls and boys; then the *kishormandal* (gathering for boys aged fourteen to twenty-three) and *kishorimandal* (gathering for girls of the same age). Twelve-week parental training courses are run on

Saturdays for fifty people aged between twenty-three and thirty-five, called *yuvakmandal*. Women have their own lectures and men have theirs in different rooms. If women wish to communicate with the *sadhu* or *guru*, they have to write him a letter. This strict gender segregation only applies within the temple confines and does not apply to worship in the home or in other buildings.

Other Hindu temples do not enforce a gender divide, and men and women can worship together. The Hari Krishna temple in Watford has a hall where men and women listen to lectures and perform *arti* together, as do other ISCON temples that I have visited here and in India. While in Gujarat, I visited many Shiva *mandir*, others devoted to the *mataji*, notably the mountaintop *mandir* at Pawaghar and the spectacular, marble *mandir* at Ambaji. At all these temples, women and men worshipped together, presented their offerings, received *tikka* (red spot on the forehead) from the *pujari* (priest) together and took *prasad* (blessed food). I witnessed two women who were possessed at Pawaghar and my informant told me that women were more likely than men to become possessed by the *mataji*. Many households have a pragmatic view of religion and will worship at different temples, at different times depending on the festival, time of the year, anniversary, or any life event. This may mean that temples cannot rely on the regular support of a given community, and cannot ensure a regular income.

Women may visit the *mandir* during the morning if they do not work outside the household and men and women worship together in the evening after work. The priest will conduct *arti* during these times and from my observations, the 7PM *arti* is most popular. The *mandir* is closed between 12 midday and 4 PM because the *murti* (representations of the gods) are given lunch, followed by a period of sleep, during which they must not be disturbed. When a man enters the *mandir* he rings the bell to signal to the god that he has arrived. If he is able, he will prostrate himself five times in front of the main shrine and then walk five times around the front and back of the images, touching the corners and sometimes kissing the stone. Women behave differently and they kneel or sit crossed-legged on the floor, with their hands together, in front of the shrine and then bow forward five times. Some hold prayer beads and recite a quiet mantra as they roll the 108 beads between their fingers. They too will then rise to their feet and walk five times around the *murti* in a similar manner to the men, touching the corners of the stone, and occasionally kissing the stone.

Visits to the *mandir* may be a daily occurrence for some men and women, but there are larger numbers of women generally in attendance. Some may only visit at special occasions or festivals, and this seems to apply in both Britain and Gujarat. In a similar way to household worship, women appear to have a strong obligation to worship in the *mandir* on behalf of other household members and take the *prasad*, the blessed offerings of the gods back to be shared. Elderly men are more likely than younger men to worship on a daily basis in the *mandir* and because of distance, are more likely to do so in Ahmedabad than Harrow.

Men have a more peripheral role than women in household rituals, especially life-cycle rituals, but may be involved in special rituals for family businesses. There may be continuity here with women being concerned with the domestic sphere and child-rearing, and men with business and social contacts outside the household.

Rituals to ensure a good husband.

The Hindu *vrata* tradition, that is a woman's devotion and service to her husband, his well-being being uppermost in her mind, still has a place in the lives of many women in Britain. Mary McGee (1991) argues that the *putivrata* (devoted wife) is rewarded in this life and the next, through her service to her husband:

The life of the *putivrata* allows a woman the opportunity to pursue the three of the four aims of Hindu life (*purusartha*) – religious duty (*dhama*), wealth (*artha*), pleasure (*kama*) – while striving for a moral perfection leading to the fourth, liberation (*moksa*) ... By fulfilling this ideal role, a woman will be led along a path of righteous conduct and moral perfection. (McGee quoted in Leslie 1991:78)

Some teenage girls, to ensure they get a good husband, perform the *vrata* ritual every year. Married women also perform the *vrata* ritual so that their husbands may have long and healthy lives. Young girls perform a *gauro* ritual for five years before they start performing *vrata*. Deepa's daughter, who is now thirteen, has completed the *gauro*. Girls did this annual ritual originally, to pray for a good husband. Some girls I know think it

is fun to perform this ritual with a group of friends in the summer holidays. It involves growing five different seeds – wheat, sesame seeds and other cereals, fasting for five days during which one eats no salt, wheat or rice, and doing *puja* every morning. Deepa said she worried about the girls during this time because they are not eating properly. At the end of the ritual they celebrate by going out together to the cinema. The girls enjoy the sense of togetherness this brings, the meaning of the ritual they told me is unimportant, but they told me it was to do with getting a good husband. They said that they do it because their mothers did it and they can have fun together, but Deepa told me that many girls today want to follow these rituals more than her generation did as girls. Kajol told me that women also do *vrata* for their children and other household members, and will fast for them.

Although many women hold full-time jobs outside the home, they continue to be responsible for the spiritual growth of the household, for cooking and for most housework. Today, however, men in Britain are becoming more involved in domestic chores and childcare than their fathers were and women's expectations of men are changing, especially now women are likely to be in paid employment outside the home. Two Patel sisters, Deepa and Puja, were among the group of nine women I met in March 1999 and reported in chapter two. They spoke to me in April 1999, about what has changed in the last twenty years and the differences they see between their husbands. Deepa is sixteen years older than Puja and there is a twenty-year age gap between their husbands, who have different attitudes to domestic chores. Deepa said:

My husband does help in the house, but he doesn't really know what to do. I have to tell him, he has to be told to do everything. But he will help. Puja's husband is so good. He helps with everything. Lots of men my husband's age, they won't even lift their plate from the table. Even in this country, they just won't do that, even when their wives are working.

Seema Shah, a Jain woman added:

Women say their prayers, they cook, they go to work, they clean the house, everything. On ZEETV [the Asian TV channel] recently there was a programme that said that men should be hand-in-hand with women and should work beside them in the house. It is nice for her because she is a human being as well. It is nice if they give a hand.

Sangita Shah, another Jain woman, suggested that Indian women are expected to have a different relationship with their husbands from their English friends.

Men you have to honour like gods. It is still like that in India. Even here, you have to take your husband as a god. Although it is not true, they are as good a human being as we are. It depends on the nature of the work, but especially if you are both working, it is nice to share work at home. If we are in the kitchen together, we talk to each other, and even the work gets done.

I asked whether they felt attitudes to women are changing. Deepa Patel replied:

Yes, women are becoming more independent than boys really. In the younger generation, the girls are going to be more demanding of the boys than now. They will be more demanding of their families too, it will change families.

Changes are happening in the expectations women have of their husbands and these may be even greater in the second generation of women educated in the UK. Women I know who were born and educated in India or East Africa reflect in their greetings, the primary importance in their minds of their husband's well being. After saying '*kem chho*' (how are you) to me or to other Hindus, or using a religious greeting such as '*Jayse Krishna*' or '*Jay Swaminarayan*', they will ask, '*tamara puti sara chhe?*' is your husband well? This is often followed by enquiries about the rest of the family.

Jacobson (1999) argues that the roles and positions of women vary considerably across Northern India, with the well-to-do college lecturer at one end of the spectrum and, at the other, the poor village woman working on the roads, her baby asleep in a hammock nearby. She suggests that women take an ambivalent view of themselves: the idea of motherhood is revered and '*mata*' or '*ma*' (mother) also means goddess and connotes warmth, protection and life-giving power; at the same time a woman's sexuality is controlled by men and when she is menstruating she can pollute others (Jacobson and Wadley 1999:59).

Some of the aspects of behaviour that have surprised me most in my friendships with Gujarati women have concerned their relationships with their husbands. Women, who appear to live independent lives in the workplace and seem to have autonomy in many aspects of their lives, may suddenly tell me that they cannot do something without reference to their husbands. An example of this happened recently when I had my nephew and niece staying with me, and had made an arrangement to visit Legoland with a Gujarati friend and her two children. The night before we were due to go, some days after the final arrangements had been made, my friend rang and told me that her husband did not want her to go because he wanted to go himself and would be working the next day. I was at first taken aback, but realised that if she did something that met

with her husband's disapproval she would be breaking her moral code and would lose favour with the gods.

Through sharing some of my own family concerns with Gujarati friends, I have been able to gain insights into family relationships that I might not have achieved otherwise. My parents have not been well recently and I have made frequent long-distance journeys to see them. I have been told by several Gujarati women that helping your parents is the most important thing you can do in the eyes of God. It is not seen as a duty, but part of your moral being and a way of improving your *karma*, which will help you in your next life. Family relationships are based on more than obligations and responsibilities, they are indivisibly linked to a woman's spiritual standing with her god. The more she can behave like a moral being in her relationships with others, the more favours she will have from her god. Her growth as a spiritual being also depends on her performing the daily *puja* (worship) at the family *mandir* (shrine) as well as worship at the temples (also known as *mandir*), life cycle rituals and religious ceremonies.

Household purity

Almost all the families I have met, both Hindu and Jain, practise the daily or twice daily *puja* and it is usually women who perform them on behalf of men and the rest of the family. The third element of Kakar's trichotomy – the partner-in-ritual, referred to above – could be applied here. Women are expected to, and do, ask everyday for divine blessings and protection from gods or goddesses and ancestors through prayer at the family shrine, where photographs of deceased relatives are often to be seen alongside pictures or statuettes of the gods and *gurus*. *Diva* (candles made from *ghee*, clarified butter, with wicks) are usually lit each morning, prayers are recited, and sometimes a short hymn is sung. Women will often rise early at 5 .m. and have a shower to cleanse their bodies before doing their *puja*. They are then expected to make *cha* (tea) for the rest of the family. If there are several women in the household, it is usually the older woman who performs *puja* and the younger one who makes the *cha*. Offerings are given to the gods at the *mandir* (shrine or temple); they usually consist of fresh fruit or flowers, which must be pure and uncooked. Once, in the house of the Brahman family with whom I was staying in Ahmedabad, I admired some fresh flowers that were going to be offered to the gods during Navratri (festival of nine nights before Diwali). I made

a move as if to sniff them, but was warned quickly that if I did so they were no longer pure and could not be offered at the *mandir*. Any taking of substances into the body, even smells, renders them impure. Once the fruit, nuts, sweets or sugar crystals, or flowers have been offered to the gods they become known as *prasad*, (blessed foods) and are shared within the household. If any member visits a *mandir* outside the home, they are expected to bring the god's blessing into the home by virtue of bringing the *prasad* back to the house for all to share.

Figure 16: Daily *puja* in Ahmedabad.



words (20/12/97).

Maya enters the first room taking the pictures of her gods – Shiva and his consort, Lalamba (the goddess of wealth who is important for women) – and a photograph of Jambun, her guru (holy man and teacher) whom she also calls god. She places the pictures on a corner of the work surface, lights an incense stick and a diya (a stick in glass) and puts them in front of the pictures. The glass is too hot at first and she has to soften it with the heat from the incense stick. Then she places suga beads, sugar crystals and salt on a steel tray and puts them in front of the gods. She prays aloud, bringing her hands together and bowing forwards towards the gods six times. Later she tells me that this ritual ensures that the gods are happy in their new home before the family can move in.

Figure 17: Navratri puja in Ahmedabad.



The household's *mandir* is usually situated in the kitchen or a child's bedroom or in a living room cupboard. It invites the gods into the house and is, therefore, the first thing to be set up when a family is moving into a new house and the last thing to be dismantled when they move elsewhere. Some informants have told me that some elements of the *mandir* are hidden under the floorboards of the house when they leave, so the gods can remain if they wish. I observed Mita, a woman who belongs to the *Lohana* caste, move into her new flat and the following account is taken from my field notes (20/12/97):

Maya enters the flat first taking the pictures of her gods – Shiva and his consort, Lakshmi [the goddess of wealth who is important for women] – and a photograph of Jalaram, her *guru* (holy man and teacher) whom she also calls god. She places the pictures on a corner of the work surface, lights an incense stick and a *divo* (a wick in *ghee*) and puts them in front of the pictures. The *ghee* is too hard at first and she has to soften it with the heat from the incense stick. Then she places *mug* beans, sugar crystals and salt on a steel tray and puts them in front of the gods. She prays aloud, bringing her hands together and bowing forwards towards the gods six times. Later she tells me that this ritual ensures that the gods are happy in their new home before the family can move in.

Protecting the household from pollution

Women usually have close contact with the gods, but while they are menstruating they must abstain from contact with the household shrine and from visiting the temple. The word for mother and goddess is *mata* and this reflects the closeness of their relationship. The pure mother is seen as having a special bond with the divine, yet at certain times in her life she is seen as impure, polluting and a danger to others. During the days of her menstruation each month, she cannot touch the household shrine, enter a *mandir* (temple), or attend any rituals or festivals for fear of polluting those attending. In some stricter families the woman is not allowed to enter the kitchen when menstruating for fear of angering the gods. Two women in the group of nine that I met on March 5th 1999 said how frightened they were of their goddess Kali or Kalima (with the respectful suffix) if they did anything wrong. Uma Morjaria, a *Lohana* woman, began by saying:

We all have a *Kuldevima* [the family's most important goddess] ours is Kalima. She wants us to offer special foods to her, such as uncooked rice, sesame seeds and different foods. When we have our periods we must not touch the foods or the *mandir*.

Sonita Chavda a Kshatriya woman, agreed and stressed how difficult Kalima is to please:

We can't even go to the temple at this time. Each family has a different *Kuldevi*, which is a goddess. I know my in-laws don't have one, but my Mum's family do. Kalima is a very strict goddess to please, especially at weddings and such. If you step out of line, or do something wrong, she will be angry. It makes my Mum slightly paranoid at times.

Ameeta Amin, a Patel woman said:

We don't understand it so much ourselves, we just follow. I used to be paranoid like that but now I am more relaxed.

Sonita added:

For me the fear has gone, but you can take it to an extreme and become paranoid. My mother is so concerned about her belief in the goddess and believes that if she does anything to offend her, her marriage will go wrong.

Dina Shah, was born a Hindu and has married a Jain man, explained how embarrassed she was when she was younger:

You know this period business. We were six brothers and sisters, two years apart in age. When we were teenagers, I was told to sit outside the kitchen to have my meals when I had a period. So automatically everyone knew you had a period. It was so embarrassing and I used to fight with my mother and say, I am not going to follow this. Even then we had to follow because my mother followed it. Now I have my nieces and sisters-in-law, it has all changed and my mother has to accept it. Now my nieces are sixteen and they won't do it and I can totally understand why they won't.

Deepa Patel joined in and said:

I suppose in the olden days in India, in the villages, they had to be careful for hygienic reasons. We didn't have sanitary towels then, so that is why they had to keep us away, for hygienic reasons. We are beginning to think it is all to do with ritual, but I am not too sure. I still believe in it and when I have my periods I close my little temple until my periods are over.

Dina said:

I am the same; I won't go to the gods to pray for the four days while I am bleeding. I want to believe it because I feel comfortable with it. I think 90% of women would try not to pray when they have their periods.

Uma wondered what happened if you make a mistake:

If you do something and make a mistake and open your temple when you had your period, I think it is OK, I do not get scared anymore. I used to get scared and think this or that will happen.

Seema Suthar added:

I know a woman who won't even drink a glass of water or sit in a room with others when she has her period. Some people are very religious. God is very pure in our society, in our culture. If a child is invited to a religious ceremony and accidentally touches someone who has a period, then the child must have a bath to be purified. Gold is very pure and if a gold chain or ring is put in water and then that water sprinkled on the child's head, then that will purify too.

The engagement and wedding, both civil and religious rituals, are organised and conducted by women, with men playing a secondary role. When a new bride joins a joint household this is both a time of joy but also a time of anxiety and even danger.

The bride is a dangerous stranger from whom the groom's family needs protection (Leslie 1991:5).

The myth of Indra's guilt being transferred to women in the form of menstrual periods as a mark of sin, danger and impurity is used to rationalize their restriction in the religious arena. The blood spilt on the wedding night may require a Brahman priest to

protect the groom's family by removal of the stained cloth. Leslie argues that in modern times, there is no overt reference to the cloth, which is now usually removed by the women (Leslie 1991:6). Hansa, a Lohana woman in her early twenties, described to me what happened to her after her arranged marriage in Gujarat. She met her husband three days before they became engaged and her parents had little time to prepare for the celebrations that followed and the more than one hundred guests who were invited. After her wedding she and her husband went to a hotel for four nights.

Early in the morning, the day after my wedding, I was taken by my parents to their house. I was not allowed to wash or shower or anything in the hotel. When I arrived at my parents' house, I had to go straight upstairs for a shower. Then I put on a new, green sari that my husband's family had given me. After that I could return to the hotel and visit my husband's family.

I asked Hansa if this showering had anything to do with concerns about pollution and she said that as Indian women are always virgins when they get married, it probably is, but no one talks about it.

The new wife begins her life with her husband's family who will have certain expectations about her and the duties that she should fulfil. When she is menstruating, if there are other women in the house, they will take over her kitchen duties and attend to the household shrine. Similarly, for the first forty days after childbirth a woman is ritually impure and may be confined to her bedroom while her bleeding is heavy; another woman in the household takes over her duties and she is supplied with nutritious foods (to be discussed further below). Many women see this exclusion after childbirth and during menstruation as a time for themselves, when they can rest and be free of their everyday duties.

In an overview of research conducted in India and Nepal, Allen (1990) reports views very similar to those discussed above concerning ambivalence about women and common Hindu female stereotypes: the pure virgin, voluptuous temptress, obedient wife, honoured mother, dread widow, impure menstruating woman, and powerful sexual partner. He argues that the hierarchy of the caste system based on relative impurity has had an effect on the lives of Hindu women.

They are, especially during menstruation and childbirth, a source of pollution as great as that associated with untouchables; and hence of comparable social worth: on the other [hand] it [relative purity] had led to their veneration as pure beings whose condition reflects on the honour and status

of their menfolk. These two beliefs, though apparently resulting in quite contrary evaluations of women, share in common the social concomitant of male control (Allen 1990:5).

One of my male informants was adamant concerning the reasons for the restrictions placed on women's behaviour when they are bleeding. Women are excused from work in the kitchen during their periods and after childbirth because they need rest while losing blood. This has nothing at all to do with impurity. After all, he said, babies are conceived there, so how can it be impure? He said this is a misinterpretation of Hinduism. My own first-hand information suggests that most women in Britain will now cook during menstruation and that many have no choice if they are living in nuclear households; they will refrain, however, from opening their shrines, attending religious rituals and visiting temples.

The purity of the *ghar* (household) is reflected in its members and is frequently threatened, so needs to be kept under constant surveillance by women. Regular ritual performance is essential or else the moral standing of the whole family is endangered. As men get older and retire, many show an increasing interest in religious ritual in the home and also go on pilgrimages to special temples, where there is believed to be a heightened sense of the god or *shakti* (divine energy).

..the idea of some spiritual withdrawal in the last years of life is strong. Old men properly devote themselves to pilgrimage and meditation, even if they do not totally abandon the general oversight of their land or business (Pocock 1972:96).

It is the women's responsibility however, to be guardians of the religious purity of the household.

In a discussion in the evening of April 9th 1998, I had with Nikhita and Kiran, the young Brahman couple, I asked where in their new house they keep their *mandir* and Kiran said,

It is upstairs in the children's bedroom.

Nikhita said,

It is not considered clean to have it in a room where you have relations between husband and wife.

Kiran:

My family is more modern and Nikhita's more traditional. Yet my family is more religious. My mother is very religious and yet she was one of the first women to go to university. She gets up at 5 AM in order to say her prayers.

Nikhita:

You have to have a bath before you pray, which means you wash your hair and everything. If you are menstruating, you cannot pray. The older women tend to be more religious than the younger ones because they are at work. With the older women it is a social thing, because they are at home all day. The mother's role is to bring up the kids and say the prayers. That is what every woman is taught to do. The generation now where you are working, Alison, do not have time for it.

I asked Nikhita and Kiran whether in their generation the religious responsibility is more equal between men and women.

Nikhita: It is still with the women.

Kiran: I think as you get older, you have more time.

Nikhita: Both your parents will not eat a meal or drink the day we go to the *mandir*, which is good.

Kiran: It is against their social conscience. It is what you are comfortable with. I have a lot of Jewish friends and they do the same and fit religion around the way they want to live their lives. I fit my belief around what I feel should happen.

The impurity of women during menstruation and after childbirth is well documented in the literature. Jocelyn Krygier argues that Hindu women are regarded as inherently impure in relation to men:

The symbolic structural assimilation, in text and belief, of woman with Sudra suggests that the system, governed by the opposition of the pure and impure, opposes twice-born men to women and Sudra and untouchable men (Krygier 1990:79).

My own data suggest, however, that the idea that menstruating women are a danger to others in the household is lessening, but that a ritually impure woman is still a threat to the purity of the shrine and must not be in contact with it during such times. Krygier quotes Scheper-Hughes who argues that seclusion could be seen as an expression of female solidarity (Scheper-Hughes 1972, Krygier, in Allen and Mukherjee 1990:96). This could well be the case after childbirth, when seclusion means the woman rests from daily chores and may return to the natal home where she is pampered and cared for by her own mother.

Women as pure with a close affinity with the *mata*

Women have an obligation not only to do *puja* daily and to go regularly to the *mandir* to pray for the household, but also to perform rituals at certain auspicious times in the life cycles of household members and to organise and conduct ceremonies at specific times in the Gujarati calendar. Young girls who have not yet begun to menstruate are regarded as possessing great purity and may be the object of veneration and worship (Allen 1990). The life-cycle rituals of childhood in effect separate the developing child from total dependence on the mother and foster interdependence with a wider circle of kin. According to Inden and Nicholas (1977) the life-cycle rituals are intended to remove bodily defects inherited from the seed or the womb and to infuse the body with good qualities. Each ritual prepares the body for attaining heaven and becoming a proper ancestor, in preparation for the ultimate goal of the release from life in the world and the cycle of re-births. The vital involvement of women in pregnancy, birth and other life-cycle rituals will be described in more detail in a later chapter, suffice it to say that the rituals practised inform a person's status within the family and among kin and the wider community and their spiritual standing with their god or goddess.

The close affinity women have with the *mataji* (mother/goddesses with the respectful suffix) makes them mediators in ritual between humans and the divine. Girls and young women who are virgins may become the *mata* in ritual, and their inclusion increases the validity and efficacy of the occasion, as will be shown for the hair-cutting ceremony described in chapter seven, where seven virgins were invited for each *lota* (representation of the goddess). Older married women encourage girls to involve themselves in the ritual and urge them to dance vigorously; if they do so, it is a good omen. Women's close relationship with the *mataji* demands adherence to purity practices, especially those associated with menstruation and childbirth, as Sonita mentioned earlier in the chapter. Even so, as I noted above, what constitutes 'adherence' is undergoing a degree of transformation in that younger generation women may cook food at times when older women would not do so. This change requires, however, that women overcome what one of my informants referred to as 'paranoia' concerning what may happen if they flout divine wishes. One of the *mataji*, Kalima, is often portrayed in violent, bloodthirsty poses and is represented as exacting reprisals if women do not follow the expected conventions. The purity of the household must be upheld to prevent

the *mataji* from becoming displeased and regular rites and duties must be performed for them.

Figure 18: Gayatri, one of the *mataji*, riding on her 'vehicle', a swan (Ambaji Mandir 1999).



Raheja and Gold (1994) in their analysis of Rajasthani women's songs challenge the image of the Hindu woman as split between her 'sexual potency' and 'procreative and nurturing capacities'. The images of the goddesses have been used to emphasise this split have been largely obtained by watching rather than listening to women. They criticise Bennett's work with high-caste Hindus in Nepal who said: 'Female sexuality is not denied in the mother as it is symbolically in the sister and the daughter.' (Bennett 1983:255) Bennett suggests here that 'motherhood, then, purifies dangerous wives and makes their sexuality auspicious instead of dangerous' (Raheja and Gold 1994:36).

They argue that the split image approach to Hindu women comes from a male viewpoint and women themselves as 'participants in a society strongly oriented toward fertility' (Ibid 37). Through listening to women's songs they suggest that:

Rajasthani folk culture, transmitted in women's songs and stories, supplies many images of females that are simultaneously seductive and fertile, erotic and domestic, and positive (Raheja and Gold 1994:38).

Through listening to women I agree that women themselves are positive about their lives and the expectations placed on them. The precautions that need to be made during menstruation are accepted by most and do not interfere with the close affinity they have with each other and the *mataji*.

Mrs Chavda suggested that what is in 'the back of the mind' would continue to be upheld so long as people 'believe in god and fear that god will punish you if you do things wrong.' For mature women, what is in 'the back of the mind' includes respect for elders and looking after the physical and spiritual needs of husbands and their kin before attending to their own needs. Ultimately women benefit themselves spiritually and enhance their *karma* and standing with the gods if they do their duty by their kin. Women seek to maintain these ideals and pass them on to children by example. The feminist view of the Hindu woman as subordinated by men wants subtlety, for the older woman holds a powerful position in the *ghar*, in part by virtue of her control of ritual activity there. Older women tend to dominate the younger ones in the household, who are expected to be respectful to them. As in Nikhita's case, her husband Kiran had such a close relationship with his mother that he referred to her rather than to Nikhita when making decisions.

Men still tend to control household finances, but women are beginning to have more influence over the way money is spent. I asked Sanjay and Veena who are both accountants, which one of them looks after the money in their household. Sanjay replied that he did, but Veena advised him. In Sapna's case, her husband, who unloads containers at Heathrow Airport, will not give her enough money to clothe and feed her three daughters. She has to work during the night as a cleaner in a department store to have enough money for her children, and she pays the money she earns into her own account for her children. Maya, who married a Muslim, controls the finances in her house. She pays the rent to the council and the flat is registered in her name. Hansa, the young Lohana woman who came from India following an arranged marriage, is now

divorced. She found that her mother-in-law and father-in-law made her life intolerable with their demands and started hitting her on a regular basis. Her husband did not support her, she had no family of her own in this country, so she fled to a women's refuge. She now lives in council flat with her four-year-old son and the contacts that her son has with her ex-husband's family are still very strained.

There is an expectancy that newly married women in the household will do the chores that no one else wants to do and in some cases this may be unreasonable. Many women accept this situation, realising that as their seniority increases they will be in control of the household's physical and spiritual wellbeing, and will be able to influence how the household finances are spent. For some, as in Hansa's situation the relationships became so difficult that she had to leave. Change is occurring and younger women are becoming more assertive in the family and beginning to influence financial decisions. When referring to the *ghar*, men and women of different castes say 'my mum's house' and tell me that she is responsible for the character of the *ghar*, the food that is eaten, the ritual practice and the moral codes upheld in it.

Chapter 5 Food

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion, exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries Douglas M (1975:249).

In Gujarati households in the UK as well as in India, food carries specific meanings about relations between kin and families. Contact is made with the gods through food offerings, and special foods are used in festivals, in pregnancy and after childbirth, as well as in life-cycle rituals. Supernatural forces are kept at bay or dispelled through the use of certain pungent-smelling foods. Food is of central importance in women's lives, not only because they are responsible for nourishing and sustaining the physical bodies of all family members, but also because they have to maintain their family's spiritual well-being and protect it from evil influences. Pocock (1972) comments that women are responsible for the religious purity of the household and for this very reason have to control their own potential to pollute.

As cooks they are guardians of the religious purity of the family. At the same time they are subject to pollution by menstruation and occasionally by childbirth. Not only are they believed to be physically subject to pollution, but are morally more subject to sexual temptation (Pocock 1972:12).

The preparation and eating of food has to take into account ideas of purity as well as certain family rules. By eating foods that were consumed by one's ancestors, foods that people have eaten for generations, the members of a household maintain their links with their ancestors in their village of origin in Gujarat or in another area of Gujarat that is called 'home'. This chapter draws on my fieldwork in Harrow and India to explore the meaning given to food in different contexts and addresses women's views on the cooking of Indian foods and how to allow for the different food preferences of kin in different generations.

Food for different generations

The group of nine women I met on 5th March 1999 were friends who had children attending the same local primary school. Six of the women come from different Hindu castes, two were Jains and one was a Hindu married to a Jain. During the three-hour session, they told me their ideas about food, and the importance of food for what it means to be Gujarati, before we all shared a meal together. Despite their diverse

backgrounds and religious beliefs, they mostly agreed with one another, even with respect to the necessity for observing life-cycle rituals and rituals for warding off the evil eye. Any suggestion that their food might be different as a function of caste, or that cooked food could not be shared with others outside the caste because of concerns about purity, as argued by many authors such as Chapman and Macbeth (1990:46) were rejected by these women and demonstrated in the way they shared the meal prepared for us that day. Pocock (1980:141) suggests that at special functions such as marriages and funerals people of different castes will eat together and the group itself will make judgement as to whether the food is fit to eat or not. The essential question is, who has cooked the food? Later in this chapter I will show that the positive or negative influences of the cook may be the deciding factor as to whether the food is safe to eat.

Ameeta Amin, a Patel mother of two young school children, began by telling me that:

We have strong conventions and we do respect that, and it does work for us. It really helps us. It makes us feel comfortable, especially when we are eating our own food.

Sonita Chavda, a Kshatriya mother, continued:

I don't know, but I think all of us tend to, I know I do, have Indian food the majority of the week. I stayed with my mother-in-law for a year [after marriage] and then we bought our own house, and I still cook Indian food five or six times a week. It's quite a lot, so I do have lazy days.

A heated debate followed about the importance of Indian food for the family and the length of time spent in its preparation – a complete meal takes about two hours to prepare, which is hard for women who work outside the home. Deepa Patel said that women have to adjust and adapt, which seemed to be applicable to various areas of their lives.

You need to adjust and adapt, like when you don't have time, I think every family does that, do pasta and sandwiches. Vegetables are given importance in all the communities. But they use pasta, vegetables or pizza. OK there are people who do not like frozen foods, but it is quicker than *rotli* (chapati bread), and *shak* (vegetable curry); or *dahl* (lentils) and rice, which is easier again. People try to adapt and do chipped or roast potatoes with vegetables.

All the women in the group are vegetarian and see this as an important aspect of their heritage and religious beliefs. Dumont suggests that vegetarianism is not a 'primitive' feature but a fact of high civilisation that may have originated from the Jain or Buddhist communities through the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or non-violence (Dumont 1980:146).

... that vegetarianism forced itself on Hindu society, having begun in the sects of the renouncers, among which are Jainism and Buddhism. No doubt these two disciplines of salvation are but the two main testimonies we have to a more extensive movement: *ahimsa* came from further afield and was more widespread; it remains true that to all appearances it was the renouncer who carried it right through to its practical consequences for diet, and gave it to Hindu society as an example of a value higher than the Brahmanical values of sacrifice (Dumont 1980:149).

The widespread influence of Jainism in Gujarat could account for strict observance of vegetarianism. The eating of meat is practised by low caste and tribal people in Ahmedabad but most Gujaratis in the UK are vegetarian. There is a gender difference here with more women avoiding meat than men. Dumont points out that cattle grazing played a large part of the lives of Vedic Indians, and cattle were only killed for sacrificial reasons and only the meat of sacrificed cattle was eaten (Dumont 1980:147). Banks also suggests that Hindus have been influenced by Jains in Gujarat and become strict vegetarians. Hindus do not follow the rules of *ahimsa* to the extremes that some Jains do and will not share their concern for avoid killing small insects or microorganisms and will not avoid eating leafy vegetables, or cover their mouths when outside the house. Banks argues that the central principal of *ahimsa*, that is lack of desire to inflict harm, respect for life, and the most serious sin of all is to deprive another being of his life, or stop a soul from residing in a body (Banks 1992). As Mr Shah told me. 'We believe in-live, and let live.'

Many Jains in Britain follow strict dietary rules and avoid root vegetables, garlic, onions and raw green salad that may harbour small insects. Garlic and onions are thought to have aphrodisiac qualities and are also avoided by stricter Vaishnava Hindus, many of whom follow the Swaminarayan sect. Laidlaw's (1995) informants told him the reasons why these underground tubers are not allowed:

The earth is full of tiny *jivs*, [living, microscopic organisms], and millions of these are killed when these plants are pulled up. They are bursting with life (they sprout spontaneously even if not planted). They contain an infinite number of *jivs* (even a tiny part of the root, if planted will grow).

They have a bad effect on you, heating the blood and inflaming the passions. (Laidlaw 1995:156)

Reynell found that green vegetables may be restricted to the 8th and 14th auspicious days of the month, yogurt must not be eaten if it is more than a day old, in order to avoid eating any microscopic organisms, and alcohol is forbidden because of the fermentation involved (Reynell 1985:48).

Three of the women in the group came from Jain households and there was general agreement about the importance of Indian vegetarian foods and introducing these to their older children. The difficulties women have in balancing the demands of their children (who wish to eat the same as their peers at school) with the needs of other kin and the mothers' desires to maintain the diet followed through generations were hotly debated by the group.

Uma Morjaria, a Lohana woman explained how hard it is if they also work:

If you work and you don't have time, you can't make Indian food everyday. But I do make a point because I want my children to know what their food is and I think if I didn't, they would very happily eat pasta and potatoes and everything everyday. So for that very reason, whether I have time or not, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, about three days a week I will try to carry on with Indian food.

There was general agreement from this mixed caste group, and the opinions expressed above came from Lohana, Kshatriya, Patel, and Jain women respectively. Reference is frequently made to kin members in the context of food, Seema Suthar, who belongs to the carpenter caste, continued:

It depends on the family, like if I have my mother-in-law staying. Even though I work from home, if the kids want something English, or something different, still I have to make Indian food. It is their way of satisfying themselves, they can't have just jacket potatoes or pasta with vegetables.

Then Sangita Shah, a Jain woman continued:

My father-in-law would never touch pasta, pizza, nothing. He just wants Indian food everyday.

In general the women felt that the older generation, especially their parents-in-law, insist on Indian food as the only food that satisfies them physically, as a food that is their right and heritage and part of their bodies as Gujaratis. They admitted, however, that changes are happening. Ameeta said:

The food has changed over the years. What a staple diet was to our parents and grandparents is no longer there. They still have millet flour and make a mixture of split lentils and rice that was their staple diet. The girls love that and in fact would eat it a lot, but I just give it once a week.

A lively discussion followed on staple foods and special foods, so I had to ask them to speak one at a time and Bina Dodhia, a Jain woman, continued:

We all have a special food to make and I said I like to make *kichi* from rice flour. It is actually dough, a steamed dough.

Deepa Patel said:

We call it *papion* in Patels. You can have the green one as well that is made from rice and split lentils, green grams.

Seema added:

Khichadi [a mixture of rice, dahl and spices] is one of the staple foods that is one of the best foods in all its ways from Gujarat, full of proteins, starch, its very good for bones and energy. It came right from the small villages.

This food can be linked with ‘the small villages’ and is thus seen as real Gujarati food – food which, for generations, has been prepared the same way and which, in the eating allows a kind of access to those previous generations and ‘the small villages’ where they lived. Deepa said:

When people cannot not afford sweets and *ghee*, or butter – it is a simple diet.

Sangita Shah said:

My first child, the elder, was born in India, and every second day I used to give her *khichadi*, rice and lentils with yogurt, which helps the digestion. But it gives strength, if you see her now, she is full of stamina because of her childhood food. All over India everyone has their own staple food.

There was general agreement about the importance of diet in childhood, the benefits of which will continue into later life. Sonita suggested that there is now more awareness of health issues associated with diet and that nowadays people eat less saturated fat.

There is not so much *ghee* [clarified butter] used and people use oil. Children used to have a lot more. I know we did. As a child I used to eat *puri* [fried, puffed bread], you know. My mum used to make it and even now I do like it, but you are always conscious about your diet.

Uma suggested a reason why one has to be more careful in the UK:

We do not perspire here.

Sonita admitted that she has these foods sometimes but not always, and Ameeta contributed another reason why they have to be more careful now.

In the old days they used to work much harder and used to burn it off. These days we have got the car and everything. It is the lazy way.

Everyone said they made *rotli* [flat chapati bread] and this is still their staple food. Bina said:

We get the millet flour and make *rotla* [thick bread] and I don't know whether it is the same in most families, but I certainly make it several times a week. The girls like it, my husband enjoys it.

Uma agreed:

I make rotla too. In Africa we had hardly been to our GP, we were so healthy; or the hospital, where was the hospital?

Deepa explained she had made some snack foods for our lunch;

I have made rice from left-overs and all the snacks. You can help yourselves before you go. It is a tradition like, when a person comes, it is nice to give a cup of tea or a snack, or if there is time, you ask them for lunch or dinner. Sometimes it becomes too much, especially when you are tired and working. Like today my friends helped me.

Food for guests

Ameeta Amin, a young Patel woman from the group above, explained:

Like as you say, someone would come knocking on the door, and they know I am at home, so if they are passing by, they would just stop here. We have to have something in the house, like snacks or at least a cup of tea and snacks, if nothing else, it is always there.

Sangita Shah suggested a difference between here and India:

Yes that is the difference I have found, coming from India, you can just knock on the door and you come in. Staying in this country for the last eight years, there is a difference. Even the people in our community say can you ring us.

Certainly this is what I experienced in my stay in India, where the front door was open most of the day and visitors came without announcement, especially in the early evenings. Water is offered there to everyone, followed by *cha* and snacks to people who stay for longer or who are close friends, but only kin are invited for meals. Bina Dodhia could see an advantage in the British convention:

The other side is nice as well, people are prepared for you. Time is so short sometimes. Working, kids, activities, family, you need a lot of time for them and suddenly people walk in and you don't know what to do. There are advantages and disadvantages.

The UK women are experiencing time pressures, balancing the needs of the family as well as work and entertaining the wider community. Perhaps these pressures are also increasing in India now, as more women work outside the home, especially in urban

areas.

Dina Shah explained what her childhood was like:

In a small village, if they can't afford to buy milk, because it is expensive for them, they buy a little bit, 100 mls and then they can offer tea at least. I could remember because I was just 11-12 years old. Sometimes they use a saucer for themselves, but if guests come then they bring cups, even borrow cups from neighbours. Now you see how warm they were, but at the time, I thought it was silly. You value it now, when you see the world and grow up.

However Sangita Shah's experiences of India were different:

Recently when I went to India, we went to houses, but they didn't serve food. They didn't have that much courtesy, to serve food or make a little bit. It is quite tiring and the journeys are so far.

Providing food for guests implies a participation in the wider community, which is part of their Indian heritage, but could be inconvenient in their lives here in the UK when the demands of work and children come first. In India entertaining people other than kin is expected, but here 'time is short' and guests other than kin may not be encouraged without announcement. In the Brahman family joint household with whom I stayed in Ahmedabad, cooked food was served to kin only, unless prior arrangements had been made.

Dumont suggests that food once cooked, 'Participates in the family who prepared it (1980:140).' As Dumont argues, cooked food may be thought of as more vulnerable to evil influences and contamination from without, or impurity within, the household. The cooking transforms the food into a transitional state, which has ambivalent status, neither raw nor digested and is more vulnerable to jealous looks or evil influences.

This is perhaps because, by cooking, food is made to pass from the natural world to the human world, and one may wonder whether there is not here something analogous to the 'marginal state' in *rites de passage*, when a person is no longer in one condition nor yet in another, and consequently exposed, open in some way, to evil influences. In India itself most of these *rites de passage* correspond to an impurity, which expresses the irruption of the organic into the social life; now there is something of the organic in our case, as with excretion, and, with the necessary difference, there is if not true impurity at least an exceptional permeability to impurity. Hence the preliminary bath which, however is not enough, because, as we know, the pure is powerless against the impure and only the sacred vanquishes it (hence in what follows, the use of products of the cow) (Dumont 1980:140).

Generation and gender in the kitchen

Generational changes in the relationships between men and women are apparent in so far as women in Britain and in urban Gujarat are asking for more equality with men. Some of the discussion about gender roles happens in the kitchen, with younger men taking part in cooking and clearing up after meals. In joint households women may still be doing most of this work but where couples have set up separate living arrangements men appear to be taking a more active part.

Food and its preparation concerned all the women in the group of nine women I referred to above. In the kitchen, tensions between a woman and her mother-in-law can arise, over what food is to be cooked, or who does it. The rivalry that can exist between the two generations of women has been described to me as 'kitchen power' by members of an Asian women's support group consisting of women of different ages. The conflict that can arise here may be reflecting other relationships in the household, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Hierarchical positions in households are reflected in who eats with whom. In Ahmedabad men, guests and older women are usually served first and sit together at the table and younger women and children are served afterwards and may eat separately in another room or sitting on the floor. Food is always eaten with the right hand; the left hand is used after defecation and considered unclean. Some people do drink a 'glass' (made of stainless steel) of *pani* (water) with their left hand. The hands are washed before and after eating and some people pour the remains of their *pani* over their hands onto their plate at the end of the meal. In Harrow, meals tend to be more relaxed and the hierarchical order of eating does not seem to apply, although men and guests are usually served first. When relationships are harmonious, the eating of food in the *ghar* brings kin together within households and unites them in the sharing of Gujarati food. Mealtimes can also be times when tensions are high and difficulties between household members exposed as I experienced in Ahmedabad and the following is an extract from my field notes on 7/10/99:

I visit the Gosrani, Jain household in the west of the city, travelling there by rickshaw and managing to find the block of flats quite easily this time, despite the lack of street numbers. Three generations live jointly including Rita, a mother in her late twenties, her husband and his younger brother, her

two children, including a baby of four months. She explains that her brother-in-law is going through a divorce at the moment and that her father-in-law is upset about this.

Rita was a lively, thin woman, who wore a blue, Punjabi top and white trousers with a white *chundari* (scarf). We spoke about her life- she has two living children, but sadly two of her children have died; a girl of breathing problems at four months and a boy of dehydration at nine months. She was tearful when telling me about their deaths but said she must be positive for her two surviving children: she had a girl of eleven years and a boy of four months. Her husband and his brother worked with their father in a family business that made folding chairs. She said that it was better to keep business in the family because you know you can trust everyone. She used to work as a traditional dancer performing *garba* all over the world, in public displays. Now she does not work then because she had decided to devote her life to her children.

Rita met her husband when she was fifteen years old and they started dating and had a love marriage that both parents accepted because they were both Jains. She said her parents-in-law want her to use the house as her own and invite friends round, but at the moment relationships are tense because her husband brother's wife has recently left the household. She invited me to stay for lunch, but warned me that her mother-in-law and father-in-law are not very happy at the moment.

Rita explains about the difficulties her sister-in-law experienced in the household: She had difficulties adjusting to living away from home. She said that Indian women have to get used to being told what to do by everyone, but they have to go through that phase without arguing. Now she says that she and her husband are good friends and respect each other, but it was not easy at first. Problems arise if women argue and do not give things time to settle. It is hard for women, they have to move away from their families and adjust to a completely new set-up.

Mr and Mrs Gosrani came into the room and Rita introduced me to them and they said '*kem chho*' to me but nothing else. They indicated that it was time to eat, and moved towards the table and invited me to sit down. We eat potato *shak*, a curry with balls of soya, shredded cabbage with spices, *dahl* and rice. Mrs Gosrani kept urging me to eat more and told me 'don't be shy'. There was a tense atmosphere at the table, Rita acting politely to her parent-in-law, but only speaking to me. Mr and Mrs Gosrani were silent throughout the meal apart from one or two words that they exchanged in Gujarati. Mrs Gosrani sat crossed legged on her chair and when she had finished eating, poured her glass of *pani* (water) over her hands into her dish. I realised I have observed older

women and men doing this, but younger people do not do it. After I had finished I was invited to wash my hands at the sink at the side of the room. Rita appeared relieved when the meal was over and asked me to go upstairs to her bedroom to look at photographs of her children.

In this account, the tensions in the Gosrani household were expressed during the meal through the lack of social exchange between Mr and Mrs Gosrani, and Rita. Divorce is still difficult for families to accept both in India and Britain, and brings shame. I have known an old woman who has refused for ten years to accept that her daughter is divorced and still asks her about her husband. For the Gosrani family above, the difficulties were apparent, and the social relations were strained at all times but particularly apparent at mealtimes.

Pregnancy and childbirth are times when younger women are guided by older female kin, initially mothers-in-law and then, after the birth, mothers. The relationship of dependency on other women becomes more apparent, with women who had apparently been leading independent lives in the workplace now following the advice and guidance of others.

When a woman is seven months pregnant, the ritual called *kholo bharvo* (lap-filling, or literally putting in the lap) is performed where rice is given by her mother to her mother-in-law and passed from one to the other from the folds of one woman's sari to the others, this ritual will be described in more detail in a later chapter. Her mother-in-law saves the rice that will be cooked after the baby is born and shared between the patrilineal and natal family.

After the birth the woman's mother makes special foods for her, to rid her of the impurity she carries, which is most dangerous in the first two weeks. This impurity could pose a threat to the health of other family members, which could be conveyed in cooked foods. So the woman is not allowed in the kitchen during this time and, in some households where this is strictly observed, she has to have her own cutlery and plates and eats in a separate place. The foods prepared include fresh, green vegetables and a special cooked food called *katlu* made from wheat, nuts, gum, honey and *ghee* that women believe ensures a strong back later in life. Proper care at this time, when a woman is in a state of ritual impurity, is vital for the production of milk for her baby

and her future health. She must also drink boiled water with spices, which women say helps in ridding the body of the blood.

Food at this time links the two sets of kin in the exchange of rice and marks a special relationship between the newly delivered woman and her mother. Sometimes other kin such as sisters or aunts may step in and cook for them. The marginal state of cooked food may be augmented by the marginal state of the woman in this rite of passage where she is becoming a parent, and makes this time one that requires utmost vigilance. During this period of ritual impurity she is not only excluded from the kitchen but must have no contact with the gods or the family shrine. After the visit to the temple, however, she can resume this contact; but purity and closeness to the gods can be attained only through the removal by fasting of everyday cooked foods from the body.

The importance of fasting

Women, and occasionally men, may fast on a certain days of the week or month, for their god, or for deceased relatives. Some people will fast if they have made a vow to a god to do so, in exchange for a favour; thus Maya told me that she had been having problems with her husband and decided to fast every Tuesday for *mataji*, so that she would help her and give her strength. After the death of a respected kinsperson, a fast may be observed every eleven days. A fast may require abstaining from food altogether, or giving up wheat, and some may eat fruit only, which is considered purifying. Jain women are expected to drink only boiled water during the day of their fast and to eat nothing. Meera, from the Lohana caste, told me how she began fasting weekly as a child.

When I was young my mother would fast every Thursday. She believed in a god who was born on a Thursday, called Jalaram [more often considered to be a saint]. Because I adopted the Thursday, I carried on. I was very young, I was only seven, when I started to fast with her. I have been in England for nearly thirty years and I have fasted in the last twenty years. I am now fasting because, I still believe in god you know, but because I am doing yoga. I believe you need to clean your system at least once a week and I thought keeping Thursday is a good option. I eat no cooked food on this day but I can eat fruit.

I asked why she withheld cooked foods and she replied:

I think the reason is if you have cooked foods it is very heavy. It is not pure. I think it may be to do with positive and negative energies. If you are making a curry, you don't know where all the vegetables come from, you might have bought it from a supermarket and it was all nicely wrapped up. Then who picked it up, the person who did might have loads of negative energy while they were doing it. So if you restrict it from your system on that day so that you are completely purified. Someone like my mother doesn't have anything, just fluids, tea and coffee, nothing else.

Meera emphasised the potential hazards of cooked foods being more vulnerable to negative influences in the way that Dumont (1980:140) has suggested. Raw foods are pure and safe to be given to the gods and safe for some to eat on the days when they are fasting. Dumont suggests that the only way to ensure purity of cooked foods is to include one of the products of the cow and most meals do include *dahi* (yogurt) at the end.

The older women advise on which raw foods to use on auspicious occasions such as life-cycle rituals, beginning with the exchange of rice in the seventh month of pregnancy. For the '*chhati*' or sixth day ceremony after the birth, an offering of *mug* beans (green lentils) is given to the gods. Mina told me that, for the hair-cutting ceremony, a special food is prepared made from seven different grains, sesame seeds and sugar, none of which is cooked. The number seven is auspicious and at special occasions is found in different forms. At one of the hair-cutting ceremonies I attended, a special cooked milk and rice dish was made and each of the seven virgins invited had this sweet food put straight into her mouth. At life-cycle rituals wider kin meet and eat cooked foods after the rituals, but the link with the gods in the ritual is usually made through raw foods. Sweet foods such as *ladu* (round shaped sweets made of wheat, honey, and milk) and *jalebi* (strands of sweet, deep fried wheat) are always shared with guests at happy occasions like these, after the birth of a child, especially a boy, at ceremonies and festivals.

Jains fast during Paryushan for one, three, five, eight, or sixteen days, and women told me that they are expected to fast every few years; only very religious people do it every year. Reynell (1985) argues that fasting is an important aspect of Jain women's religiosity and in each of the households she entered in Rajasthan, one woman was always fasting. In Britain, Jain women fast only occasionally, although recently a sixteen-year-old girl told me she had fasted for sixteen days and drunk only boiled water from 9 am until 5 pm everyday and that although it was difficult at first, her body

became used to it. At the end of Paryushan the fast is broken at a large gathering of the community where simple foods of peanuts, rice, bean curry and tomatoes are eaten. I attended one such gathering at the Oshwal Centre in Potters Bar, where 5,000 Oshwal Jains came one sunny afternoon in September.

The purity of milk

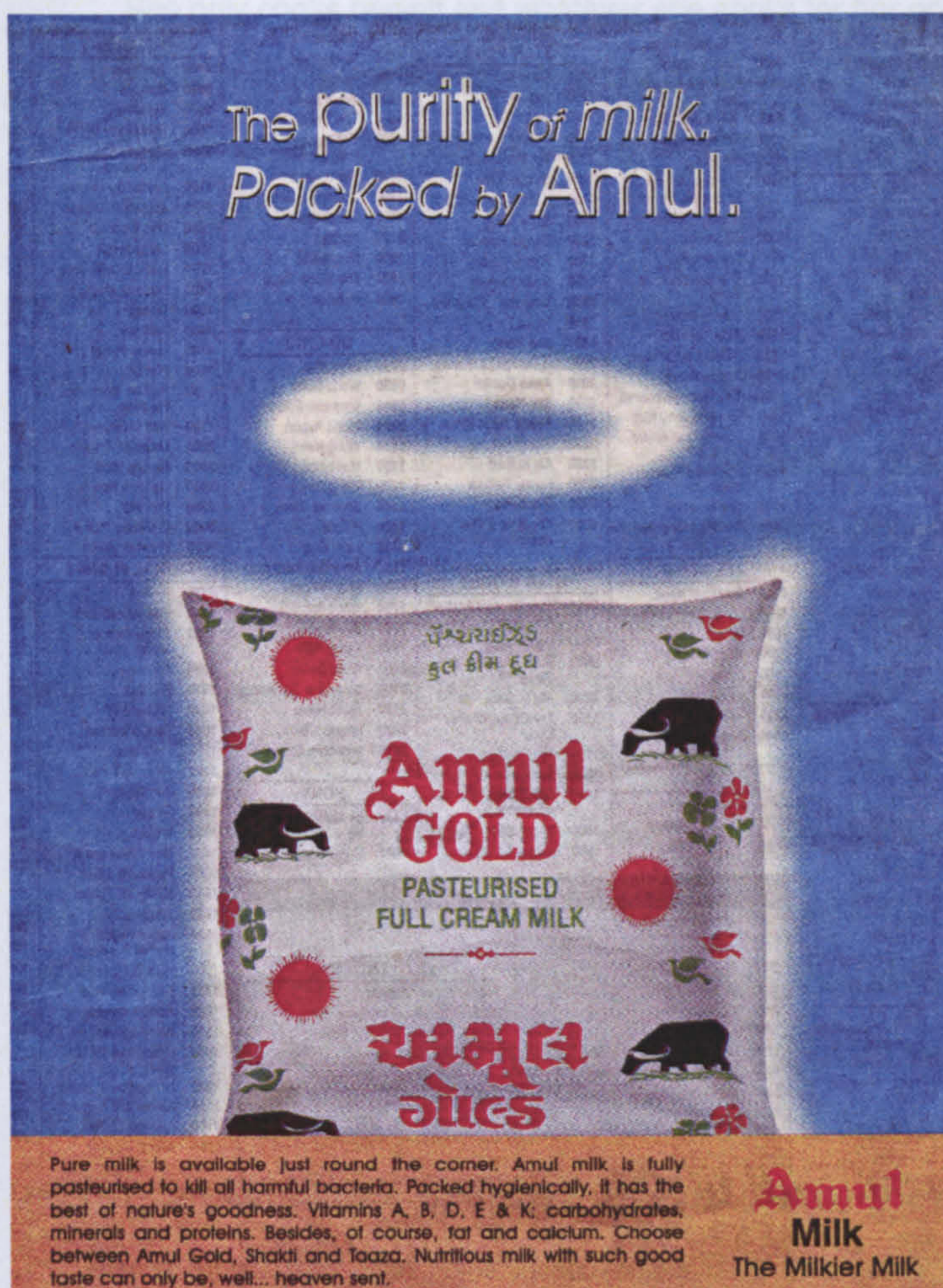
Grazing played a large part in the life of Vedic Indians, and it may be supposed that like many other pastoral peoples they killed cattle only when there were good reasons, sacrificial reasons, and only the meat of sacrificed animals was eaten. In other words there was a religious attitude towards cattle, which is not surprising, and which is to be taken as the starting-point for what was later to become the veneration of the cow, the cow having been already extolled in Vedism as a cosmic symbol, the universal mother and source of food ... (Dumont 1980:147).

The cow became venerated as a sacred animal, was no longer sacrificed and its five products then were seen as beneficial and purificatory (ibid: 150) these substances becoming 'five immortal substances' in ritual. Cow or buffalo milk is regarded as a pure food for everyone and included in most meals as curd or yogurt (*dahi*), which is thought to help the digestion of cooked foods. Milk is particularly suitable for babies and children who are intrinsically pure, so the food given them is similar to that given the gods. Thus an advertisement for milk from a local dairy in an Ahmedabad newspaper claimed that milk has ultimate purity. The word 'purity' was written under a silver halo over the packet of milk. Milk is pure and sacred and so it is a safe food for children. Cooked foods, by contrast, are vulnerable to evil influences or negative forces and may be responsible for introducing an unclean element into the body of the child. So weaning may be delayed, depriving children of the needed nutrients, especially minerals that are present in a mixed diet. Being rich enough to buy milk may be seen as a sign of progress, as mentioned earlier by Dina, whose family could not afford to buy much milk when she was growing up in India.

Milk is one of the five immortal substances described above, at least one of which is always included in rituals to the gods. The sacred cow is referred to as *gai-mata* (cow mother/goddess) and its presence in large numbers on the streets of India act as a reminder of this. In Ahmedabad, every night, leftover *rotli* (chappati bread) was left for cows on the walls outside the flats where I was staying. If a cow attempted to eat vegetables from the market barrows, it was treated with respect and gently pushed

away. The *gai-mata* produces milk, a pure, white fluid, believed to be essential not only for health, but also in linking humans with the divine.

Figure 19: An advertisement for buffalo milk (Ahmedabad, Times of India October 1999).



Food for the gods

Food given to the gods ensures the removal of inauspiciousness from the household and is crucial in the protection of the wider community and even the universe. Raheja (1988:68) shows how the giving of *dan* transfers auspiciousness to the person, the house and the village: the food given in ritual becomes the food left by the god or goddess. *Prasad* is the polluted food of the goddess, but for men it is the most pure

While in Ahmedabad I observed that at every temple visit to do *puja* (worship with *diva*) or *arti* (ritual act with singing), raw food, usually in the form of fruit, nuts or sugar crystals, is presented to the god, and once blessed takes on a new meaning as *prasad*. It is taken home, as a blessing, but menstruating or newly delivered women cannot eat it. Cooked foods can only be given to the gods if special conditions are adhered to: a

separate area must be available to cook for the gods and the utensils must be kept separate from those used to prepare food for the family. Meera told me:

My mother cooks for her god everyday. But everything is separate, no one can go in her kitchen. She only cooks herself and whatever she cooks for her god is offered to him and then she eats the same food. People like me can't cook for God, because I don't have the facilities just for him, and have everything separate, all the ingredients and everything is completely separate from the rest of the household.

More commonly, raw foods are prepared for the gods because they are considered safer and not so subject to contamination, as Uma explained:

We offer some food to Kalima, like rice, not cooked, sesame seeds and different, different foods. When we have our periods we are not supposed to touch that.

The Brahman family with whom I stayed in Ahmedabad, prepare *prasad* (food for the gods) on special occasions at the family shrine, and usually fruit is cut into small pieces by one of the family members. If the younger women are menstruating, as was the case during Navratri (nine nights of celebration), one of the young sons was asked to prepare the *prasad* as instructed by the grandmother, and was told to place it in the front of the shrine by the *diva* (candles). During Navratri the *prasad* is a different fruit every night – apple, payaya, orange, pomegranate etc. – but once prepared for the goddess it must not be seen, touched or eaten by a menstruating woman in the household. The fruit is peeled, cut up, placed on a steel dish and put by the *garbo* – the earthenware pot used on the nine nights that is transformed into the goddess by prayers and called *Mataji* (goddess). This raw, blessed fruit is then eaten by the family before the evening meal.

A special *puja* was conducted in Ahmedabad, for the family business on the eighth morning of Navratri during which special foods were offered. A priest said prayers and a mantra in Sanskrit to give the business *shakti* (female divine energy) for the next year.

Coconuts are present in almost all rituals and represent the presence of the god. Breaking the shell and sharing the milk brings the gods into humans' own bodies. Raw food is a medium through which links can be made with the supernatural world through offerings, the coconut's powerful presence here, possibly substituting for a sacrificial animal through the breaking of the hard, skull-like shell. The significance of this being done on the threshold, which is neither inside or outside, may be an expression of the 'marginal' state of this food. This coconut offering is neither supernatural nor natural

and neither pure nor impure. Raw food is not subject to evil influences in the way that cooked food is, so there are fewer regulations on its use. In the temples I visited in Gujarat, coconuts are blessed during the *puja*, but broken and eaten in the courtyard outside.

This Navratri *puja* has been given as an example of how food provides this vital link in ceremonies. Different foods may be used, but the coconut and betel leaves or betel nuts are almost always present as are other staple foods such as rice, wheat, millet, milk, *ghee* and sugar beet. After the ceremonies this food becomes *prasad*, is treated with great reverence and distributed among the participants, or given to the priest, or to the poor in the local community.

Commensality

Commensality is governed by complex rules that are difficult for the outsider to understand. A Brahman who has performed a ritual may accept as a gift the raw materials for a meal. Dumont argues that raw food can pass without restrictions. Cooked foods are much more complex, may be vulnerable to impurity and reserved for kin or members of the same endogamous group. The perfect food, although cooked, has the protective element of cow's milk products in the form of butter or yogurt, which renders them more expensive to make and usually only made for banquets and festivals (Dumont 1980:142).

In the two weddings I have observed, one a Brahman and one a Kshatriya, the exchange of food between the families took place in different ways. In the morning of both weddings the bride and groom were prepared for the auspicious occasion by their respective families, beginning with having their bodies anointed with turmeric powder and *dahi* (yogurt), which is massaged in, to keep away evil influences. The purity of the products of the cow provide the ultimate protection against evil powers that overwhelm all other protective substances. This anointing ritual – *pithi* – is also supposed to tone and strengthen muscles and to improve self-image. The bride and groom are expected to fast before the wedding. The following comes from my fieldnotes, first from a Brahman (31/7/99) and then a Kshatriya wedding (9/5/99):

When the groom arrives at the Brahman ceremony he is welcomed by the priest by being offered grains of rice, a coconut, and a *chandlo* (red spot) on his forehead. His future wife's sister then attempts to put food into his mouth, which he tries to refuse but then eats reluctantly. A ritual cleansing takes place at the beginning when the priest gives the groom a coconut and a betel leaf to hold, while he washes his feet, first with water and then with honey and milk, before the arrival of the bride. Then after the couple have walked around the ceremonial fire, and taken their marriage vows, an exchange of foods takes place between both sets of kin. In this Brahman wedding the exchange began with the groom's mother feeding the bride, after presents have been given to her from the groom's family. This is followed by the bride's mother feeding the groom with large pieces of sweet food, causing the guests to laugh.

In the *Kshatriya* wedding the bride's mother is the first to congratulate the couple by offering sweet food to the groom, from a silver tray. She gives him large pieces with her fingers, straight into his mouth, and his expressions make people laugh, and she repeats the feeding of the groom before feeding her daughter twice. This marks the end of the long, solemn part of the ceremony, and is a contradiction to normal kin expectations of behaviour. Certainly a bride should never refuse her mother-in-law and a groom may rarely get a chance to be fed by his mother-in-law. The woman acting for the groom's mother who has died, is his older brother's wife, and she is handed the silver tray and gives the bride two pieces of food which she eats, but then tries to force feed her with more, but she refuses and keeps her mouth shut, much to everyone's amusement. The two families now join the bride and groom under the canopy, to demonstrate the new kin ties between them, which were first expressed through the giving of food.

The manner, in which the large pieces of food are forced straight into their mouths and the bride and groom's attempts to refuse, caused considerable amusement from the guests, and I realised that there must be a significance attached to this act. So while watching a four-hour video of Meera's engagement and wedding in Gujarat, I took the opportunity to ask her about the significance of this forced feeding. She replied:

It is all to do with respect, which we call *man*. Refusing food, is asking for more and more respect. You have to refuse, or people will say, it was not a good wedding. The girl's family feeds the boy's family and the longer they refuse, the more respect they get. The next day, the *vevai vela* (boy's side) visit the girl's side and eat with them. The girl's family must never take food from the boy's family after the wedding. I remember my mother's mother visiting our home in Gujarat and she always brought her own food and drink, and if she used gas in the house, she paid for it.

The giving and receiving of food at weddings establishes the new social relations between the two sets of kin. In hypergamous weddings the bride's family will be seen as having lower status than the groom's family and so unable to eat together. While living with the family in Ahmedabad, the young mother's parents rarely came to her marital home and I never observed them eating or drinking there, but I on one occasion I saw her sister eating food surreptitiously in a bedroom.

Dumont (1980:138) argues that a father gives his daughter in marriage and simultaneously gives presents to a family of higher status. The bride's father makes it 'a point of honour' not to receive anything in return, no food or even water from the bridegroom's family after marriage. Dumont argues that here food is a 'minimal material gift and its refusal is symbolic' and the details demonstrated in wedding ceremony hint at the new relations which are even present outside hypergamous marriage.

The bride's family offers the bridegroom a morning collation, and the tradition is that the bridegroom does not accept until he has been entreated at length. Here the bridegroom's superior rank betrays itself: to agree to eat food with somewhat inferior people, the bridegroom claims a present. The demand is expected, but it may be extravagant, adding considerably to the presentations agreed beforehand, and may thus lead to lengthy bargaining (Dumont 1980:138).

During the wedding itself, apart from the strict conventions concerning the bridegroom and the bride's family, cooked food may be eaten with people belonging to different castes. Dumont (1980:137) argues that some rules concerning food are not directly related to caste and if foods contain certain dairy products this might resist impurity and allow relations between castes. He suggests that there is a parallel between with whom you eat and with whom you marry and intermarriage presupposes that both parties can eat together (Ibid: 141). My observations in the UK and in Ahmedabad suggest that restrictions on commensality are not so prevalent at festivals and large social gatherings, such as *bhajans*, life-cycle rituals, temple celebrations at Paryushan, Navratri, Full Moon festival, Diwali and New Year. Dumont suggested that there is some consensus of the wider group that these foods are safe to eat (Ibid: 141). In my observations, it may be that the temple approved the person who has cooked the food, or the food has been blessed by the presence of a priest, that renders it safe to eat. There appears to be more concern at a domestic level about who shares food and with whom, especially among older people.

Positive and negative energies in food

Food has the potential to transmit not only impurities but also the emotions of the cook into the body of the eater, as Meera a NHS midwife working at a local hospital, complementary therapist, and mother of two children explained to me. I had previously been told how, while breastfeeding a baby, the mother can pass her emotions to her child and if she thinks about good things, her baby will grow up to be well behaved. Meera, a member of the Lohana caste, says that positive or negative energy can pass into food, so the mental state of the cook can affect the people who eat it. One day when we met at her home she told me:

I am into positive energies in food, I don't think you can cook any food without a portion of love, no food. If I had a visitor and I had to cook for him, I had to cook and my mind is not there, then the food would be awful. The people who eat it, if they are into my way of thinking, it would be awful and they would come home having loads of gastric problems. This is why I avoid eating at other people's houses, because I don't know what sort of energy they are putting into food. I know this is an extreme view, but it is what I believe. If I was to cook for someone, I would only cook if I really wanted to.

I asked if she restricted with whom she eats, and she replied:

I do personally, that is only because I am very much into how people cook their food and what kinds of thoughts they put into it. It is like breast milk, there was a time when it was so much in fashion, when people were collecting it and putting it in milk banks. Then women started to think do I really want to give my child milk from another woman, who might have a different kind of personality, different kinds of thoughts, do I want to use it? I feel the same way. I have no way of proving it, but I believe it so strongly, I would like some sort of research material that shows this is the case. The same with the food, it doesn't matter what ingredients you have in cooking, if you don't have a portion of love in, the food is never good.

Did she think that food could be affected by negative influences?

Yes, but I am not into spirits, but I do think that how you feel, you actually transpire that into food. Because I do massage, if I was feeling really lousy, I would not be doing massage on anybody, because passing emotions is a two way process. As a complementary therapist, I have actually blocked that kind of feelings as far as receiving is concerned, but I am not sure I can block it as far as giving is concerned.

Sometimes she made food for other Gujarati women after they have had their babies, because she had built up close relationships with them and they may not have female relatives in this country to give them some of their traditional foods. I asked her why she felt it was important for her to do this, and she explained:

It is still a myth and a tradition, especially with East African women.... the older generation, not my age, but older, who would feel that giving food to an antenatal mother and a postnatal mother is receiving a lot of gratitude and blessings; not only from the woman, but from a lot of other things, but especially God comes into it, a lot of blessing from God. It doesn't matter how much you pray or how much you donate money, and do things to God, this is the best way of getting his blessing, through cooking for antenatal and postnatal mothers. Although I don't particularly make food because I believe that you get blessed, I do it because I feel there is a need for it. In my experience as a midwife in the last twenty years, I would tend to agree with these old women because I am blessed very well and I never feel I am clever. I believe that everything that has happened in my life is very good because I have been blessed. That is my philosophy and people say, 'Aren't you clever, you have got everything the way you want it, you are able to live on your own, and you are able to study, your husband is so good,' and I am thinking, I don't think so, I think I have been blessed so well. I really feel, although it is not a belief all the way through, I think that whatever you do, you are rewarded in some way or other. I don't think it is all cultural because I have loads of friends and a family and they don't all share my views.

Meera expresses a strong view here that through making food for women before and after they have babies, women who are lacking their own kin support, she receives approval and blessings from God, which in turn improve her life. The influence of Vaishnavism and her belief in Krishna may be a factor here, where positive action carried out for others is called *seva* and there is no possibility of direct return. The positive energies she believes she imparts in making food for other women because she cares about them, make her strong. The reverse could also be true and negative thoughts or evil influences could be transmitted through cooked foods that have in some way been spoilt.

Ayurveda is practised by many of the grandmothers I have spoken to, who refer to the body flows and balances that must be maintained if a person is to be healthy. Young children are given certain teas and herbal mixtures, which vary according to the season of the year. A few older women knew which foods were hot or cold, but most younger women thought I was referring to whether the food was spicy or not. Aromatic oils may also be applied to the skin if the heat of the body needs to be released, so a Brahman

grandmother explained to me that she had rubbed oils wrapped in a muslin cloth on her grandson's chest when he had a fever, because this would cool his body. Herbal supplements are frequently given to children and many families give them daily. The advice of Ayurvedic practitioners may be sought, but many of the younger mothers educated in Britain refer to the superior knowledge of their mothers or mothers-in-law for guidance, and admit they know very little themselves. Bhopal (1986), when he interviewed mostly Punjabi women in Glasgow, found their knowledge on the balance of hot and cold foods in their diet was poor, but most were knowledgeable about herbal remedies. Margaret Trawick (1992) describes how an elderly Ayurvedic doctor in Sri Lanka explains how the system works to a patient:

Ayurveda is a naturalistic healing system and Ayurvedic physicians are inclined to emphasize the rightness of material life processes and in their treatment of disease facilitate these processes rather than to oppose them. Ayurvedic theory says that the body evolves through changes that are necessary to purify and liberate the changes within. The flow of life within the body, as long as it is orderly and unobstructed, produces naturally this purification and liberation of essences. It is important, therefore, that the channels of flow remain open, clear, and free. The culmination and termination of the flow of life is death, when the soul itself is purified and liberated from its bodily prison (Trawick 1992:140).

Carolyn Nordstrom links Ayurveda with the social context of a person's life:

Well-being, then, is not assessed solely in terms of an individual's physical and mental health, but as a set of positive relationships with the people and processes in a person's world. This includes not only a rounded intellect and balanced emotional states, but also fulfilling social relationships, a clean environment, a stable society, and a proper configuration of supernatural and cosmological forces (Nordstrom 1989:964).

The balance of supernatural and cosmological forces is a concern for all Gujarati women, who are alert to the possibility of the evil eye, or *najar*, affecting their children and making them unwell. This will be covered in the next chapter that will also discuss those rituals concerning food and water that are carried out in most households to protect vulnerable members. Water, or certain foods that have pungent smells or sharp tastes, are used to rid a child of evil forces. The water or food that has the power to rid the child of evil influences mediates between the human and spirit world.

Food has a powerful presence in Gujarati households. Its substance links kin when they eat together, and also maintains healthy body flows, free of disease. Cooked foods can

be affected, however, by negative forces or evil influences and protective measures must be taken to ensure that this does not happen. Any person who is considered ritually unclean has the potential to affect the food adversely. The marginal state of cooked food makes it particularly vulnerable to attack through its status being uncertain, it is neither natural, part of nature and pure, nor part of human substance, but having been prepared for the family already holds some of the character of the household. Mary Douglas quotes from an unsigned review article in 'Contributions to Indian Sociology' 111. 1959:37:

When a man uses an object it becomes part of him, participates in him. Then no doubt, this appropriation is much closer in the case of food, and the point is that appropriation precedes absorption, as it accompanies the cooking. Cooking may be taken to imply a complete appropriation of the food by the household. It is almost as if before being 'internally absorbed' by the individual, food was by cooking collectively predigested. One cannot share the food prepared by people without sharing in their nature. This is one aspect of the situation. Another is that cooked food is extremely permeable to pollution (Douglas 1966:126).

Mary Douglas suggests that this concern about the cooking of foods being ritually pure reflects concern about wider society and the relative purity of different castes. Food may be produced by a range of different people with varying degrees of impurity, so before being admitted to the body it must go through a 'clear symbolic break', which the cooking process provides so long as the person cooking it is pure (Douglas 1966:127). Raw foods on the other hand may be seen as pure, closer to nature, to the world outside humans and nearer the gods, so they are used to link humans with the supernatural and the spirit world in ceremonies and rituals.

The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know their own society. The rituals work on the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body (Douglas 1966:128).

Food conveys meanings about people's heritage and sense of belonging, and when cooked in the household passes positive energies and meanings into the physical body of the partaker. Relations between kin, across generations, and across sex, are at once maintained over time and transformed in the processes of preparing and consuming food. Raw food is given as *dan* to the gods in ritual to bring auspiciousness into the household. Cooked foods may be given as *seva* to others, as a selfless act with no expectation of return, but are rarely given to the gods because of the risk of impurity.

Restrictions on commensality between castes may, especially at public events and festivals, be more relaxed in the UK and urban India than described by Dumont, but in the domestic setting older people may be more careful with whom they eat. Young children are in a state of purity and so there are continuing concerns about the cooked foods given to them and milk is often seen as a safer option. Supernatural forces are kept at bay by the use of pungent foods, and care must be taken in food preparation to avoid jealous looks or negative thoughts, which might spoil the food.

Chapter 6 Evil influences that cause illness

One afternoon in October 1999 I visited Maya in her council flat in Harrow. She met me at the door telling me how worried she was about Ami, her two-year-old daughter, who came running towards me smiling, throwing her arms around my legs in an affectionate manner. Her six-year-old sister Zeena, who was stretched across the couch, watching children's television, grunted at me as I entered the room. Maya said *beso* (sit down) and I sank into a soft armchair. At once she began to explain the problem she had recently discovered. Ami, she said, is susceptible to the 'look' because she is pretty, intelligent and many people would like a daughter like her. Maya's *masi* (aunt) had warned her about a woman they met at a social gathering last week, who may have looked at Ami in a jealous way, because since then she had not been eating. This woman did not have children herself and may have wished she had a child like Ami and since the meeting with this woman, Ami's character had changed, which was a sign that evil eye or *najar*, had entered her body. She had become hyperactive, unable to concentrate for long, she was restless and eating almost nothing. Maya told me it was usually the mother or one of the grandmothers, who had the responsibility of removing *najar* (evil eye) from the child's body and she would show me how this was done. The following account is taken from my field notes on 20/4/2000:

Maya sat Ami in the middle of the room on a low chair and explained that she must not be near a doorway, because that part of the room may not be safe for her. Ami sat on the chair happily watching television, while Maya poured some salt on the palm of her right hand and then passed it round Ami's head seven times, in a clockwise direction. She then dissolved the salt in a bowl of water in the kitchen and poured it down the sink, without looking at it. She said that once the salt has been dissolved in the water, no one must look at it, especially Ami, because that would be very dangerous for her. When her mother had finished, she jumped up and went to join her sister on the couch, smiling happily and Maya remarked how happy Ami looks now *najar* has left her body. Prayers must now be made to *mataji* (goddess) for her, at special times, at 6.30 pm or 12 noon on Tuesday, Thursday or Sunday.

Maya and I spoke about *najar*, how children are vulnerable to attack and mothers must be vigilant if they are to avoid situations where it might happen. When she lived in Kenya, Maya's aunt showed her how to go to a *char rasta* (crossroads) where she would throw *bhagyas* (fried vegetables) over her shoulder, and walk away not looking back. One must not look at the objects once they have been thrown at the crossroads.

Mothers usually consult their own mothers or mothers-in-law about the most effective way of expelling *najar*, but in Maya's case her aunt was her nearest relative, so she had guided her.

Supernatural forces pervade social life and influence mixing with others. Malevolent forces such as *najar* and *bhut* (ghosts) can cause illness, or even death, at vulnerable times in life, associated with periods of transition. A recently married couple, a pregnant or newly delivered mother may be susceptible, as are infants and small children, the dangers lessening with age. Envy and greed attract evil powers and the people suspected of transmitting *najar* ('the look') may be of similar social status, within the caste, but different in some way and unaware of their negative powers. The victim of *najar* will become unwell and his or her character may change, indicating the evil influence. No action will be taken in reprisal, but a person who is identified, through consultation with kin, as having given the 'look', should be avoided in the future.

Bhut (ghosts) may also have malevolent powers and bring misfortune to households. Untimely deaths, failure to follow correct funeral rituals, unfulfilled obligations, or unpaid debts, may result in souls lingering in this world, unable to pass on to the next incarnation. Houses and gardens can harbour *bhut* and so those who are buying a new house should consider its orientation and shape. Certain individuals have powers to detect *bhut*, to see into the past and to be clairvoyant; these powers are gained through the study of religious texts, prayer and meditation.

Through the accounts of my informants, I examine below how these supernatural beliefs link with kinship and people's social networks and the worship of the *mataji* (goddesses). I will also look at certain times of transition – marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and childhood – when vulnerability to *najar* attack is highest. I describe too how *bhut* are detected, how they are attached to houses, and give accounts of people who have special gifts of looking into the past and the future.

Marriage and pregnancy

A Hindu wedding requires days of celebration, is attended by several hundred kin and friends and usually entails considerable expense and lavish entertainment. For the young couple it is a time of transition and vulnerability to jealousy and greed, as is

illustrated in the following two accounts. Meera, a Lohana woman born in Kenya, told me the first story in 2000:

One couple I knew had a large wedding near Nairobi. The girl was living here and went out to marry into a very wealthy family there. They had 3,000 guests. It was very elaborate and a lot of money was spent. Everything was perfect, the bride and groom were very handsome. They went on a honeymoon around the world for four weeks. When they returned it was customary for the bride's brother to meet them at the airport and take them home. They met at the airport and had a race with the brother in their cars. They had a fatal accident and both the bride and groom died.

Meera said there must have been people at the wedding who 'thought things' and something went wrong, because it was too perfect.

If they had a quiet wedding it might not have happened. People have negative energies in these circumstances and that can be dangerous.

She told me of another wedding in the North of England held in a castle:

This was a very expensive affair with the groom arriving in a helicopter. Everything was perfect and beautiful. Soon after the wedding they went to Kenya and a car killed the groom. A week later the bride found a lump in her breast and her mother took her to a doctor in Nairobi who said it was nothing, but she was not reassured. She came to the UK and saw a specialist here and breast cancer was diagnosed. If you show off like this at weddings, then some people may give negative energy, which affects the bride and groom. I want my daughter to have a simple wedding in a little hall. These days everyone wants a hotel and it's like a fashion show, with the latest saris and Punjabi suits.

Meera's explanations of the reasons why these disasters happened to newly married couples suggest that the ostentatious display of the families invoked envy in the guests and thus produced negative energy, or *najar*. The vulnerable state of the couple in transition from a non-married to a married state makes them more susceptible to attack. The following account differs in that it describes what followed on a poor wedding in rural India rather than a wealthy one in Kenya.

I met Sala often during my time in Ahmedabad and knew her as a lively young woman who was always singing and laughing. She called me *didi* (older sister) and we talked in Gujarati about her *lagna* (wedding) and what she would wear. She was eighteen years old, belonged to a Harijan caste, and lived in a slum dwelling with her younger brother. Her parents had died when she was eleven and she supported her brother by cleaning houses and doing washing for local households. Her marriage was arranged with a

young man from a village fifty miles outside the city. The following is an account of her death that I received in a letter in 2000, from a member of one of the families for whom she worked:

Sala died recently. That was just after her marriage. Some evil spirit entered her body. She was not behaving properly, her voice was different and she looked different. This was shocking and sad for us, because she was just like a family member.

A change in character or appearance indicates the presence of evil forces, as it did in Maya's account at the beginning of the chapter. Uncontrolled shaking of the body may also be a sign and mothers may put a piece of iron under the baby's cot to stop the baby jerking.

Pregnancy is also a time when the body of the woman may be more susceptible to attack and her head needs to be protected because evil can enter as wind via her ears; some people say that air-conditioning can make this more likely. Many older women who are now grandmothers say that a pregnant women should not wash her hair until after the ritual for the seven month; otherwise she weakens her body and makes it more open to attack. Mrs Pandya, a Brahman grandmother, explained why she did not wash her hair during her first pregnancy:

I did not wash my hair for seven months when I was first pregnant. You see I waited six years to have Kiran when I lived in Africa; they said I couldn't get pregnant because my tubes were blocked. When I became pregnant here I wanted to follow the family rules, because if anything happened, it would always be in my conscience.

Younger women who are in employment in Britain and urban Gujarat continue to wash their hair when pregnant, because they are not prepared to go to work with greasy hair. Mrs Pandya insisted that over time her hair became clean and shiny and did not appear dirty. Many women emphasised to me that following the family rules is crucial in avoiding evil attack and each family has different interpretations of the rituals and different ideas as to which ones should be observed. All the women I have met agree that women who have had miscarriages may not conduct life-cycle rituals, although they can participate, for fear of bringing ill health to the child.

Protecting children

Belief in the power of *najar* to cause illness in children underlies many explanations of the origins of disease. Biomedical causes may also be sought, but at the same time, rituals will be carried out to ward off evil. In some households, an explanation of an illness as being due to *najar* may be dismissed by younger mothers as superstition, or as a belief held by the older generation, but not by theirs. Seema, a Patel mother, explained on 13/3/98:

There is a generation change. My mother-in-law believes in the evil eye more strongly than me. Older people believe that you have to pass a container of water, made of glass or steel, around the baby's head seven times in a clockwise direction. Then you take it outside through the front door, not the back, to a crossroad and pour the water in the middle of the roads, without looking at it.

Although some women educated in Britain may tell outsiders that they believe these rituals are superstitious, they still follow the direction of older women, and the 'family rules' of the oldest man. Women in the wider group may be consulted about the most efficacious methods to follow and the advice of the most powerful senior women is followed. The child becomes the passive object of ritual action and through this experience the child over the age of one or so arrives at new knowledge about his or her kin and what it is to be kin. The methods used to remove evil have in common the use of water and pungent substances, the avoidance of thresholds, and leaving the substances used in protective rituals at crossroads.

Meera's family, in the same way as Maya's at the beginning of the chapter, used water to dissolve the evil from the child and this time it was taken through the front door to a *char rasta* (crossroads), where it was poured onto the ground without looking at it. The front door is important, because supernatural powers may linger in gardens and may pose a threat to the household. *Char rasta*, a crossing of four roads, is believed to be where evil forces are concentrated because it is where people leave substances that were used to expel evil from the body. It is also a place where an ill person may have been carried and a ritual conducted to have the evil removed. Four roads crossing each other make a transitional place where a choice of direction has to be made.

Nikhita, a young Brahman mother, who is a graduate, explained to me on 9/4/98, that there are two ways a person can have the evil eye:

One is the malicious evil eye. The other is when the person is not being malicious about it, but the thought just comes into their minds.

She described how the evil eye caused her two-year-old son, Aran, to stop eating:

One day Aran was playing happily with this woman and for some reason my husband felt unhappy about the situation and snatched him out of her arms, and she was very upset. She felt really offended and she cast the evil eye on him. She did not intend to cast it, but the hurt that it caused her affected Aran.

Nikhita continued to tell me about situations that must be avoided, where the risk of transmitting the evil eye is high:

Because we have this thing about the evil eye, Asian women will not breastfeed in front of other Asian women. They feel that woman might cast an evil eye on their child, and then you will stop producing milk. They are very cautious about who they feed in front of, and will probably restrict it to just direct family. If there is someone else there, they will not come out and feed their child. It is not the shame of showing a boob, it is out of fear of casting the evil eye. She may be jealous and think, oh, she's got a beautiful baby, or she's having milk, and I couldn't do it. Or it could be that she has a boy and I've got a girl. It could be a hundred and one things, and she could be from the most modern families.

My mother-in-law told me not to feed in front of anyone, because we don't want anyone casting an evil eye on him. I would have breastfed him if there were no other Asian mothers present. We don't think that white people will have the same jealousy.

Nikhita's mother-in-law gave her advice on how to avoid the evil eye and other women within the kinship network may have been consulted. If it is believed that there has been an evil attack, then female kin from the wider kin network may be contacted. Only women who are considered kin will be consulted. Thus, in effect, *najar* determines who is trusted kin and who is not and which women have the power and authority to direct appropriate rituals. White people are outsiders and are not considered 'jealous' enough to cast the evil eye. Only those who are considered to be kin are consulted about appropriate action and they are never suspected of passing *najar*. Those who are accused of giving 'the look' are friends or acquaintances – people who are similar in many respects to oneself and who may even come from the same caste, but who are not considered kin.

The bounds of kinship are at once renewed and defined by *najar* and in requesting help from wider kin. Anyone is capable of inflicting *najar*, but not on those they call kin, so

everyone outside the network may be viewed with suspicion, especially those who may be close in other ways. The theory of the person as one capable of causing illness and disease, as well as one able to detect and remove evil, conforms with the pantheon of the Hindu goddesses, capable of both good and evil at the same time.

All the households I know are concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, about the protection of children from *najar*. After birth, or on the *Chhati* (six day ceremony), black threads are tied around the baby's wrists, ankles, waist and sometimes a black-thread necklace, with a metal amulet is tied around the neck, but many women now refrain from this practice, because of concerns about strangulation. Sonita, a Kshatriya woman, has a two-year-old son who has an amulet on which is an engraving of Jalaram, a Gujarati saint; she was careful to explain to me that she always ties it into the top of her son's shirt, so there is no danger of it becoming twisted around his neck.

Black marks made of *kohl* (soot from the burning of candles mixed with castor oil) called *kajal*, are put around the child's eyes, so that the child looks less attractive to envious people. This practice is less common in Britain than in India, where many babies had heavily blackened eyes. When I attended the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad, I observed paediatricians strongly advising mothers against this practice, because of the toxic effects of the lead mixed with the carbon. Some women also put black marks on the palms of the hands and the soles of the child's feet. The child's *nani* (mother's mother), *dadi* (father's mother), or *foi* (father's sister), will, depending on where the child is staying after birth, advise on the threads to use, or tie them themselves. Hindu and, to a lesser extent, Jain households carry out some of these preventative measures, following the practices of the family of the eldest male. Some will routinely pass a steel container of water seven times around the infants' head, in a clockwise direction, at every bath time, as suggested by Seema above. Kajol, a Mistry mother told me on 1/7/99, what she did to prevent the evil eye affecting her six-week-old baby:

Whenever I have been out on a Tuesday or Sunday, it works better on those days, I will pass limes, cut into four around the baby's head in a clockwise direction, fourteen times. This will rid him of any influence he might have picked up. I always leave a piece of iron under his cot to stop him jerking.

During my fieldwork, I found that Jain families were more likely than Hindu ones to dismiss belief in *najar* as superstition. In the following discussion, I look at some of the practices used to detect and expel *najar* and recount some of my informants' stories about the effects of evil attack.

Detecting an evil presence

The presence of *najar* may not be as easy to detect as it was in the previous examples, where there were perceived alterations in the personality or voice of the victim or uncontrollable shaking of the body. In infants, the effects may be more subtle and varied: they may cry a great deal, jerk in their sleep, or reject their food. Often biomedical opinion will be sought first from Health Visitors or General Practitioners and their advice followed, or medication given. Then, if the symptoms continue, older female kin will be consulted and attempts will be made to establish whether *najar* is present. Methods of detection often include the burning of chillies or garlic, as follows:

1. Heat dried, red chillies in a pan and if no pungent smell is given off, then the evil eye is present.
2. Crush garlic cloves and strain them through a handkerchief. Give these to the child and if the child's digestion improves, then the evil eye was present. (see my MSc thesis, Spiro 1994:30.)

Sometimes more distant kin are consulted in the detection process. When two-year-old Aran stopped eating, his father's *mama* (mother's brother) in Newcastle, was consulted, as his father Kiran described:

Aran is very close to my uncle. He was concerned that Aran's eating habits were so poor. This uncle has a medical background. He mentioned the situation to a woman there, who has special powers. He described the scene to her where Aran was snatched from the lady. She told him that the evil eye was present. This woman has a special gift for detecting and expelling the evil. You have to understand, Alison, that in the Asian community, there are a lot of people who have gifts. People may not go to her; she may be anyone, or someone particularly religious who people consult. She is not a psychic, just someone who is very religious. She lives in Newcastle, so she did it through a photograph of Aran. She said prayers to break the influence.

Once the presence of *najar* has been established, rituals to expel it will be undertaken after consultation with other kin, who are often either the child's *nani* or *dadi*; or as in Maya's case, the child's great aunt and in Aran's, his great uncle. Once the hierarchy of kin has been consulted then a person with special spiritual powers was suggested by one of the elders. A child refusing to eat is a common theme in accounts of *najar* attacks and of particular concern to women. *Najar* can only be inflicted by people who are not kin, but share similar status, such as a neighbour, or someone known by the family.

Mala, a Patel woman married to a Lohana man, described on 13/7/00, how her mother-in-law guided her, when her daughter was thought to be affected by *najar*:

Kanjan, my two-year-old daughter was not eating and a family friend told us that "*Najar lage chhe*" (the evil eye is coming). My cleaning lady's husband did this ceremony to remove *najar* in his house. He sat her on a chair in the middle of his kitchen floor and passed a handkerchief containing chillies and other stuff around her head seven times in a clockwise direction and then took it out into his back garden and buried it. My Mum also did it with chillies, but she set fire to it and said that the worse the smell, the stronger the *najar* attack.

When Kanjan was six months old, we met a lady in India, who was possessed by Sai Baba. She told us that Kanjan was very susceptible to other people's looks and "*Najar lage chhe*" and we must put a black dot behind her ear and black threads around her waist.

I asked Mala in 2002 about her cleaning lady and whether she still worked for her. She told me that she did and that she was a close friend of the family. She baby-sits for them and Kanjan calls her *masi* (mother's sister) and her husband she calls *masa* (mother's sister's husband). It appears that it is only members of the kinship group, including those not related by blood or marriage, known as kin, are consulted about *najar* attacks.

Kajol confirmed this too and told me that you must consult your elders and either on the mother or father's side. She would always consult her mother because her mother-in-law does not believe in *najar* so much. I asked her what happens if the ritual she suggests does not work and she replied:

My mother would consult other more senior elders. You must go in the right order, you know, or you might step on someone's toes. If the child is still ill, then a spiritual person will be consulted. This is a very religious person, not a priest, or a healer, but someone with special powers. It is like a part-time job for them.

Here Kajol was emphasizing the hierarchical nature of expelling *najar* and that you must be careful not to 'step on someone's toes', but follow the seniority path in the female kinship group. When the knowledge and expertise of this group has been exhausted then a person with spiritual powers will be consulted, who is outside the kinship network, in the way that a priest is also. Kajol went on to tell me in October 2002, what has happened to her three-year-old son, Shivam, this year:

He became very lethargic and lost his appetite. I kept taking him to the doctor with asthma and eczema, and he gave me more inhalers for him. I knew there was something else wrong with him. My mother came to visit and was very worried about Shivam and me, so suggested some ways of

removing *najar*, but nothing worked. When she went home she asked her sisters and they said it was definitely *najar* and she should see a spiritual person. This woman gave my mother this necklace [she pulled a black, bead necklace from under her sweatshirt] and said I should consult Shivam's *rasi* [certificate written by the priest after birth]. I suppose I had forgotten what the astrologer had written on this after birth. When I looked I remembered that it said that because of his horoscope, his mother would have to fast. It also said that he will have skin and chest problems and will suffer from anaemia. We took him to the hospital soon after this and the paediatrician told us he had anaemia. Now we give him iron tonic and he is much more lively and his appetite has improved, but I decided to follow the *rasi* and fast and do *vrat* (fast). The priest told me that I have to fast for 21 Saturdays, then 21 Sundays and 21 Wednesdays, each one for a different god. I have finished all the Saturdays that were for Hanuman, the god of wind. I had to eat black lentils at one time in the day, and nothing else except fruit, nuts and water or coffee the rest of the day. I have done two Sundays for the sun god Suriya. I can only have white foods on these days, so I eat rice pudding in the middle of the day and drink *dudhpak* [milk with almonds] at night. I do *puja* in the morning and afterwards do 5 *malajapa* [she showed me how she moved the string of 108 beads rolling each one separately through her fingers] reciting a *slok* [religious verse].

The priest said that I could ask a *sadhu* (priest) in India to do the *malajapa* for me, but it is better if the mother does them. When I have finished Sundays, then I will do Wednesdays to *mataji*, and will have to eat *mug* beans once a day. After each set of 21, I have to give *shidhu* [payment] to the priest -raw foods, some money, a shirt and a sari, and a piece of metal. For Saturday I gave iron, for Sunday I will give stainless steel and Wednesday, copper. I listen carefully to all the details, because I want to do it properly.

Kajol wore the black necklace her mother gave her, but she did not tie black threads on Shivam, because she considered him too old. The accuracy of the *rasi* in predicting her son's physical problems compelled her to follow the *vrat* advised by the priest. The number seven, an auspicious number, or multiples of it are used in expelling rituals. She realised that biomedical treatment was helping him, but she had to ensure the removal of any supernatural powers by completing the fasts advocated in the *rasi*.

Maya's daughter also had eating problems and below is an extract from my fieldnotes 28/9/00:

I visited Maya's council flat, and she welcomed me at the door smiling with her hands at her side. The two girls are at home, Zeena and Ami aged seven and three respectively, as they were on Easter holidays, and were busy drawing at the dining table. Maya explained that Zeena has had

stomach pains and has not been eating. A paediatrician has seen her, but no cause could be found. Maya has since been praying to *mataji* (the goddess) at certain times, on a Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 12 midday or 6.30pm. Last week, she stood Zeena in the middle of the living room and passed a mixture of *rai* (black seeds) and salt in her hand, around her head seven times in a clockwise direction, and then dropped them into a bowl of water, which she threw immediately down the sink, without anyone looking at it. She emphasised the importance of this happening in the middle of the room, and it must never be done in a threshold, because this is 'an in-between place, which is not good.' She told me that she will repeat this whenever her children are tired or unwell and she does it on her husband, when he is angry with her, or in a bad mood.

Once the substances have been used to remove the evil, they become extremely dangerous and nobody should look at them, Raheja reports similar findings:

The negative qualities that have been separated from the person are extremely dangerous until they have been 'moved away' and assimilated by the appropriate receptacle (Raheja 1988:84).

Maya told me about a situation that happened last week on Zeena's birthday. Her *bhai* (second cousin she calls brother) came to visit with her *babhi* (sister-in-law) his wife. He married this woman five years ago and she is ten years older than him, and already has three children from her first marriage. Maya said she was a strange woman and she does not know which caste she belongs to, but it is not theirs. This woman liked Ami and wanted to adopt her. She brought a birthday cake for Zeena and asked if the two girls would go to their house in Manchester to stay. Zeena said she was too tired and both her *masa* (mother's brother) and his wife took offence at this and quickly handed the cake to them saying '*lyo*' (take it) and left. Maya said this was very rude and she told her aunt about it. The cake was plain and had no candles on it. Her aunt told her that no one must eat the cake, because 'you don't know what might be in it'. Maya thought this woman might be jealous of Zeena's hair, which was thick and hers was very thin. Her aunt has advised her not to take any notice of her when she comes, and to ignore as much as possible, but as she is *babhi*, she cannot stop her coming.

Maya and her aunt suspected this woman, who was married to her second cousin, of passing *najar* to Zeena. She looked for reasons why this woman might be jealous of Zeena, and focused on the difference in their hair because for many women hair is a sign of beauty and femininity and could become a source of envy. Maya also saw this woman as an outsider: she had been married before, which makes her different, because it is unusual for Hindu women to re-marry; she was ten years older than her husband

and her caste membership was uncertain. Maya's aunt advised them not to eat the cake and to ignore this woman as much as possible. Although this woman is in fact a distant relative by marriage, Maya emphasises her difference. *Najar* defines in effect, who is family and who is not. In this case, it would appear that Maya and her aunt dislike the woman who married the second cousin Maya calls brother; their dislike is expressed in the idea that this woman is an outsider, which is itself confirmed in their fear that she was envious of Zeena and that any food she gave to the children was bound to be unsafe. As I noted above, those suspected of inflicting *najar* may belong to the same caste and social class and in many ways may appear to have similar backgrounds, but are outside the trusted circle of kin.

A child who refuses to eat has the attention of his or her mother, grandmother, aunts and close friends, who all of whom try to coax and cajole the child into eating. By virtue of this kind of attention, the child becomes aware of his or her place within the household; through the concerns of female kin, the child who will not eat learns about certain aspects of kinship. The child's symbolic rejection of the love that women put into preparing food makes it imperative that they encourage the child to eat, because it is in eating that people in general, and the members of any given household in particular, at once express and bring into being their specific relations with one another.

Najar has the power to cause not only minor illnesses in children, such as poor appetites, but in some circumstances it can lead to serious disease or death, as in the story recounted to me by Sangita a Bania woman who is a Vaishnava Hindu on 22/3/01:

I had a daughter who would have been twenty-six this year. When she was three years old, a neighbour and friend of my in-laws gave her the "look" and within an hour she had a temperature. We travelled to Leicester that evening, but while we were still on the motorway, she stopped breathing and passed away. I still blame this woman for being jealous and passing the evil eye to her. Even today, I cannot speak to her. Many people today say they don't believe in it, but when it happens to you, then you have to.

Shefali is a Patel woman with two teenage daughters and she spoke to me after her return from India on 22/3/01:

My *sasu* (mother-in-law) has been ill since we returned from India after Christmas. It often happens over there, that people do things to you. It is usually because of jealousy. I know who did it. She will be OK because we prayed to *mataji* and she was given a flower.

I asked her if these things only happen in India and she replied:

Oh no, they happen here just as much. People may be jealous, like if you have a boy and they don't. I had a boy who died when he was two years old, and no cause could be found for his illness. He became weaker and weaker and the doctor said he had a neurological problem. He wanted to listen to *bhajans* (hymns) all day and kept telling me to light the *diva* (candles). Someone in India told me that he had been sent to save our family. After he passed away, my husband became very religious and still is now, although he was not beforehand. I still think of my son when I drive in my car and listen to *bhajans*. I no longer worry about my daughters, because I have entrusted them to Krishna and Rama.

The ambivalent nature of the above story demonstrates how illness can at the same time be described within the context of *najar*, and also the divine; the child was on a mission from God, to save the family. The interchange between evil and good can be seen in the pantheon of the *mataji*, who are worshipped and called upon to protect people from *najar*, especially those who are considered vulnerable. These divinities carry *Shakti*, divine female energy. They demand daily worship at the household shrine and are seen as forces of goodness and purity, but at the same time as capable of destruction and evil when angered. The *mataji* at the lower end of the pantheon are considered less pure, but have still to be revered. Mary Douglas argues that the unclean and the holy could both belong to the same conceptual category in Hinduism:

Holiness and unholiness after all need not always be absolute opposites. They can be relative categories. What is clean in relation to one thing may be unclean in relation to another, and vice versa (Douglas 1966:9).

The power of evil is often concealed and may come in many guises, so the person suspected of giving the 'look' and transmitting *najar* may be a friend or neighbour, someone within the same social group, who is in some way different. A person who becomes jealous or envious is capable of passing on evil and causing illness. The victim can be a child, who is attractive in some way, appears well fed or who is seen feeding, either from the breast or the bottle. If the milk is seen by the jealous person, it can make the child ill, so many mothers will conceal feeding bottles with cloths or fitted covers, and avoid breastfeeding in public, as in Nikhita's case. A mother may be displaying pride in having a healthy baby and if the child is a boy this will exacerbate a viewer's envy. Meera believed that it was *najar* which, following displays of wealth, pride and greed that attracted the envious looks of guests, led to the sad and untimely deaths of young people who had just married.

Warding off evil

The rituals used to ward off evil have much in common with those used in detection and include the use of pungent-smelling substances such as chillies and limes; water is usually used in conjunction with chillies, or on its own, because of its power to dissolve other substances and to remove the evil. The number seven (or multiples of it) is significant in most rituals, including those to ward off evil, perhaps in part because it is a prime number.

Parkin argues that the presence of the evil other is part of a Hindu's lower self that is his or her badness. The higher self is the devoted follower of Vishnu (Parkin, 1985,162). This view of the person as someone capable of both good and evil explains why women need to be vigilant in protecting their children, because they can never be certain of the powers of the people they meet. The person suspected of passing *najar* could be a friend or acquaintance that is totally unaware of his or her powers so could never be accused to his or her face. Women discuss the origins of *najar* within the household and a certain source is identified, but this knowledge is not shared with outsiders. Rituals are done to ward off the attack, prayers said to *mataji*, and preventative measures stepped up, but if there is no improvement in the victim's condition, then help from wider kin will be sought.

Pocock (1973) describes *najar* as the eye of envy, and as no humans are entirely equal, no one is immune from it. Apart from a woman called Surajben, and despite mention of women, most of Pocock's informants are men. It is women, however, who detect and ward off *najar* and pray to *mataji*, and they pass their knowledge to other women; men are rarely consulted. Some of Pocock's accounts have common ground with my data, but his contact with women was limited. Reynell (1985) reports that women in Rajasthan are also concerned about *nazar*, which is passed through jealousy and can cause misfortune and death. Pocock was told by his informants of the strength of the evil powers:

A woman was once feeding her child and looked at it with great affection. Her mother-in-law, fearing for the child, suddenly directed the young woman's attention to the stone flourmill, which immediately broke in half. Here there is no question of envy, but of permanent evil eye unconsciously exercised (Pocock 1973: 29).

Surajben told Pocock that:

Najar was usually unconsciously exercised and sprang from desire. If one was contented one did not feel desire and one's eyes could not hurt others (Pocock 1972: 30).

I agree with Pocock that the evil eye is inflicted through people's unconscious jealousy, envy or greed, but found no evidence of a 'permanent' evil eye. Women are discouraged from showing affection to their children in front of outsiders. Likewise, Nikhita said that her mother-in-law told her not to breastfeed in front of other mothers, in case they were made envious. She also felt that white women do not have the same jealousy as Indian mothers, perhaps indicating their difference, confirming that *najar* is usually passed by people of similar status and social group. I wondered from what Pocock described above whether it was possible for a mother to pass *najar* to her own child, and whether another mechanism was happening here. So I went back to see Kajol to ask her whether it was possible for a mother to inflict *najar* on her own child. For the first time I heard about a different form of the evil eye known as *mithi najar*, which means 'sweet evil eye'. Kajol told me that this happens when someone boasts about their child or keeps looking at him or her lovingly. It is different from the eye of jealousy which comes from outside, but can cause problems in the child, who may stop eating. Similar rituals are used to expel it as they are for the eye of jealousy. So rather than the 'permanent evil eye' suggested by Pocock, this *mithi najar* is inflicted if the mother is too proud of her child, or demonstrates loving behaviour in front of others.

Bhopal (1986) found that the views of Punjabi women interviewed in Glasgow were similar to my findings and *nazar* (*najar* in Gujarati) was thought to cause fretfulness and loss of appetite in children. The gaze of a loving or malevolent person was thought to be responsible for transmitting the evil.

***Bhut* (ghosts) and other evil spirits**

Supernatural forces can be attracted by envy and greed in the form of *najar*, in living people; but after death any unresolved grievance, or untimely death can result in the spirit lingering as a *bhut* (ghost). In times of disease epidemics, severe monsoons or natural disasters, such as the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, there are reported incidents of ghost activity. Parry argues that any unexpected death can result in ghost activity:

By contrast with 'good' death, the 'bad' death is one for which the deceased cannot be said to have prepared himself. It is said that 'he did not die his own death'. The paradigmatic case is death by violence or as a result of some sudden accident; the underlying notion being that the victim has been forced to relinquish life prematurely with the result that his embittered ghost is liable to return to afflict the survivors unless the appropriate propitiatory rituals are scrupulously observed. Whether these have been successful can only be judged by their results, for the ghost that is yet to be satisfied will return to haunt the dreams of the mourners or to vent his malevolence in other more destructive ways. As a consequence, bad death in the family tends to be cumulative, the victim of one causing another (Parry 1982:83).

Some ghosts are not malevolent and bring fortune to households:

The marginal and malevolent ghost becomes a benevolent and incorporated ancestor, a source of future fecundity and prosperity for his descent line (Parry 1994:5).

Pocock suggested that ghost activity may result from unfulfilled obligations (e.g. unpaid bills) or unfulfilled desires and he links this to *najar*:

Just as I will fear the envious evil eye only if I am aware of my own greed, and vanity is only a form of greed, so will I only fear the activity of ghosts if I have a guilty conscience (Pocock 1973: 36).

Thus Mr Pandya, a Brahman grandfather with whom I discussed the death rituals that free the person from worldly attachments, told me:

I do not want this ceremony done after my death, because I feel I have done nothing wrong to anyone in my life, so I will not bother anyone after my death.

Ruth and Stanley Freed (1993), argue that a fear of death and short life expectancy, combined with Hindu beliefs about the soul *atman* and *karma*, lead to a belief in ghosts causing death. In their detailed ethnography of a village in the Delhi region, ghost belief became apparent unexpectedly within the context of daily events, genealogies, and kinship. They argue that the belief that ghosts cause fever, illness and death comes from Hindu texts such as the Puranas and Mahabharata; when a person became delirious; this was the ghost trying to take away his or her soul.

In my ethnography ghost belief became apparent in discussions about illness causation and *najar* and *bhut* were linked together as evil spirits or forces. Sala, the eighteen-year-old I described earlier, who died after her wedding, had an evil spirit enter her body, but it was not specified whether this was *najar* or a *bhut*. The character of the person changes as the *bhut* or *najar* tries to take over his or her soul. *Najar* is usually characterised as 'a look' inflicted through jealousy, which then causes illness, but there

remains a degree of human control in all but the most extreme cases, provided it is identified in time and appropriate rituals carried out. The presence of a *bhut* may be more difficult to detect and exorcise, as in the following account, which was told to me in Ahmedabad, in which rituals, prayers and *vidhya* (knowledge gained through prayer and religious devotion) were all required to persuade the evil presence to leave.

Mr Joshi, a Brahman grandfather in Ahmedabad recounted this to me after a ritual, during Navratri on 17/10/99, where Sanskrit had been recited for two hours by a priest, with the aim of increasing *vidhya* in the household:

My older brother used to live with a man who was a *sadhu* [monk] called Gopari. Once a Marvadi man [a tribesman from Rajasthan] came to stay. He worked in the market selling *rakhi* [bracelets made of threads]. This man became very ill with a high fever, diarrhoea and vomiting, which did not respond to medicine given by the doctor. Everyone thought he would die, because he was so weak and thin, after one week of being ill. The next day the Marvadi man started shouting abusive things to Gopari. Gopari thought, this is not the real man talking, this is not my guest, it must be an evil spirit. So Gopari asked the spirit if he wanted to leave the man, and it said it did. So Gopari asked two other men to carry him [the Marvadi man] to a *char rasta* [crossroads] and an offering of *kulu*, a large fruit, was given with some *mung* [green lentils]. The evil spirit said it would go, if bread was thrown to the dogs first, which they did. The man was carried home and in the morning the fever and the diarrhoea had gone, he was cured. This goes to prove the power of the *vidhya* to overcome evil.

Bhut (ghosts) may not always be malevolent, though they may reside in a house, garden, or in a tree but they often cause fear; thus many people say, *Mane bhut bikhe lage chhe* ('I am frightened of ghosts.') The shape of a house may make it more likely to be haunted and certain people have gifts for detecting and expelling *bhut* from them.

Late in the evening of 12th May 1998, when I was visiting Mr and Mrs Pandya, in their house in Harrow, the conversation moved on to beliefs in ghosts. I asked them to explain what people believed and Mr Pandya replied:

Most people do believe in ghosts, but I don't. What we believe is that when someone dies they have a life after death. As far as we are concerned, the body is nothing. The soul is all-important. If the spirit is good, it will have re-birth, but some people think if it is bad, it carries on wandering.

I asked how they could tell if there was a ghost in the house and Mrs Pandya replied:

The house is always cold. The radiator is hot but the house is cold. If we want to get rid of them, we do prayers and invite people to the house. Then 108 times we do prayers. We call it the mantras; I will go and get it to show you.

She left the room and went upstairs, returning a short while later with a string of prayer beads. She worked her way quickly, with great skill, through the 108 beads and explained:

Yes, there are 108 beads and we have to move the beads with the middle and ring finger, like this. Then we say prayers to Hanuman. My mother lives in a beautiful bungalow, but it was haunted. My mother used to feel that someone was walking past the window. When I went to my mother's house the first time, it was cold, especially two rooms were very cold. When I came home, I said to my husband that I did not like that house. Then they had a lot of prayers, and I don't feel so cold now. I must tell you that when we buy a house the shape is important, there are two types. One is narrow in front and wider at the back, that means the house is very prosperous, like a cow. A cow has a little face and a big body, making milk all the time. We believe that this house is very good. Another type of house is one where the front garden is large and the back one is narrow, like a lion. A lion has a big head and a narrow body, so some one is going to die. When Kiran and Nikhita were buying their house, I told them not to buy a house that is wide in the front and narrow at the back, it doesn't matter if it is oblong. My brother saw a house in our road, but it was narrow at the back and wide at the front, so I said that is not a good plot.

Belief in ghosts is an integral part of Hindu ideas of the soul and the condition of the soul as a result of its activities in life, or the person's *karma*.

The soul of a person becomes a ghost at death and continues as a ghost for a time based on the sum of the soul's actions in past lives (Freed and Freed 1993: 15).

Mr Pandya believed that he had done nothing wrong to anyone in this life, so he has good *karma*, so there would be no reason for his soul to linger and 'bother' anyone. In the discussion on *varsna*, he suggested that the attachment to kin and possessions must be made to weaken, as the person grows older. The transition of the soul to the next life is made easier if *varsna* is reduced: obligations must be fulfilled, debts repaid and grievances resolved, so the soul will not linger, but be free to travel. If any of these are unresolved, or death is untimely the soul will be trapped in this life and will exist as a ghost.

Pocock also described how the people of Sundarana believed that the soul existed for a time after death when it passed through a heaven or hell depending on the state of the person's *karma*, before the re-birth into the next incarnation.

Death is followed by a period of punishment or reward, which varies in length according to merit, but ultimately the law of *karma* requires a re-birth unless the soul has been freed forever from the operation of that law (Pocock 1973:38).

People with powers to detect and exorcise ghosts

Exorcising ghosts or freeing the soul of a dead person may require considerable positive, good energy in the form of *vidhya* (knowledge), as described earlier by Mr Joshi, or as Mrs Pandya said, many mantras. As with *najar*, detection of ghost presence has to be done before rituals can be carried out and certain people have powers gained through religious devotion to see ghosts. Mr and Mrs Pandya told me of such a person they called *Dadi* (paternal grandmother) and accepted as kin once she detected a ghost presence in their house. Mrs Pandya began to recount her powers:

We knew a lady; she was my mum's friend. We became so close that I was like her daughter. She used to pray a lot and could concentrate so much. Whatever she said came true. I don't know why, but there were so many examples of what we experienced. First of all we wanted to buy a house in Orpington. We saw the house and everything was fixed for us to exchange contracts. On the Friday, *Dadi* rang and said you are not going to buy that house. So I said rubbish, everything is fixed; we are going to have that house.

Mr Pandya continued:

That was the first experience I had. I am not the sort of person who just does not believe it unless I see it for myself. She said buy a house in Kenton or Harrow and you will be happy. We were living in Camden Town at the time.

Mrs Pandya added:

She came with my mother to visit me and asked to see my *mandir* (temple) in the house. I told her that because of my child, I kept it in a cupboard. She said, let me go and wash my hands and then she sat there for twenty minutes and then said that she was going home. I felt angry because she had come a long way and within an hour wanted to go back again. But then later she rang me and said someone had died in the house, and she had seen a little boy. I thought, oh my god! She described him, he has short hair, a round face and he wears a pyjama. I said, no one had died here, and she said, oh yes, I saw his face while I was washing my hands. I asked my landlady, who

was Indian whether it was true that someone had died in the house. She was surprised and asked how I knew. I said did he have grey and white striped pyjamas, short hair and a blazer? She asked how I knew and showed me a photo of a boy who was her son. She said their family came from a village in India, and her son was very fond of wearing a blazer, because he had never seen that. She told me he had leukaemia and then he died. After that I started to call her *Dadi*. She told me to move house as soon as possible because someone is going to die. At that time I was pregnant, and soon after I had a miscarriage. *Dadi* spoke to my landlady and told her to go to India and have a ceremony for her son and then she will prosper. Her second son was ill at the time and she said that he will be all right. She believed her and went to India and did the ceremony and they came back, opened a factory and now have a house in Finchley.

Mr Pandya sat listening to this account about *Dadi* and decided to explain more to me about how she gained her powers:

What happens you see is a very common thing. You have to study, you have to think, and you have to do these things. The same thing if you study physics, if you want to understand, you have to study hard. The same with the spiritual path, you meditate, you concentrate, and you control your mind. That is what *Dadi* did. We go to the temple, you go to the church, but we don't do anything, we just say that we prayed, but we just gave lip service. What *Dadi* did was to concentrate on it so much that she began to mind read and foresee things that were going to happen. Not everyone can do it.

Mrs Pandya returned to her theme of ghosts and houses:

Dadi said that this house is very lucky. She said the doorframe; the bottom one is very lucky. No evil things can come. Then she did something at the back. She said something there, and then said; now you are safe. We have illnesses like everyone else, but we get better. She said that in this house, no one has died. Her older son bought a house in a crescent nearby, although *Dadi* told them not to. They had a tree in their garden and they made a fire under the tree. *Dadi* told them they must not do this, but her son's wife was German and she did not listen to *Dadi*, so they did it. The next day when I was there, *Dadi* told me the ghost family came inside the house. I said *Dadi* don't talk like that, I don't believe you, but she said it was true. They had been living in the tree and now they had come into the dining room. I told her that I didn't believe her. The German wife left and they got divorced, and he married again. The new wife started to say that there was someone in the house. When she went to have a bath, she took her husband. She said she was scared in the house. A nephew came from India and stayed for four days, on his way to America for treatment. He died in the house. *Dadi* said that no one would listen to her, because she had said it would happen. They sold the house and a Pakistani family bought it. One day I was there with *Dadi* picking up post. The Muslim lady asked *Dadi* if there was something in the house. She said her

eleven-year-old son asked why there was always something following him in the house. The radiators are always hot, but the house is cold. When they go upstairs the lights come on and when they go down, the lights go off.

Mr Pandya added:

Our son used to tell us that on a very hot day, the dining room was always cold. I don't really believe it, but they say where there are ghosts, it is always cold.

Mrs Pandya described a ghost that was detected by *Dadi*, but had also been experienced by outsiders such as a German wife and a Pakistani woman. These may legitimise *Dadi's* powers, as effective outside the kin and religious group, and thus stronger and more far-reaching than those of other female kin. In using the term *Dadi* for the woman who was 'a friend of my Mum's', Mrs Pandya and her husband were according her the kinship term given to the most highly respected woman in the household, the father's mother. Her power and authority are recognised and respected through this term, with an accompanying obligation to protect and nurture them.

Women need constantly to be vigilant: to avoid situations where evil may attack, and younger women will consult older ones in the kinship network. Precautionary measures, such as drawing the *ohm* sign or the Hindu swastika sign on the doorframe, or hanging leaves on it, prevent ghosts from entering. The back door may be potentially more dangerous, because ghosts tend to live in gardens, so signs will also be drawn there and rituals done regularly to expel any unwelcome forces. The dangers were associated with the doorway as a threshold, which is neither in nor out, so its status is ambivalent and in Turner's (1969) terms, a liminal place for people passing through who will require the protection of ritual. Pocock (1973) pointed out that doors must always be closed when people were eating, because once food was cooked it took on an ambivalent state half way to being digested, so it was vulnerable to attack. I argued earlier that people in transition were also vulnerable to *najar*; couples around the time of their marriage, pregnant women, infants and small children, all need special protection from the *mataji* (goddess).

The concern felt for people in transition, whose status is uncertain, such as those who are newly married, pregnant or newly delivered women, or babies and young children, is such that special precautions are taken to protect them from attack. Detection of the source comes first and then rituals intended to ward off the evil eye. *Najar* may be feared by a person who is greedy or proud, and may attract the envious eye; or by a

newly married couple; or by a mother who has a son, who enjoys feeding him; or by a mother who has beautiful daughters. Those who have social obligations unfulfilled, or out-standing debts not paid may fear *bhut*. Both *najar* and *bhut* are rooted in social relations between equals outside the kin group, or people who appear to be so, or are striving to become so. Hindu beliefs in the transition of the soul from this world to the next incarnation require a degree of completeness, where attachments are reduced and correct rituals performed, so unfinished business, or untimely death, may mean the soul lingers as a ghost. Women continue to be vigilant in the protection of vulnerable people especially young children, from malevolent attack, through preventative ritual, detection and warding off rituals. The best protection against all malevolent forces is to strive for a high level of spiritual belief and *vidhya* or knowledge.

Through the belief in malevolent powers, kinship relations are at once realised and re-negotiated. Women consult each other over the detection and expulsion of both *najar* and *bhut* and usually the opinions of the older, more powerful women are sought. Kinship becomes both competitive and hierarchical. Children grow to recognise this, and find they too have effect on others by refusing to eat the household food, enjoying the attention they receive. Anyone is capable of inflicting the *najar* at any time and causing illness; also any person is capable of spiritual growth through meditation and reading religious texts, enabling him or her to expel evil and exorcise ghosts. The Hindu person as capable at once of both evil and good has been recognised by others (Parkin 1985). Kinship ties here are strengthened in women through belief in supernatural forces and kin from outside the household may be consulted. The knowledge of those specific rituals that are necessary to protect vulnerable kin informs the process through which, over time, ideas of the person, sociality and the nature of relations between kin are at once expressed and brought into being.

Chapter 7 The household's moral duty to the child

Children occupy a central position in Gujarati households and are a focus of concern for all, especially for women. Children have to be protected from harm, even before birth, and their nurturance in a calm, spiritually fulfilling environment, is viewed as vital for their future personalities. Embedded in the idea of the Gujarati person is the concept of *sanskar*, the moral identity of the household, which must be conveyed to the next generation. There is no direct translation for this term in English, so it needs some additional explanation here. *Sanskar* is a quality shared by everyone in the household. The word comes from the same stem as Sanskrit itself and is known as *samskara* in Hindi, which means life-cycle ritual.

Inden and Nicholas (1977) suggest that every *samskara* (life-cycle ritual) transforms the living body by purifying and refining it – i.e. by virtue of removing defects such as those inherited from the seed or the womb and infusing positive qualities. The rituals involve immersion, sprinkling, touching parts of the body and putting on new clothes. The recitation of special words and the feeding with special substances and anointing has to be done in a certain sequence, each ritual preparing the person for the next. Inden and Nicholas argue that these Hindu rituals differ from Christian sacraments in that they affect the total person, not just his spiritual life (Inden and Nicholas 1977:37).

In Western terms this may be thought of as a feeling or attitude, but Gujaratis have suggested to me that *sanskar* goes beyond a psychological sense of belonging and is informed by the actual physical space in the *ghar*, the house. As Mr Pandya an elderly Brahman explained to me:

The *sanskar* is formed in the way you are brought up in the environment of the house. So a girl marrying into the house may have a different *sanskar* from her in-laws, even though she is of the same caste.

On another occasion, Deepa, a Patel mother explained to me what she understood by *sanskar*:

A person has a good *sanskar* if they are willing to do anything for other people. If anyone comes home, that person would always welcome him or her. It is learnt in the family, in the upbringing of the children.

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Here Deepa is suggesting that the meaning has moved away from the emphasis on the rituals themselves and has been generalised into one that describes the moral behaviour of the members of the household. She explained to me that the *sanskar* is the way we bring up our children as human beings and teach them how to behave: that is to be honest, respect elders and honour their god. For her, an important aspect of this was also how guests are welcomed and treated with warm hospitality in the house. The *sanskar* of a household will be known in the community and whether this is good or bad will be an important consideration when choosing a marriage partner for your children.

Throughout this thesis, my informants have referred to the importance of determining whether a family is 'good', especially when choosing marriage partners and have found it difficult to describe exactly what they mean by this, except that it is respectful to others and honest. Later in the fieldwork, when I was able to refer to the *sanskar* of a household being an important factor here, greater clarity was possible. Yogesh's grandfather explained to me that the *sanskar* of a child depends on his or her moral and religious upbringing. From conception, the child's *gharbamar sanskar* (the household's *sanskar*) is transmitted to him or her from the mother thoughts, diet and behaviour. There are sixteen *sanskars* or life-cycle rituals from conception to death that need to be observed. He emphasised that women have most of the responsibility, and estimated about 80% of the child's character depended on the women.

So far as I have come to understand, my informants hold its *sanskar* to be firstly the very essence of a household's being, independent as it were of any given household member; it is the *sanskar* of the household that determines the moral outlook of its members, their religious beliefs, obligations, and the way they view the world. Secondly, the meaning relates to the more commonly recognised *sanskar* (or *samskara* in Hindi), which becomes embodied in the child through the nurturing in the womb and breastfeeding. The mother's health and diet, her emotional wellbeing, her thoughts will affect the way the child learns about the house and the wider world. As the child grows, the life-cycle rituals he or she passes through shape the moral outlook, and so transform the *sanskar*.

It seems, further, that the *sanskar* of the household becomes apparent to the members by virtue of the rituals they perform. I was often told that a woman marrying in will bring a different *sanskar* with her, but will be expected to adopt that of her husband's family. Here the difference in *sanskar* across households is signified by differences in the way

Figure 20: Main life-cycle rituals – Hindu and Jain.

Ritual	Time	Description
<p><i>Shrimant</i> (pregnancy)</p> <p><i>kholo bharvo</i> (putting in the lap)</p> <p>Often not observed.</p>	7 th month of pregnancy	Woman's hair may be washed. Rice is exchanged between the laps of mother and mother-in-law. A small baby may also be passed between them.
<p>Chhati</p> <p>Observed by most Hindus and Jains.</p>	6 days after birth	Gathering of patrilineal and natal kin. Baby wrapped in green cloth by <i>foi</i> and turned in front of the shrine, making sure his or her eyes not dazzled by the <i>divo</i> . God of fate, <i>Vidhata</i> , writes the child's future with a red pen on white paper.
<p>End of Sava- meno</p> <p>Observed by most Hindus and Jains</p>	One month and a quarter after birth.	Mother and baby have a bath and put on new clothes. They are taken to temple by <i>nani</i> (mother's mother) baby is blessed by priest.
<p><i>Balmovala</i> (birth-hair)</p> <p><i>Utava</i> (shave off)</p> <p>More likely to be observed by Hindus. Some Patels shave the child's head after birth.</p>	One and a quarter or two and a half years.	Child's hair shaved off by a barber. Hair is collected by <i>foi</i> on a green cloth, care taken not to drop any. <i>Pujari</i> conducts religious rite. Large gathering of patrilineal kin. Hair taken after ceremony to a flowing river or the sea, in India to the ancestral village.
<p><i>Janoi</i> –tying of sacred thread. Observed by high Hindu castes only.</p>	Boys-7 years+ or before marriage.	White thread is put over boy's left shoulder and tied around the waist- kept on at all times. A second thread is added at marriage.
<p>Marriage</p> <p>Variations in ceremony between Hindu castes and Jains.</p>	Usually 20-30 years	Large gathering of kin often 200-500+ guests. Ceremony conducted under <i>mandap</i> (canopy) and couple walk seven times around the sacred fire.

the various life-cycle rituals are performed and so, in adopting the *sanskar* of her husband's household, the in-marrying woman is expected to perform the rituals advocated by the husband's line and to follow the ritual practices of her mother-and sisters-in-law. In effect it seems that the *sanskar* comes into being in the life-cycle and other rituals, that are held at once to reflect and inform the moral behaviour of the household members towards each other and the rest of the community. Everyday ritual practice is entirely taken-for-granted; it is accepted and performed as it is, because the family have always done it that way. Rational explanations are rarely given and reasons for the performance are considered unnecessary. Some households may adopt a pragmatic approach and combine two or more life-cycle rituals, for convenience, or because of unfavourable circumstances such as the season of the year or illness in a member of the kin group. *Sanskar* affects the total person not just the spiritual life and in this respect I agree with Inden and Nicholas (1977:37); the rituals practised are not, however best understood as individual acts (even when performed alone), but as collective acts, which are held at once to shape and to evince the morality of the household, the kinship group and the wider Gujarati community.

In this chapter, I examine life-cycle rituals and the way household members demonstrate their moral responsibilities towards a child from the beginning of pregnancy, through the rituals of childhood, showing that the continuity of *sanskar* to the next generation is the concern of all its members.

Pregnancy: a time for vigilance

When a woman becomes pregnant, it is a time for celebration that affirms her position within the family. She now carries a child who shares the bodily substance of the family and is part of the patrilineage. Her rising status in the joint family ensures that she can share in more decision-making with her *sasu* (mother-in-law). She will no longer be given all the menial tasks and her physical, emotional and spiritual well-being become central concerns of all her female kin. It is thought that the infant gains knowledge of his or her kin, their practices and beliefs, through the mother's body fluids in pregnancy and breastfeeding, and the character of the child may be affected by the mother's thoughts. Young Gujarati women educated in Britain may previously have been uninterested in the rituals practised by their mothers, and some may have dismissed them as superstition. Once pregnant, many such women feel an obligation to perform life them, to ensure continuation of family beliefs and practices.

I visited Kajol in February 1999, when she was expecting her second child, and her daughter Bina was two years old. She belongs to the Mistry caste; her father was a carpenter and they left Uganda in 1972, but she had spent much of her childhood in India. Her parents now live in Birmingham. She married a man of the same caste, Dipesh, who also came from Uganda and whose parents live in Hounslow. We spoke about what precautions pregnant women must take to protect their unborn children.

As far as women who are expecting are concerned, there are a few things....we don't go to funerals, I don't know whether you knew that. We do not go to the actual funeral itself. We also do not go to people's houses where they have just had a baby. Some say you must not go for thirteen days after the baby is born and others say you must not go for five weeks.

I asked why not, and she replied:

I am not sure, it is something to do with the fact that they say.....I don't know whether you have heard the word *melu*, not dirty but.....

We agreed that 'impure' might be an appropriate translation and Kajol continued:

That is why we don't go to weddings, we must not go under the canopy. I think it has something to do with it being pure and spiritual.

Were the precautions during pregnancy intended to protect the baby?

Yes, it is to protect the unborn baby in all cases. I used to say to my mum that in this country most women go out with their newborn babies, even to hospitals or clinics, or somewhere. Like I go to a

toddlers' group, and there was a mother with a newborn baby, and my mum said to keep my distance. But she said that it is more important not to go near their beds, rather than near them. I have seen so many women in this country who visit friends with newborn babies.

I said:

So the reason why a woman is supposed to stay in for forty days after having a baby is not only to protect themselves and the new baby, but also to protect everyone else outside too.

Kajol:

Yes, and I suppose it is common sense to protect your newborn from germs, colds, 'flu, whatever. You could go for a trip to Sainsbury's and you could....you just don't know, do you?

When I was expecting Bina, I was terrible. I was terrified of going out, to be perfectly honest. Then I could stay at home and restrict myself to going where ever, but this time it is different. I can't keep her in the house. It wouldn't be fair on her.

I asked Kajol if women are vulnerable when pregnant and she replied:

I think it is purely from the point that you must protect yourself from the evil eye. I suppose it is going a bit far but you know, things like, you don't know what people have down the road. You are a bit concerned, well I am anyway. But then that is life isn't it, whenever you go, wherever you go.

In the olden days the girl used to be taken at seven months of pregnancy to her mother's house and the baby born there, so that the mum could look after her daughter. That is not the case these days. Obviously you have hospitals, you have...it just isn't practical. The theory was that you were well looked after. She was sent back to her husband's house when it was all over. But my mum always says if you don't look after yourself in pregnancy and afterwards, your body is not the same. You have difficulties later on.

What sort of difficulties?

Things like back pain. Not as fit. You just do not have the energy that you did before. She often talks of back problems, they are very concerned about the back. She says I should eat hot foods, not like cold sandwiches and stuff. Pregnancy is special, I suppose you are treated like a VIP, not quite, but people tend to look after you. She came and made me all this food, to eat different food, you know, to make sure you eat well and you eat hot foods. If you have a craving, then you should eat it, don't deprive your body of it.

You should also think good thoughts, and think good things, you know, because it reflects on the unborn baby. This was quite interesting because I was watching a TV programme. They say the environment around us, what we think, our thoughts, are well implanted in the unborn baby from the time of conception. That was interesting because it was what my mother had been saying.

The belief that thoughts and knowledge are transferred from mother to baby through body fluids, both in pregnancy and through breastfeeding, is widespread. Certain foods are thought to affect the character and temperament of the child if eaten during pregnancy, hot spices are avoided because it is thought they make the child aggressive or bad tempered. A diet rich in fruit, vegetables and milk products, foods considered pure, is usually advocated. Mala explained that the women push you to eat butter, milk

and yogurt when you are pregnant, and *ghee* (clarified butter) is used for cooking, rather than oil, which is usually used because it is considered healthier. Women used to be told not to wash their hair for the first seven months of pregnancy, for fear of making their bodies more vulnerable to evil attack and miscarriage. Most women work today, and they say they would feel self-conscious if they did not wash their hair. British Gujarati fathers, like their Western counterparts, are taking a more active part than their fathers did in supporting their wives during pregnancy and are often present at the birth. They may attend antenatal classes and take an interest in the birth process and breastfeeding; although, within joint households, it is still the older women who make the decisions as to how the baby is fed, as discussed in the next chapter.

The first life-cycle ritual to be observed in some (but not all) families is carried out in the seventh month of the first pregnancy and called *khola bharvo* (putting in the lap). This may be a small affair with only a few female relatives present, but can be a much larger event in a temple hall, with several hundred guests. Some women say they do not believe in it; others combine this ritual with one of the other childhood rituals, usually that for hair-cutting, and perform it when the child is a year and a quarter. I made enquiries about any specific rituals or foods that may help to increase fertility, but no answers were forthcoming. After a wedding the bride is encouraged to hold a male infant, which is thought to increase her chances of having a male child. Green *mug* beans are kept from the wedding ceremony and cooked for the guests at the seventh month ceremony; Meera told me that it is important not to lose these beans, for otherwise the woman might not become pregnant. I describe later how rice is kept from this ceremony until the *chhati* (sixth day after birth ceremony). The Hindu view on the connectedness of life events and the journey of the soul through this life to the next is evinced in the way that life-cycle events are linked by virtue of the same priest conducting them all, or food being saved from one ritual to be used in the next.

In life-cycle rituals, kinship relations are manifest and the group's common substance is at once constituted and confirmed. The religious observances are similar across caste and class, Hindu and Jain, in Harrow and in Ahmedabad. Life-cycle rituals are conducted for pregnant women and children when family members call upon the *mataji*, or mother goddesses, to protect them from evil influences that might cause disease or misfortune. They mark the Hindu stages of life from pregnancy and birth, through childhood and puberty, to student, householder and then, at old age, to renouncer or

ascetic before death. The way the soul progresses through these stages in its path to final emancipation from the cycle of rebirths is the concern of all Hindus. At each stage a transformation or rebirth occurs as the person passes through the particular rite of passage. Van Gennep's analysis of the way the person goes through a period of separation, then a liminal period, followed by incorporation into the new status has been applied to similar South Asian life-cycle rituals in Bengal by Inden and Nicholas (1977:35). They argue that during the liminal phase the person being acted on is a passive recipient of symbolic action. The ritual establishes new relationships with kin, wider society and the ancestors.

Steven Parish argues from his work with the Newars in Nepal, that 'creating a moral self is not a natural process, but a ritual process'. He suggests that the *samskaras* (life-cycle rituals) stress interdependency because the individual is acted upon by others, and a sense of 'self' becomes embedded in the 'web of relatedness' (Parish 1994:257).

In respect to Gujarati practices, I argue that these rituals at once constitute and confirm not only the common substance of the household with respect to wider kin, but also ideas of *sanskar* within the *ghar* (house) itself. Below I outline the life-cycle rituals for pregnancy and early childhood using data gathered in Harrow and Ahmedabad, through observation of the ceremonies and transcriptions of the interviews.

Gujaratis have a pragmatic approach to these rituals which may be appropriate at certain times but not at others, and apparent rules concerning the age of the child may be adapted to fit with the individual family's needs or the time of year. For example it may be thought dangerous to cut a child's hair in winter, so the ceremony will be delayed until spring. Some families say they believe in one ritual more than another and some rituals concerning children are more significant for first-born children or for boys. Sometimes families combine several rituals into one gathering of kin, incorporating extra *lota* (representations of the goddess) for each ritual.

The ritual for the seventh month of pregnancy.

Many pregnant women feel that if they have taken all precautions, followed the 'family rules' and carried out the required rituals, then they themselves cannot be blamed if problems arise. By seven months the baby is widely believed to be well formed and not

in so much danger. The ceremony conducted at this time is concerned firstly with washing the pregnant woman's hair and is called the *Shrimant*; colloquially it may be referred to as *kholo bharvo* or just *kholo*, meaning 'lap'. Many Gujarati families in Harrow say that they do not bother with this ceremony, but others do still observe it. For some it may be a large social gathering for kin and friends, involving over a hundred guests. Some families will delay the ritual and combine it with a future life-cycle event, such as the *Chhati*, the sixth day ceremony after birth, or the *Balmovala*, the hair-cutting ceremony. Some women who have had problems with the birth process or who have delivered a child with abnormalities blame the fact that they did not observe the seven-month ceremony. One Jain woman who has a boy with Down's Syndrome believes that this happened because she omitted the ritual. A Brahman woman explained how the ceremony is conducted:

The woman's hair is washed and she is bathed in yogurt, honey, milk and sugar. Her parents come and bring her three items of clothes: petticoat, blouse and sari. After the bath, the girl comes down the stairs wearing these clothes and on each step her mother puts money [which is afterwards sent to a charity]. A woman who has children who are all alive has to perform the ceremony. I couldn't do it because I had a miscarriage, so my niece did it for me. We had rice, a coconut and the red powder *kankoo*. The rice is put in the fold of her sari and exchanged seven times with the girl's mother. As she goes to her mother's place for the delivery, it comes to her last. Then we invite the goddess and do the same ceremony that we do after the birth and at the hair-cutting. The rice is kept by the girl's mother and cooked for the six-day ceremony after birth. The rice that is offered to Ganesh at the wedding is often kept to use at these ceremonies.

In many families a small ceremony is conducted around the household shrine and five or seven women are invited; there seems to be considerable variation in the way the ceremonies are performed. Usha is a Patel woman who was expecting her second baby when I visited in May 2000. She told me she did not have a ceremony in her first pregnancy, but described one she had attended:

My cousin had one, well she is not really my cousin, just a friend. They had a little do for her. It was quite amusing, because we are quite a close family. Hash, her husband, is considered my brother because he is similar age and we grew up together. They needed a younger brother to slap red paint on the woman who is pregnant and as they didn't have a younger brother, they borrowed my husband for the day. He had to put red *kankoo* [red powder] on his hand and slap her face. It was quite a jovial affair and no one knew why we were doing it. She dressed up in her wedding outfit for the day, the white and red sari. She had all her jewellery and it was a really small affair and only

our family there. There was rice exchanged between her mother and mother-in-law, and you are not allowed to drop a grain of rice. She held it in the fold of her sari and tipped it out seven times. I don't think anyone knew what they were doing. My mum was in charge because she was the eldest, and they were just piecing things together from what they had heard.

Usha described this ritual in such a lively way and for her all that mattered was the coming together of kin united in a common purpose and having fun together increased the feeling of togetherness or 'communitas' (Turner 1974). Rituals are processual social dramas in which social relations are renewed and new ones established (Turner 1974). The practices that define any given ritual have many meanings and physiological processes often become attached to moral facts. So, via ritual, a physiological process such as pregnancy may attach itself to moral ideas about duties to kin, responsibilities and involvement of grandmothers and other women, patriliney and others. The drama of the ritual action, in the singing and dancing or, in this case, in the exchange of rice between the pregnant woman's natal and patrilineal kin, allows the moral idea to attach itself to the physiological experience.

In this sense ritual symbols are 'multivocal', susceptible of many meanings, but their referents tend to polarize between physiological phenomena (blood, sexual organs, coitus, birth, death, catabolism, and so on) and normative values of moral facts (kindness to children, reciprocity, generosity to kinsman, respect for elders, obedience to political authorities, and the like) (Turner 1974:55).

In other families a priest may be invited along with larger numbers of guests. One woman told me that it is good if the priest who conducted the wedding also conducts these rituals because there is continuity. McDonald has suggested that, in the ceremony, the woman becomes the *mata* (the mother goddess) and is honoured as such by the other women, who in turn become the *mata's* sisters (McDonald 1987:60) The exchange of rice between the patrilineal and natal families indicates the involvement both will have in the child's future. This rice is saved and then cooked and shared between both at the *Chhati*, or sixth day ceremony after birth.

In August 2000, Shefali, who was then eight months pregnant, described her seven-month ceremony, which was held at the Swaminarayan School, opposite the temple. Her family is Brahman and is actively involved in the temple. Two hundred and fifty guests were invited and her family all gave her presents for the baby. I asked her about the exchange of rice and she told me this had occurred, but it seemed that the social

occasion and gathering of kin were more important to her. Relatives came from Leceister and the north of England. The actual ritual appeared to be secondary to the moral implications of the involvement of the unborn child in this wide network of kin. It seems that people are compelled to carry out these rituals because they have always been done and must continue to be done. The rituals have an explicit religious component, but even so, participants often advance no religious or logical reason for doing them. Turner (1974) argues that if there were logic attached, the ritual would move into the secular world.

Childbirth – a new responsibility for female kin

Childbirth begins a period of ritual impurity for the mother and extreme vulnerability for the infant. As soon as possible after birth, female relatives tie black threads around the baby's wrists; this is thought to ward off the evil eye, as discussed in the previous chapter. Most women return to their natal home for the first forty days, *sava mahino* (a month and a quarter), but some women will return to the marital home for a few days, so that the husband's family can see the baby. In stricter households, the woman will be required to stay in her room and not enter the kitchen during the first two weeks. As her blood loss decreases, her level of impurity lessens and she may be allowed to move more freely around the house, but will not go out of the house for the first forty days, except to visit the clinic or the doctor's surgery. Meera, a Lohana mother and midwife, told me:

You are unclean for the first six weeks after birth, until the bleeding stops. There are customs, particularly the older generation believe, that you do not stay in the same room as your husband.

The woman is fed special foods made by female kin, believed to strengthen the newly delivered woman's back, improve her breast milk and rid her body of the impurities of giving birth. Her mother or mother-in-law make a sweet food called *katlu*; eating it is said to strengthen a woman's back after giving birth. It is made with maize flour, butter, glue or gum, honey, nuts and spices and is cut into two inch squares; at least two of these squares should be eaten each day, but some women are reluctant to do this because the sweet contains too many calories and is high in fat. Green vegetables and aubergines are used in cooking *shak* (vegetables) and thought to replace minerals lost by the mother. Special boiled water with *sua* (spices) should be the only water drunk by

newly delivered women in order to rid the body of impurities. Many women have told me they do not like the taste of it, so just pretend that they are drinking it to please their mothers. Visitors to a household where a male baby has been born will be offered a drink and *ladu* (a sweet food made from wheat flour) or *jalebi* (strands of fried, sweet wheat); it is considered bad manners to refuse.

Nikhita, a young Brahman mother told me her views about these foods and drinks, one evening when I visited her home:

Asian women are often very thin and a lot of weight is put on in pregnancy and this can cause strain on their backs. Look at English women, they get back to their normal size more quickly, because they have to get on with their lives after giving birth, but Asian women don't have to. As a result they pile on the weight and are not so active and are not exercising. So they can end up with back problems.

I asked her whether the back is an important site of health and wellbeing, and she replied:

Yes, wellbeing. The food you eat is important, the *katlu* and the gums make your back stronger. The spices too are supposed to make you stronger and get rid of any excess weight that you have put on. Most women do not find them tasty, they take them because they know they have to, like medicines. I had to have three pieces of *katlu* a day.

You should avoid potatoes; they are not good for your stomach and can upset the baby. They also make a *ram*, a syrupy thing. You know the girl you met here, well her mother makes it for her all the time, and she makes lots of milk for her baby. It has a lot of *ghee* in it and energy. You give it to anyone who is not well or recovering.

What about the water she had to drink?

I couldn't drink the water raw, so I used to have it by the bed and drink it in fistfuls. It was good for the baby's colic, but it was vile tasting. It was boiled with *gol* (unrefined cane sugar) and *sua* in it. I have a bottle sitting there. It is hot, very hot for the body. It clears your digestion and gets rid of any wind in your body, and in your baby.

***Chhati* – the day the god of fate writes the child's future**

The *Chhati*, the six-day ceremony after birth, is the first and usually the only ritual practised by Gujarati households in the first months of a baby's life and seems to be observed by most households. A few families have a ceremony called *Suraj puja*, for

the baby to worship the sun at twelve days after birth. I have found no evidence in Harrow of a separate name-giving ceremony seen in other parts of South Asia (cf. McDonald, 1987, who describes this ceremony in her research in East London). The name is chosen by the father's sister, *foi* or *foiba*, or by the parents themselves, usually after consultation with an astrologer, or priest, who supplies two suitable letters, at least one of which should be incorporated into the name. Most families will consult religious leaders, astrologers, or gurus in India to write the child's *rasi*, which is a piece of paper, like a certificate which states the time and date of the child's birth and will be referred to when working out the auspicious times for life-cycle and marriage rituals. If the child is still in hospital, the *chhati* may be conducted there by female relatives, or at home on the sixth day, in the absence of the mother and baby. In order to establish the auspicious time on this date, one must consult an astrologer, or the *coghadiya*, which are auspicious and inauspicious time-periods on a calendar divided into one and a half hour time bands showing good and bad times of the day – red being good and green being bad times for ceremonies.

Many women are living in their natal home at the time, and a small ritual involving immediate female kin may be all that happens, especially if the baby is a girl. The father's sister, the *foi*, is usually invited to hold the baby and give the name, if this has been decided. In other households, the ritual may take place in the patrilineal house and large numbers of guests are invited, all of whom bring presents, and a priest conducts the ceremony. Some western-educated women will dismiss these rituals as superstitious, but say they go through with them to please their families, especially older female members. Others have told me that in order to be Gujarati, a child must go through these ceremonies and that the child's tie to the *ghar* and the wider Gujarati community begins here.

Chhati ceremonies I have observed here and in Ahmedabad have common themes, which I describe briefly here; the descriptions that follow are taken from my field notes. I begin with my observations of one ceremony following the birth of a second daughter to a Patel mother; this took place in her natal home in Harrow, on 21st September 1998, with her parents and sisters present but her husband's family were not invited:

Nita rings me to tell me she had a baby daughter six days ago and is planning to have the *chhati* tonight. She rings me back at 5pm to say that her sister will be home from college at 5.30 pm, and the ceremony will take place then, but it must be finished by 6 pm. She says it will be a very small

affair with only her family present, and they will light the *divo* (candle) and say some prayers, but I am welcome to come if I wish.

I arrive at 5.25 pm, and am welcomed at the door by Nita and her mother who are both very friendly and smiling. I remove my shoes and Nita shows me where to put them. She introduces me to her two sisters, aged 14 and 16 years, and says she will tell me what will happen and says that her baby daughter has already been bathed and dressed in new white clothes – an embroidered suit with a white shawl. She explains that the ritual has to be conducted by a woman who has not lost a baby, or had a miscarriage, and who is not menstruating at the time. Her eighteen-year-old sister will conduct it because the baby's maternal grandmother, *nani*, had a miscarriage earlier in her life. We both sit down in the living room and the baby lies asleep in Nita's arms, on a sofa that is near to the door, as far as possible from the shrine. She explains that a steel tray is prepared [china and glass are considered unclean, because of their underground origins] and placed in front of the family shrine. There is also a steel tumbler containing water on the tray, with a piece of white paper and a red pen. She tells me that red is an auspicious colour used on good occasions. It is with this pen that the God of Fate, Vidhata, is thought to write the child's future after the ritual. On the tray is a *divo* (candle) made with cotton wool and *ghee* (clarified butter), some red powder or *kankoo*, some new baby clothes (one item of which should be white), some money which must not be a whole number (here £1.25), and some grains of rice. Some families use green *mug* beans, betel nuts, sugar crystals and salt or any combination of these.

The baby is picked up by her *masi* (mother's sister) who takes her to the household shrine and puts her down on a chair in front of it. The shrine has the Swaminarayan guru in the centre and the other deities around it. She confidently puts a red *bhindi* (spot) on the foreheads of all the gods and gurus in the shrine and then one on the baby. Nita explains that some families paint a red Hindu swastika near the baby's heart, but that they do not believe in that. The sister picks the baby up and shows her the shrine seven times, being careful that the brightness of the candle does not dazzle the baby, and then lies her down in front of the shrine, on a chair.

An *arti* (prayer) is then sung by the family and the *divo* circled on a tray in a clockwise direction. Nita is considered unclean and cannot participate, but sits at the side of the room. The tray is left for twenty minutes in front of the shrine and then the white paper and red pen is placed under the baby's mattress, so that the child's future can be written on it by the god. Nita says that many families sing songs afterwards about the baby resting under a banyan tree.

It is unusual for the *masi* (mother's sister) to play the main part in the *chhati*, but in this case none of the father's kin were present, so the father's sister could not be asked. Sinclair Stevenson (1920), writing about the Brahman caste in Nigara of Kathiawar describes how the father's sister conducts the ritual. She begins by sprinkling red

turmeric powder and lime on a stool, throwing some grains of wheat on it and placing some grains of rice beside it. She describes the stool as being called the 'sixth' or *chathi*, and the candle is placed behind it so that it cannot shine in the baby's eyes and make him blind or cause him to have a squint. The baby is placed in front of the stool and the women sing 'Roll, baby, roll; god has given you birth, he will give you food' (Sinclair Stevenson 1920:10). I have found some similar practices in the rituals I have observed, especially concerning the protection of the child's eyes and the rolling of the baby in front of the shrine.

Many families tie black threads on the baby at the *chhati*, if this has not already been done. Some Patel families shave the hair off male infants, but this practice is not seen very often, and is more likely to be done by Muslim families. There are common themes to be found, but there is also considerable variation in practice. The *foi* is an important figure in most life-cycle rituals and plays a more important part when the ritual is conducted at the patrilineal home, which was the case in the *chhati* that I observed in a Jain household.

The Shah family lives in a joint household in a semi-detached house in a tree-lined street in the Kenton area of Harrow. Mr Shah senior is retired and he lives with his wife and two sons, their wives and four grandchildren. His son Dipesh rang me to tell me that he and his wife Hena had their second child the week before and invited me to attend the *chhati* the following evening at 7.15 pm. They already have a little girl who is two-years-old and now they have a son. The following is an extract from my fieldnotes on 26/6/01:

I arrive at 7.10 pm, and Mr Shah is in his front garden, dressed in a white safari suit, cutting some green leaves from a tree. Dipesh comes down from upstairs and shakes me by the hand, welcoming me, and I congratulate him on the birth. He takes me up to the bedroom to see Hena and the baby. She is sitting on the bed crossed-legged, looking radiant, wearing a golden brown Punjabi suit and breastfeeding her baby. This time she had a water birth, which she found to be a good experience. I go downstairs with them at 7.30 pm, just as more visitors are arriving: Hena's brother and his wife and two children, Hena's mother, and Dipesh's two brothers, their wives and children walk in through the front door and remove their shoes. Dipesh's older brother's daughter is eighteen and will act as *foi* (his sister) for the ceremony because he does not have a sister.

Mr Shah told me that it is only recently in the UK that men began to observe these rituals, but they are not allowed to take part, that is left to the women. His family comes from a village near

Jamnagar in Gujarat, which is different from other parts of the state and is more like Kutch. He has lived in a joint family since 1954; his sons have always lived with him and four years ago his father did too, until he died aged 90 years. Hena's mother is a small woman with thick glasses and wears a pale green sari. Her husband is still alive but bed-ridden, and she looks after him. Hena explains that she decided not to stay with her after the birth, because she would be too much of a burden for her.

The *chhati* starts at 7.35 pm in the *labh* (red) time which is auspicious. A red patterned cloth is put on the floor, next to a small wooden platform, on which is a simple shrine. One of Dipesh's brother's wives draws a swastika shape in the *mug* beans with a Sainbury's Reward card. A *divo* is placed in the corner, along with a betel nut, almonds and sugar crystals, and the green leaves I saw Mr Shah gathering outside. (I am told later that these take the place of betel leaves.) A green patterned cloth is placed behind the red one and a plain green cloth is laid on top of the red patterned one. A red pen and a piece of white paper are put on the small, wooden table on the green cloth, with the *divo* that is lit [see photograph]. The children gather round excitedly and Mira, Hena's daughter, holds her cousin's hand and sits down on the red-patterned cloth when told to do so in Gujarati, which is the only language spoken all evening. The girls sit in front and the boys behind without being told to sit in this order [see photograph]. The young girl acting as *foi* holds the baby for two minutes and then carefully lies him on the green cloth and rolls him in it, covering his eyes with it. She turns him seven times towards the *divo*, being careful that the light does not shine in his eyes. Later I ask Mr Shah what is the significance of this and he says: 'it is what we always do, we do not have an explanation. It is passed through generations. The god of fate, Vidhata will come tonight and we believe will write the child's fate on the white paper'. I ask whether the paper is left beside the cot, but he says it will be left by the shrine overnight.

The *prasad* (offering to the gods) of almonds and sugar crystals is handed round by the *foi* and the children are told to take one only, I take an almond but am urged by everyone to take sugar too. After the ritual, sweets foods of *ladu* (sweets made of wheat flour) and dates are passed round for everyone to eat. Mr Shah tells me that dates are healthier than *ladu* because a lot of people have diabetes and will not eat *ladu*. I ask whether different foods are given at *chhati* for girls and boys. He replies that today girls and boys are treated equally in rituals, especially by Jains.

Throughout the ritual, the men stay on the outside around the walls of the room and the women and children are actively involved in the centre. The children start pushing each other and Mira pushes a male cousin who is about seven years old. She seems to get her way, although only two years old. She appears very confident and is in her own home. After the ritual everyone talks and moves around the room. Bowls of watermelon are passed around and I am invited to sit at the table with other women to eat.

The behaviour I observed in these discreet ceremonies followed a distinct pattern and although many of the participants say they do not know why particular objects are included or particular acts performed, they say it is the way they can ensure a future for the child and offer him or her protection with the blessing of the goddess. Both Hindu and Jain households usually call upon the goddess Randalma to protect pregnant women and young children. Some households follow variations in this ritual and two described an additional follow-up ritual at eleven days, when rice grains from the *chhati* that are kept under the cot are taken into the garden for the birds and the mother takes her baby outside for the first time. In this short ritual when the sun is worshipped, the tray from the *chhati* is retained, but the red pen, white paper and white handkerchief are kept inside. Eleven piles of lentils are made on the front door frame and a *divo* is lit at the back door. A crisscross pattern is made across the floor from the front to the back door with coloured lentils. The mother and baby come back into the house and the mother is given *khicadi* (a dish made from rice and lentils) to eat and given £1.25 in cash.

I visited Manisha, a young Brahman woman who lives in a modern flat in the centre of Harrow on 5/6/01:

Manisha is looking very happy, sitting on her leather sofa in the living room of her flat, as I visit her two weeks after giving birth to her second son. Her mother, Reena, who lives in Birmingham, is staying with her for four weeks, to help her with the new baby and her little boy Shaan, who is now two years old. Manisha wears a loose T-shirt and trousers, but her mother wears a blue Punjabi suit. Manisha was brought up in a Brahman family and had a love marriage to a Brahman. She told me that she was educated in this country and sees herself as British, although she speaks to her mother and Shaan in Gujarati. Manisha and her mother conducted a small *chhati* for the new baby at 10 pm on the sixth day after birth. They set up a tray with a red pen and some white paper and put them in an envelope. They dressed the baby in a white baby suit and drew a red swastika on it. They lit a *divo*, had a bowl of *mug* beans and called upon the god of fate to write the child's future on the paper. When the baby was eleven days old they took him outside on the balcony to see the rising sun and worship the sun god. I asked whether they had given him a name and whether they had made a *rasi*, but Manisha says that she does not believe in this because the horoscope may give the child difficult letters like gh or kh and you have to make a name with them, so she and her husband will choose his name.

Manisha and her husband decided not to follow the usual pattern of choosing a name containing the letters from the horoscope, but the time of their son's birth will be carefully recorded and will be consulted when arranging life-cycle rituals, including his

marriage. Young couples that have been educated in Britain may decide to follow only certain rituals or expected patterns advocated by their parents, and may dismiss some as superstition or just say that they do not believe in them.

The rituals performed for newly born infants are usually done in the mother's natal home, but Mala told me that if the husband's family is powerful, it can insist that that they are done at their house, which happened in her case. She was married into a Lohana household from a Patel family and because of the high status of her husband's family, its wishes had to be followed. She felt they wanted to make a show for their friends about having a grandson and invited over two hundred guests to the *chhati*. The priest who had conducted their marriage performed the ceremony. Her husband's sister played her important role by showing the baby the gods and giving him his name.

The Hindu and Jain households I have known both here and in Ahmedabad mark the end of the stage of ritual impurity after childbirth by a visit to the temple. The woman and her baby take a ceremonial bath and put on new clothes before leaving for the temple, accompanied by members of the mother's natal kin. Most families will do this at the end of forty days, or *sava mahino*, but this may be shortened if a visit from a guru from India is expected and in some cases he will choose the name of the child. If the child is male the priest will touch him, but if female, he may give the name without touching. After the visit to the temple, the woman and her child are taken back to her husband's household. Girls may be given similar rituals in some families, but in others they are observed only for boys, depending on the pattern followed by the male line.

Figure 21: The *Chhati* Ritual. *Mata* talks to *foi*.



Figure 22: *Foi* wraps the baby in a green cloth and turns him towards the shrine.



The hot-curing ceremony of *Dansavla* (Mata) is the removal of a burden for the child by curing the fever. It must be done before the child is one and a quarter years old, or later two and a quarter.

The hair-cutting ceremony in Harrow and Ahmedabad

In the case of the hair-cutting ceremony, *Balmovala*, some families will conduct it for boys only, but others will do it for girls as well. The child's 'birth hair' is usually not cut until he or she is one-year and a quarter, *sava varshni*, because any removal of hair before this time may expose him or her to evil attack. The removal of the child's first hair is common in many South Asian groups, some shaving the head soon after birth, which is usually practised by Muslim families and occasionally by some Hindu groups, such as some of the Patels. Removing the hair frees the child from a 'burden' or the polluting effects of the birth process. Pregnant women and women who have children whose hair has not yet been cut must not watch the ritual for the fear that they might be polluted.

Obeyesekere in his Freudian analysis of matted hair in a marginal group of ascetic women in Sri Lanka, argues that hair as a symbol articulates the cultural, social and psychological dimensions of the existence of his informants (1981:1). He suggests that the head is the locus of Hindu consciousness and its cultural heritage of yoga. The centre of psychic energy, the *cakra*, which controls the vital breath, is situated below the skull. He argues that hair represents in ascetic women with matted locks, the sexual energy or *shakti* of the gods, their penises emerging from their heads (Obeyesekere 1981:6). No such link made by my informants, but there is no doubt the hair has a powerful meaning not only for the individual but also, in an interpersonal context, for the wider group.

The significance of one and a quarter, *sava*, is thought to be because of the Gujarati belief in the inauspiciousness of whole numbers. However many families may delay the ceremony until the child is two and a half years old; to leave it longer than that is not common. Some families will cut the child's hair by inviting the barber to the house without holding a ceremony with invited kin and guests, and other families will cut the hair before the ceremony; the cut hair is always retained and treated in a special way.

Sangita is a Lohana woman with a son aged fourteen months whose hair-cutting ceremony had been arranged for the following week. She told me on 12/2 1998, why the ritual is important:

The hair-cutting ceremony or *Balmovala Manta*, is the removal of a burden for the child by cutting the hair. It must be done before the child is one and a quarter years old, or after two and a quarter.

It has to be held on a Sunday, not a Saturday because men are not allowed to cut hair on a Saturday or put oil on their heads on this day, because it is a special day devoted to Hanuman. It must also happen before midday, because of the position of the moon at the moment. During the ceremony, the child sits on his *foi's* (his father's sister's) lap on a green cloth, and his hair is cut by a barber. The aunt must catch the hair and not let it touch the ground. The hair is taken to some running water and put in it. In India, there are certain rivers that are used and some families will take the hair back there. After the ceremony, the family will go to the temple to do *darshan* [view the god] and then return to the parents-in-law's house where they will eat sweet foods and have a good time together.

I returned to Sangita's house the following week and she showed me the video of the hair-cutting ceremony. She said they took the hair to the River Thames and put it in the water near Chancery Lane, where she used to work. She explained to me what others do with the hair:

Alison, you asked before if there are special rivers in Kenya where people take the hair. The special rivers are only in India. The Ganges has the Goddess Ganga and other rivers are also religious, but in Kenya, they cannot be. If the goddess really lived there, then we would go and put the hair in that river, but we left India so long ago, we don't know, we don't have any relatives and that is why we don't go there. But people who have family still there, they take the hair to the river, like Savita – you know her, her father-in-law and husband took the hair to the river bank. India is more important.

We went to the temple to pray that everything has been done and to say to god, if I had made mistakes in the ceremony, to forgive me. Because people take so many short cuts these days, you don't know if you have done it right. Just to say that I have done it according to my knowledge.

I asked Sangita if the ritual is done for all children, and she replied:

In most families it is the first male child. Like in my family, it was my brother who had one. But in my in-law's family, they did both my nephews and they are real brothers, so they do all the boys. Girls don't usually have it done. But on my mother-in-law's side, they don't have girls. There is a Hindu lady across the road and she did it for her daughter.

The hair is collected on a green piece of cloth usually by the father's sister, *foi*, and then wrapped carefully in this until, at a later date, it is taken to some running water. Care is taken not to drop any hair on the ground because it may get into the wrong hands, especially those of a witch. In Harrow and Wembley, some families take the hair to the canal in Wembley, or to the River Thames (where there is now a special area for the scattering of ashes and hair), or some to the sea. Other families may keep the hair safe

and give it to a trusted family member who may be visiting India in the near future, to take it to the village of their ancestors, where it is put into running water. When the family has come from Africa the hair may be taken to a river there, or left on the beach in a safe place, where the birds cannot get it, for the sea to take away. I have asked many people why the hair is treated in this way, and have been told that it must be kept safe and cannot just be thrown away because a witch might use it. The continuity of life between generations is seen through the symbol of running water, a medium with supernatural links, receiving funeral ashes and hair, returning them to nature. Some twice migrants from Africa feel they have lost links with India, but others still feel connected to a town or village where their ancestors lived, and they may return there with the child's hair and put it in a river, or even in a well. The child's name may also be written on a plaque in the temple in the village or town, alongside his ancestors.

Below I describe a *Balmovala*, hair-cutting ceremony in Harrow, in a Brahman family, and then compare it with one I observed in Ahmedabad. On both occasions, a barber had cut the hair several weeks before the ceremony, although this was of little concern to the family, who assured me that it did not affect the ritual. Rohan is the second son in his family, and was nearly two years old when the ritual was held. He had not been well over the previous winter, suffering from ear infections, so the ritual had been delayed until the summer. His mother invited me to attend and suggested I came early on the Sunday morning to observe the preparations. The following account comes from my field notes on 15/8/99:

I arrive at 8.30 a.m. and notice the front door is open and decorated with green leaves hanging from the top, yellow flowers scattered around the threshold, and a red swastika painted on the bottom of the door frame. Rohan, the child for whom the ceremony has been arranged, his mother Shital and his paternal grandmother Mrs Butt, whom he calls *Dadi*, welcome me at the door. Shital quickly takes me upstairs where her two sons, Rohan aged nearly two and his brother Sunil, aged five are about to have a bath. She tells me that her period has started today, which means she will not be able to take part in her son's ceremony, and she wants to check that I am not menstruating. That she cannot take part is a nuisance to her, but her mother-in-law does everything, so she is not so concerned. Sunil, aged five, is quick to tell me that today is a special day for Rohan. Shital washes Rohan's head by pouring a bowl of water over his head, which makes him cough and splutter, but he does not seem to mind. The boys are dressed in *jhaba*, loose Indian tunic tops and trousers. Shital chooses a turquoise blue gathered skirt with a gold tunic for herself and selects

matching *bungli* (bracelets) and *chandlo* (the spot on her forehead). The doorbell rings and I am told to go downstairs because the priest has arrived.

Downstairs the priest is talking to Mr Butt, and Mrs Butt who is wearing a stunning bright pink and green sari. She takes me to the back room to look at the temple she has built there with the priest. She explains that the four *lota*, or dolls, representing the goddess Randalma, have been used – two representing the birth and two for the hair-cutting. She explains that Brahman males have to follow these rituals in the correct sequence. Each *lota* has a face, with a gold chain and a pearl necklace, but no body. She has to invite seven virgins for each of the *lota*, a total of twenty-eight girls. She then returns to the kitchen where she is preparing a cooked rice pudding with saffron, which has to be made fresh on the morning of the ceremony. In the same room sits an elderly lady crossed-legged on the floor, sorting out two piles of green leaves on a newspaper in front of the temple and chanting prayers she reads from a book. She wears a white sari with a blue border, which means she is a widow, and has her white hair tied back in a ponytail. Mrs Butt introduces the old lady to me as her mother *Ba* (grandmother) and tells me that her job is to sort out three-leafed green plants for the ceremony.

The guests arrive bringing presents for Rohan, many of which consist of money. The ceremony begins after Mrs Butt has put a garland of yellow flowers around the top of the temple and I notice there are also vases of yellow flowers either side of the temple and a basket of orange, pink and yellow flower petals in front. In front of the *lota* is a plate with *mug* beans, a coconut, a piece of turmeric, and £1.25 in coins. Mrs Butt explains that the *mug* beans represent the Earth and the coconut is a holy fruit giving food and milk. Mr Butt is wearing a white *dhoti* and he joins his wife by sitting-crossed legged on cushions in front of the shrine. The priest is wearing a blue shirt and trousers and sits on their right hand side. He begins by ringing the bell and chanting, asking for the god Vishnu to come. Then puts water in his right hand and rubs it all over his face and head, finishing by rubbing his hands and drying them on a paper towel. He puts a red *chandlo* (red spot) then a few grains of rice on the forehead of Mr and Mrs Butt. Sunil then comes to join them and sits crossed-legged in front of the shrine, the priest putting a red *chandlo* and rice on his forehead. The priest continues by placing grains of rice and then yellow flowers in their cupped hands. Flower petals are then placed in front of the *lota*, red first, followed by yellow and then pink, and water is spooned over them.

A Ganesh *puja* (worship to the god Ganesh) follows. This is an essential beginning to all life-cycle rituals. Mr and Mrs Butt wash the figure of Ganesh in honey, milk, yogurt, sugar and *ghee*, and then dry him with a yellow cloth. Threads of different colours, sandalwood powder and the pink, red and orange flowers are used. Joss sticks are lit and dried fruit and cashew nuts put in front of Ganesh and water is sprinkled all over. Cotton wool is dipped into the *ghee* and circled around Ganesh's head. At this point the priest takes the second coconut out of the box and makes a red *chandlo* on

it as if it were a person's head, and Mr and Mrs Butt hold it in their hands singing '*Randalma ahi chhe*' (the Goddess is here), and yellow flowers are stuck into it. They bend forwards in prayer and the priest rings his bell and chants excitedly. Coins are given to Ganesh by Arun's father, his father's brother, both grandparents and his great grandmother.

A brief Lakshmi *puja* (worship to the goddess of wealth Lakshmi) follows and flowers are put in a bowl and water sprinkled over them. *Ba*, the child's great grandmother, comes forward and sits in front of the shrine offering the green leaves, nuts and fruit. The household kin, Mr and Mrs Butt, Rohan, Sunil and Ba (Shital is not allowed in the room with the temple) all hold hands and sing the *arti*, or prayer, circling the tray with the candle on it. The goddess Randalma is invited to join and she is offered the special rice pudding prepared for her called *khir*, she will be fed this again this evening.

The twenty eight young girls arrive, they are daughters of family friends and Mrs Butt washes each girl's feet, puts a *chandlo* spot on her forehead and gives her the special *khir* which contains five important ingredients – milk, *ghee*, honey, sugar and yogurt – with a small piece of flattened *rotli* (chapatti bread). A silver coin with a picture of Ganesh on one side and an *ohm* sign on the other is given as a present to each of the girls. This part of the ceremony takes an hour and a half. Then the guests arrive and lunch is served. The women bring presents of *ghee* and *bungli*, bangles for Randalma, and ask for long lives for their husband. In the afternoon special songs are sung by the older women and the young girls dance, while the men sit in groups and talk. Apart from Rohan's grandfather, *dada-ji*, and his father, the men do not have an active role.

Mrs Butt will sleep all night next to the goddess, making sure the candle keeps burning, and treating her like a guest in the household. She tells me that the goddess is like her own mother. The room must not be cleaned, until four women remove all the items of the ritual the following day. They then say goodbye to Randalma and promise to call her again.

Mrs Butt tells me later that in the Lohana community, a *bhui* is often invited. She is a lady who becomes possessed by the goddess and shakes all over and some believe that the ceremony is not complete without this.

The hair-cutting ceremony I observed in Ahmedabad was very similar, except there were just two *lota* present because a *Chhati* had been done when the child was six days old. The little girl Radhika had already had her head shaved a month earlier, at the same time as her father, after her great grandfather's death, as a mark of respect. The family had to have a special ritual done by the priest to free them from any polluting effects of the death. Usually no happy rituals may take place in a household during the first year after a death. Inden and Nicholas refer to the 'five immortal liquids' (1977:54), milk,

ghee, honey, sugar and yogurt, that must be present at every large ritual to feed the gods; these were all present in both rituals that I observed. These are often combined into sweet foods that are offered as *prasad* (offering to the god), and then shared with the guests later. There were many common features I observed in both rituals, which may be expected, as both were held in Brahman families. Both children were older than the normal one and a quarter years for the ritual, and both had their hair cut beforehand. The following is an account of the ritual I observed in Ahmedabad on 19/9/99:

I arrive at the flat, which is on the first floor of a twelve-storey tower block, on the outskirts of the city. Radhika and her mother are the first to welcome me. The small living room is packed full of people. Women sit together along one side, on chairs and on the floor, dressed in brightly coloured saris, in reds, pinks, and greens. They smile warmly at me when I arrive, saying in Gujarati how much they have looked forward to meeting me. They greet me with '*namaste*' (a formal hello), bringing their hands together and bowing their heads forward. The men sit around the outside of the room, and on the *hindola* (swing suspended from the ceiling, a feature in many living rooms in Gujarat), some dressed in trousers and open neck shirts and some in white *dhoti*. They stand up individually to shake my hand as I am introduced, and speak to me in English. There are four young children playing in the middle of the room, and an older girl and a boy of about eight and ten sit on small chairs by their mothers. All the kin present are from the father's side; none of the maternal kin are present.

In the evening the women begin to gather around the *mandir* (temple), which has been assembled earlier in the day, in the adjacent room. There are two *lota* (representations of the goddess) draped with a red sari; offerings of fresh fruit and *mug* beans are arranged in front together with yellow flowers. The priest arrives and the *puja* (ritual to the god) starts at 7.30 pm. A Ganesh *puja* is followed by the women singing songs to the goddess Randalma, and inviting her to join the occasion, chanting '*Randalma avi*' (Randalma come). The women start to dance and encourage the Radhika and the other children to join in. Then two of the younger men join in, dancing enthusiastically. The women loudly chant different songs to the goddess as they dance. After about an hour of dancing, food is served and I am invited to eat at the table with the men, while the women stand and talk in the kitchen and the children play on the *hindola* (swing).

Ba, the grandmother of the girl, tells me she has to sleep all night with the goddess to keep her company and keep the *divo* burning.

The next morning at 8am, the priest returns to dismantle the shrine but before doing so, he conducts a short *puja*. Radhika sits on her mother's lap, who sits crossed-legged in front of the shrine, and listens intently to what the priest has to say. Four other women are present, Radhika's grandmother, two paternal aunts and a neighbour. Her mother circles the tray with the *divo* on it in

from of her in a clockwise direction, and chants an *arti* (prayer) with the priest to Randalma. Radhika stands up with her mother and they walk round the room carrying the *divo* to everyone present, so that they can pass their hands through the smoke and wipe it first over their faces and then over their heads. Radhika is fed with the rice *prasad* (offering) first and then it is offered to everyone present. Her mother stands up and moves backwards waving her sari in the direction of the door, and everyone chants '*Randalma avi*' (Randalma come), inviting the goddess to return on another occasion. The women all wave their saris in the direction of the door, symbolically waving goodbye to the goddess. A sweet, biscuit-like, food called *sukhdi*, which is made of *ghee*, *jaggery*, wheat flour and sugar is offered to everyone present. Then the temple is dismantled by the priest. Any food left over from the ritual, is taken by the priest to be distributed to poor people, and grains of wheat are given to the priests to make flour and *rotli*. No food is ever wasted.

Figure 23: *Mandir* constructed for the *balmovala* in Harrow.



Figure 24: The *Mandir* constructed for the *balmovala* in Ahmedabad.



Figure 25: Women worship at the shrine during the *balmovala* in Ahmedabad.



The maintenance of these two Brahmin hair-caring shrines in Harrow and Ahmedabad were marked. The two *bal* (peppercorn) grandmothers in each case treated the goddess like a guest in the household who should not be left alone at any time, offered appropriate food and drink, and the diya kept burning for her all night. The women appeared to have a close affinity with her, and for one night she became part of their kin group. Because of their purity, the young girls became like goddesses and were given special attention. During the ritual, *balas* spent from the paper (money) remain on the perimeter throughout, except Mr. Patel who sat in front of the shrine for the Goddess's puja and for the work. Four women were involved to hold the goddess out of the room and bringing her back in a future date. The main difference seemed to be that in the Harrow ritual seven virgins were invited for *balas*, this did not happen in

Figure 26: Women and children dance at the *balmovala* in Ahmedabad.



The similarities of these two Brahman hair-cutting rituals in Harrow and Ahmedabad were marked. The two *ba* (paternal grandmothers) in each case, treated the goddess like a guest in the household who should not be left alone at any time, offered appropriate food and drink, and the *divo* kept burning for her all night. The women appeared to have a close affinity with her, and for one night she became part of their kin group. Because of their purity, the young girls become like goddesses and were given special attention during the ritual. Men, apart from the *pujari* (priest), remain on the periphery throughout, except Mr Butt who sat in front of the shrine for the Ganesh puja and for the *arti*. Four women were involved in both cases, waving the goddess out of the room and inviting her back on a future occasion. The main difference seemed to be that in the Harrow ritual seven virgins were invited for each *lota*, this did not happen in

Ahmedabad, perhaps because the Harrow ritual was larger, more elaborate and carried out for a boy. Rohan was involved in the household *arti* but seemed less involved than Radhika in Ahmedabad. Perhaps through her gender there was a greater expectation of her involvement than there is for a boy. I did not observe the dismantling of the shrine the next day in Harrow, so was unaware of any involvement he may have had here.

The moment a woman becomes pregnant she is instructed by her female kin on how to safeguard and nurture the child's physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Knowledge of moral values begins to be embodied in the unborn child, through the mother's bodily fluids and emotions. Any potentially dangerous or polluting situations have to be avoided and special precautions taken. After the birth, both the mother and child enter a stage of transition in which the mother is in a state of ritual impurity, during which she is a danger to her household if she enters the kitchen, and to the outside world if she leaves the house, or if someone visiting sits on her bed. Over time she poses less of a risk to others and at the end of the *sava mahino* (month and a quarter) she and the baby can leave the house and visit the temple.

Victor Turner's (1969) analysis of 'life crisis' ritual suggests that the ritual subject passing through the *rite de passage*, is conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position, following defined stages (1974:37). It begins with a breach of normal social relations that widens as the ritual progresses and normal social order is challenged. The novice (or in this case the infant or child) passes through a liminal period where he or she is humbled or put down in some way and experiences a status reversal. Redressive action then occurs during which a public ritual is performed, which in this case is religious in nature. The final phase is the re-integration of the ritual subject into his or her newly elevated status. Turner argues that during the liminal period, status reversal is essential, so that the stronger are made weaker and the weak act as if they were strong.

Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low (Turner 1969:97).

The attributes of liminality are necessarily ambiguous, status and rank disappear and the passivity, humility and near-nakedness of the individual being acted upon is symbolic of the grave or womb. In the case of the hair-cutting ritual, the child is humiliated by having his or her head shaved and this is often accompanied by distress. The removal of the birth-hair, however elevates him or her to a higher level by being freed of the burden of the connection this hair had to previous incarnations.

The symbolism of life-cycle rituals suggests that the body is acted upon to become a body replete with meaning. Continuity of moral and religious understanding is transferred to the next generation and kinship relations are reaffirmed and transformed. Young British Gujaratis may dismiss these practices as old fashioned and superstitious, but many follow them to please their female relatives. It is difficult to predict whether these rituals will continue, but at this point in history most families seem to be following them in Harrow.

The meaning of ritual is never quite the same for different people, although certainly people tend to believe that they are united in giving the same meaning to any particular ceremony. From my observations of the two hair-cutting rituals, the physical presence of the participants and their actions marked their involvement. The priests in each case performed their religious rites, which they conducted to bring the blessings of the goddess on the children and the family. The elderly women prepared the offerings and the objects necessary for the ritual and ensured that it was conducted in correct sequence, following the family rules of the oldest male in the household and making sure of the purity of the occasion. These women told me that during the ritual they have a close relationship with the *mataji*, treating her like their own mother and guest. The children who were being acted upon seemed to enjoy the extra attention and the presents they received, although they were also made to enter into the seriousness of the religious rite, Arun during the household *arti*, and Radhika in the ceremonies in front of the shrine, the dancing and the dismantling of the shrine on the following day. Radhika was at no time forced to be involved, she did so at her own volition, as she did in other household rituals. Rohan preferred to run around and play in the garden. The mothers of these children appeared rather detached and Shital was not too concerned that she could not take part because she was menstruating, as her mother-in-law was leading it and she had little to do anyway. The young girls who had been invited to add auspiciousness and purity to the occasion performed the duties expected of them, but once they were completed they had fun and met their friends. The female guests observed some of the ritual and some said prayers in front of the shrine, covering their heads with their saris in a respectful manner. The male guests appeared uninterested in the religious aspects of the ritual, but enjoyed meeting friends and kin and in the Harrow hair-cutting ceremony, sat in the garden and talked. The father of the child and his brother joined in the *arti*, however, holding hands with the father's parents and grandmother, symbolising the

unity of the household. Everyone present had different levels of involvement of the process of the ritual, but they were all united in a common aim to continue a practice that has always been done and by these means retain a link with their heritage.

I discussed the idea of *sanskar* at the beginning of the chapter, where Inden and Nicholas' *samskara* or life-cycle rituals had parallels here with this Gujarati concept. They suggested that these rituals acted on the living body, by removing defects and infusing positive qualities into it. I argue that the *sanskar* of the household is embodied within the living bodies of its members and expressed in their behaviour towards others. It will affect the way the household is viewed within the wider community, which in turn affects its suitability for providing marriage partners. During life-cycle rituals the putting on of new clothes, the recitation of special words, the anointing of substances and feeding with special foods affect the whole body of the child, not just his or her spiritual life. Through the ritual act the child learns through the kin around him or her, about the world and the relationships in it. Life-cycle rituals are never individual acts and through the close inter-connectedness of the members of the household, the *sanskar* of the *ghar* is transformed, together with its moral standing within the Gujarati community.

In the final chapter I discuss how, because the process of making meaning at once preserves ideas and practices and transforms them, it is inevitable that shifts in both ritual practices and the meanings accorded them occur over time. For the moment I wish just to point out that my informants in general hold that the life-cycle and other rituals discussed above are performed because they have to be, because they have always been done, and because they provide a link with the ancestors. Children experience ritual from an early age and ritual activity becomes an everyday part of their existence – at once normal and compelling. The process through which they come to understand ritual, to render it meaningful, is not however apparent to them, but it is in this process (rather than just in any given ritual itself) that the power of ritual lies – a matter I discuss further in the final chapter. It may be argued too that even small, domestic rituals such as that for the sixth day after birth described above, implicate virtually every aspect of what it is to be Gujarati in the broadest sense – ideas about political, economic, kin and gender relations are at once expressed in ritual practices and constituted there. It is not necessary, however, that people be conscious of these ideas when performing a ritual or that there be any rational or logical explanation for the

performance beyond the idea that it *must be* performed; at each repetition, perhaps especially when a large group of people is involved, feelings of *communitas* (Turner 1974) are reinforced and the compelling nature of the ritual (compelling because of the childhood experience that makes its performance mandatory) is re-experienced. Like every other aspect of human practice, rituals are transformed over time and their performance is adapted to varying conditions of existence; inevitably their details and the meaning accorded them vary both within and across groups of people, even where these people have much else in common and where, therefore, many common threads in ritual practice are to be found. Life-cycle rituals are times for kin to gather together, when certain religious rites are observed and people are united in a perceived shared purpose. The ritual objects and practices may vary from one caste to another, or from one household to another, but by virtue of their very performance rituals arouse in the participant the sense of belonging to a certain group and thus, in this process, invoke the idea of that group itself the *sanskar* of the *ghar* for example, or the wider group of kin, or the caste, or even the group that is Gujarati. In invoking in the participant a sense of belonging to a certain group, the rituals at once bring that particular idea of the group into being for each participant, and reinforce and transform a particular idea of what one belongs to and what it means to belong.

Chapter 8 Childhood: The Beginnings Of Interdependency

The birth of a child is a time of celebration for the household, wider kin, and also the wider community. It is a new life to be nurtured within the web of interconnectedness and interdependence so as to become a person within the wider Gujarati community. A child finds himself or herself in continuing close association with others in which, over time, he or she constitutes ideas about the world that include specific values about self and others. This is a world in which the patrifocal family and the extended network of kin take precedence over that of the nuclear father/mother unit. Children actively embody experiences through their relations with others. They constitute worlds in which religious observances and ritual become everyday activities, of the same order as, say eating a meal or riding a bike. In chapter two, when I asked eleven-year-old Reshma to tell me about her family, she started off by telling me about how her grandmother had taught her about religion. Religion had become a central concern of hers, which she had embodied, and at her age, had begun to make her own logical sense of it.

Below I examine the way in which, from the time a baby is born, wider kin assume certain responsibilities and become involved in the care and decision-making concerning the child. Rituals conducted in pregnancy and childhood at once create and confirm both the child's relationships with others and his or her *sanskar* (moral standing in the world) so creating a good person who will be suitable for a good marriage and eventually a good death. Western-trained health professionals often find this strange, because from the time a child is born, they expect the parents to assume their role as main carers and guardians of the child. Through poor understanding of the complexities of kin ties, these professionals may view a couple's relatives as interfering or too dominant, and even as undermining of the parents. It is through these relationships, however, that special bonds are formed within the household initially and then beyond. The interdependency that develops is central to the way a person is constituted, sees him or herself within his or her history, and is connected to others.

This chapter looks at different aspects of family life with children and the ways in which children participate in social and religious activities. I begin with the effect the birth of a child has on the family hierarchies and the way different members of the joint family assume responsibilities and decisions concerning infant feeding and childcare in general. I also examine the way in which other female kin become involved in the

child's life, how a child joins in social and religious activities and, finally, some of the strategies parents use to discipline children.

Childcare and decision-making

Relationships in the joint family change on the birth of a first child. With the confirmation of her fertility, the woman's status rises within the *ghar*, joint household. The birth of a boy may still be celebrated more than that of a girl, not because of the perceived superiority of males, but because boys ensure the continuation of the *ghar* and will remain close to their parents for the rest of their lives. The sons will have responsibility to care for their parents in old age and conduct their funerals, so enabling their transition to the next life. There is some evidence, however, that girls are now taking on more responsibility for their parents in old age. Although, when they marry, girls are required to perform the rituals advocated by their husbands' families. Although they live apart from their natal families, the ties remain strong and important to them, especially around the births of their children. Most families observe more life-cycle rituals for boys than for girls because it is important to establish in childhood the boy's *sanskar*, or way of seeing the world, so that he follows the beliefs proper to his family and thus ensures continuity to the next generation. A girl however, will be joining the *sanskar* of her husband's family, so early life-cycle rituals will be not so important for her. The move to more equality between girls and boys has resulted in a few families carrying out for girls some of the rituals that have traditionally been reserved for boys, such as the hair-cutting ritual. These rituals have been examined in more detail in the previous chapter.

An elderly Brahman woman explained to me why it is more important to observe life-cycle rituals for boys:

If we have a boy, we call on *Mataji*, our goddess. It is a rule that we have to celebrate and do the ceremony if it is a boy. If it is a girl, we don't do that. It is not that we don't like the girls, but because the girl goes to another family. Then the other family will have a different god or goddess. So that is why we don't do it for girls.

Savita, a mother of three daughters and explained why many families still have a preference for boys.

I was upset after the birth of my second daughter. My husband is the only son of his parents and there will be no one to carry on the family name. This is the reason why people want boys. Today it is not because of the dowry that is expected with girls.

For women, the birth of the first child, especially if it is a boy, represents the beginning of a transformation from the low status of the new daughter-in-law to that of the respected status of mother, to be venerated like a goddess, which is reflected in the name *mata* or *ma* meaning both goddess and mother. A woman's transition to this new role is not without hazards and potential dangers, both to her and to her infant, in the first few weeks, during which she must be guided by her own mother and protected by rituals. These were discussed in the last chapter, as were the special foods her mother prepares for her to rid her body of the toxic effects of labour, protect her future health, and maintain her strong back, which is thought to be particularly vulnerable after childbirth. Her mother will also guide her in the care and protection of the baby from evil influences, tying black threads around the baby's wrists and sometimes neck and placing black *kohl* marks around the eyes or feet and hands. She will probably become actively involved in the baby's care. She may swaddle and rock the baby and massage him or her daily with oil. In some families, other close female kin will visit and wish to give the baby a small amount of honey on the tip of their fingers, to welcome him or her to the wider kin network. Although the majority of women still wish to return to their natal kin for the first forty days, or *sava mahino* (month and a quarter) after birth, there is considerable variation here, both in Harrow and Ahmedabad, with some women returning to their husband's family first for a few days after the birth.

Whatever practice is followed, there is intense interest and involvement of female kin on both sides of the family. When a new baby is born, older women (initially the maternal and then the paternal grandmother) expect not only to guide the mother in her care of the infant, but also to assume some of the care themselves. If the new child is the second or subsequent one in the family, they may focus their attentions on the older child or children. If co-sleeping has not already been occurring then this may be adopted now, and the child may be taken to the grandmother's bed or aunt's bed at night, to enable the mother to care for and breastfeed the new infant.

Feeding relationships

South Asian women in Britain today are still more likely to breastfeed and continue doing so for longer than their Western counterparts (Hamlyn *et al* 2002). Katbamna pointed out the strong preference Gujarati women in the UK have for breastfeeding that contrasted with that of Bangladeshi women, who were more likely to introduce bottlefeeds (Katbamna 2000:103). There is evidence from a local breastfeeding audit in Harrow that although South Asian (mostly Gujarati) women are more likely to breastfeed initially, by the time the infant is six weeks, many introduce occasional bottle feeds (Harrow PCT Audit, 2002). The reasons for this will be explored below, but the influence of other women in the household may be a factor. The child has close contact with the mother through breastfeeding and most Gujarati women believe strongly that this is important for the baby. The transference of body fluid in the form of white, sacred milk, serves to link the child to wider kin and give him or her knowledge of the culture (Spiro 1994). Many women in the UK, however, experience interference in the breastfeeding process when their mothers and then their mothers-in-law begin to demand a share in the feeding of their infants. A seemingly safe alternative to breast milk, bottle-feeding with formula milk, is seen as a way other women can be involved at an earlier stage in the child's life, than was ever possible in India. This may indicate a change in practice and the initial indulgence a mother has in demand breastfeeding her child, as described previously by many writers on South Asia, (Kurtz 1992; Mintern and Lambert 1964; Kakar 1981) may be changing in Britain and urban India. Mothers-in-law have considerable power in any decision concerning the feeding of children in the *ghar*.

Women have also suggested that although breastfeeding is the ideal way to feed infants, in this country there is no time for it. There are also pressures to return to work. *Ba* will probably care for her grandchild and may think that it is easier to introduce a bottle early to make this transition easier. The indigenous society has a strong bottlefeeding tradition and there may be pressures from peers to conform to this. Grandmothers who migrated to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s were probably exposed to advertisements for formula milk showing chubby babies and may think that Indian babies are thinner because they were breastfed.

Meera, a Lohana mother and midwife told me how she thought attitudes to breastfeeding in the older generation had changed recently:

Some families still believe that colostrum, the first milk in the first three days, is not an option for the baby, and should be expressed and thrown away. The baby is not put on the breast at all for the first three days, and only fed on the fourth or fifth day, when the milk gets in. In the first three days, they are very happy for their babies to have bottled milk. Especially the girls who come from India, by the time they come here, they have seen many white women who give bottles. These women actually believe that if the native women are doing it, it must be fine, and really good, and this is why their babies are big and chubby.

The women who came from India, especially from the villages are often little, quite small compared with women in this country; and their husbands are also of small frame. The mother-in-law believes that this is because of breast milk, having seen babies in this country, which are much bigger, and they think it is because of the bottle. With their experience of breastfeeding, they think it is the better option to bottlefeed. They couldn't bottlefeed because they were not rich enough to do it.

I asked Meera if bottlefeeding is seen as a way of making babies bigger.

Making babies bigger and healthier. Asian women who were born and brought up here are much bigger than Indian women who were born and brought up in India. Because their babies are bigger too, they think it must be the bottle.

Nikhita, a Brahman mother with a six-month-old baby she is breastfeeding made a similar comment:

Asian mothers believe that formula milk makes babies heavier. They compare Asian babies with white babies of the same age and the white children are always bigger. Breastfeeding is more common in the Indian culture than it is in the Western culture. There is an assumption that they are formula fed and that is why they are bigger. If you have ten babies, then the white ones will always be bigger. The other thing in our community is that if anyone makes a comment about me not producing enough milk, it really rattles me. I feel like saying that I am feeding him, he is not going hungry. First of all you fight it and then you say, I've had enough, and pack it in. It depends how strong you are, you might pack it in, or just keep going.

Did Meera think that advertising of formula milk had influenced women?

Yes, definitely. You know, a good 15 years ago, when I was a newly qualified midwife, we sent bottled milk to our relatives in Africa. They are very wealthy and have two sons. They came here on holiday for the first time in the 1970s, and saw all the lovely, lovely, chubby babies and they couldn't get over it. So when they had a daughter after the two sons, they actually decided they wanted to bottle feed her. We sent bottles of milk from here. They wanted a nice, healthy, chubby baby. Her mother is 4 foot 10 inches and her father 6 foot 2 inches. The girl is now 17 years old and overweight, she is so chubby they now want her to come to England to do all the exercises.

The family thinks they would now like her to be like me and my daughter, because they see us as slim and lovely and we go to aerobics and the health club. We also eat healthily, so they want to send her here to lose weight. I think the whole thing is so sad. In India it is only the well-to-do who can bottlefeed and the mothers have a lot of pressure from the older generation to do so.

I asked why she this is so and she answered:

I think the older women feel they can be part of it, if their daughter or daughter-in-law is bottlefeeding. They think that if they have the money, then why not. The daughter-in-law can get on with the other chores in the house. She doesn't have to sit there all day breastfeeding. It is also a Western concept that you can go and do some work outside. These women need not work, the family probably has a business of its own, but these women are prompted to go and look after the business. These women like to do this because they see it as being Western to leave the baby with the mother-in-law, or have a nanny staying to look after the baby, so they can go out to work. It is a very Western concept.

When I was in India one family showed me a musical bottle they had. As soon as you lift the bottle it starts playing music. This is lovely for Indians who really attach this type of musical bottle with money and status. These wealthy families have workers in the house, cleaners and someone to help with the food. It is not just one person doing things, you have many people doing the things women don't like doing. These workers are watching the baby having the bottle, a musical bottle, and it looks so lovely. I have heard workers sit down and say that I would love to use that bottle if I was only that well off. It is very sad and tragic. But you can't blame. The Indians have always seen Britain as some sort of superior country. Because they are a Third World country, many other countries are seen as so well off. They would much rather follow their footsteps than think for themselves.

Meera described how the bottle represents a Western way of feeding babies that makes them chubby, and she reflects a perceived association with being healthier in the short term. An over-weight older child or adult may not seem so attractive, although ideas of body size and obesity appear to be different in Britain from those in India. The women who star in Indian-made Hindi movies tend to be heavier than their Western counterparts. Thinness still appears to be associated with poverty and this seems to be most acute in children but obesity in adults, on the other hand, is becoming more of a problem with increased wealth in India and Britain and is linked with chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease. In some families, bottle-feeding infants may still be linked with status and progress and thought of as more reliable, but probably more importantly it is an activity that can be shared by other women in the household. This

sharing of infant feeding enables all female kin in the household to nurture the child and thus to build up an emotional bond with him or her, tying the child in to the network of female kin in the household.

Bottlefeeding not only offers women the freedom to return to work, but also makes it easier for grandmothers to take control and make decisions about the next generation. The close bond that develops as a result ties the child to wider kin with its associated obligations. Meera saw bottlefeeding also as a representation of status and wealth, and breastfeeding as linked to small stature and poverty. Observations in Harrow and Ahmedabad suggest that women often give older children up to the age of five years bottles of cows' milk. This practice lessens their appetites for solid foods and may deprive them of essential minerals, especially iron, and may lead to anaemia. In an earlier chapter I suggested that this might be related to the purity of milk, making it an attractive and safe food for children.

Breastfeeding should be promoted in hospitals in line with the Department of Health guidance (Hamlyn et al: 2002), but women are often given confused messages as to whether this is indeed the case. The availability of formula and bottles from birth in Britain makes bottlefeeding appear reliable and convenient, and the messages conveyed by the medical and midwifery staff might initially influence some families to use this method. Unfortunately bottles given at this early stage may be detrimental to breastfeeding and might confuse both mothers and infants. Despite the fact that most of the grandmothers in this study, breastfed their own children and have a strong belief that it is a way of transmitting knowledge and emotions to the next generation (Spiro 1994), they may encourage their daughters or daughters-in-law to use bottles or may give them themselves. The *sasu* (mother-in-law) can make decisions, in some households, about her grandchildren with very little discussion with the child's mother, as the following scenario suggests.

Ameeta, a Lohana mother of a two-year-old son, came directly from India following an arranged marriage two years before in 2000. Her husband's family came to the UK from Uganda in 1972 so he was educated in the UK. Relationships with her mother and father-in-law had been strained from the beginning and they now live separately. She explained to me why she had to stop breastfeeding:

I was living in my mother-in-law's house. She wanted me to stop breastfeeding, so that she could feed my son. She just took him away and bottlefed him. I was left with milk pouring out of my

breasts and I didn't know what to do, because I couldn't disagree with her. I was like a guest in her house.

This grandmother appeared to be making a statement about her power over her daughter-in-law, who saw herself as a guest in the house and thus unable to assert herself, even when it came to feeding her own child. It seems clear that for both Ameeta and her mother-in-law, feeding the child not only manifested their love, but also entailed the child's future attachment and obligations to themselves and perhaps Ameeta was resisting the child becoming attached to his paternal grandmother. On the face of it the conflict between Ameeta and her mother-in-law was focused on the new baby, but it seems equally possible that the two women's disagreement had everything to do with Ameeta's relationship with her husband, who did *not* support her against his mother.

The close involvement of female kin with the new infant and, in the UK, the availability of a safe alternative to breastfeeding, may have allowed grandmothers to extend their care into feeding and initiate the child's dependence on wider kin. My observations indicate that this may be more important than the pull of wider society to bottlefeed. The mother may be left feeling undermined and unable to assert herself. Some women may accept this as an inevitable aspect of the household hierarchy and shared roles and responsibilities. To feed another is to bring into being a relationship with that other and/or to confirm it; the form taken by the feeding tells us not only what that relationship is meant to be, but in so far as the feeding is an aspect of day to day life, actually *makes it be* what it is meant to be. So perhaps it is unsurprising that mothers-in-law in many cases try to take over the feeding of their grandchildren – not so much because they want to rule over their daughters-in-law, but because they want at once to be able to show their love for their grandchildren and to claim those children for themselves and for the *ghar* to which their own sons belong.

Co-sleeping

Infants may not only be fed and massaged daily by their *ba*, but when breastfeeding at night finishes or a new baby is born, the child may also sleep in the same bed as the grandmother. Co-sleeping is seen as an important aspect of caring for children, and close relationships are likely to develop as a result. The mothers may initially breastfeed

the baby at night and sleep in the same bed, but after weaning the children may sleep with their *ba* or *dadi* (paternal grandmother) or aunt.

In 1999 Mrs Purohit, a Brahman grandmother told me about her care of her eighteen-month-old grandson:

Shiv stays with me every afternoon when his mother is at work and sleeps with me on Thursday nights.

During my frequent visits to the household, I noticed how attached Shiv was to his grandmother and how upset he was when she left the room. On one occasion his mother called him into another room and although he looked confused initially, he stayed with his grandmother.

In 2001, when Shiv was three years old, Mrs Purohit told me how their relationship had continued to be close, even though he lived with his parents and his brother in another house a mile away:

Shiv sleeps with me every Thursday. It makes us very close. My husband goes to the box room. I can teach him so much, and read him the *Gayatri slok* [worship to the *Mataji Gayatri*] in the morning. My daughter-in-law says to me, 'What magic have you done to Shiv?' My other grandson, who is now six, comes to our house every afternoon after school and he sleeps with me on Saturday nights. He says to me 'When I put my head on your lap, all my worries disappear.'

I asked Mrs Purohit whether sleeping together with grandchildren is important and she answered:

It is for many grandmothers, it is how they get close.

The expectation is that children will sleep in the same bed as their parents until weaning from the breast or until the arrival of the next child, or beyond. Many parents to whom I have spoken view the idea of leaving children on their own at night as unacceptable. During my stay in a household in Ahmedabad, the two-year-old girl slept with her parents at night, but during the day slept in the afternoon with her grandmother. She had no bed of her own and was never on her own during the day or night. Many households follow the same practice, which can meet with disapproval from western-educated health professionals, who hold the view that children should learn independent sleeping patterns from an early age.

Close relationships with kin develop through co-sleeping and patterns of interdependence and inter-reliance are fostered. Children learn through close interaction with

their grandmothers about religious beliefs, language and kin relations, but above all they gain the security that women in the household will always be there to offer them support. This relationship of inter-dependency and co-sleeping may extend into adult life, as one Brahman mother told me:

My husband was so close to his grandmother and shared her bed until he was twenty years old. When she died he went into a deep depression, from which he took a long time to recover.

In Western societies sharing a bed with a person of the opposite sex after puberty may be viewed as abusive or imply incest. The bed in the West is linked with sexual intercourse so the presence of a child with one or both parents, or a grandmother, is likely to meet with disapproval. In South Asia, however, co-sleeping is an accepted and important aspect of family life that may continue after puberty.

The special relationship with *ba* (paternal grandmother)

The paternal grandmother, or occasionally the maternal grandmother (both may be called *ba*) often takes on much of the care of the child. The following account is taken from my fieldnotes:

A paternal grandmother, *Ba*, proudly carried her four-week-old grandson into the clinic one day to be weighed. She was closely followed by the baby's mother, who was also smiling. She announced loudly to everyone in the hall: 'Our baby is lucky, he has three mothers! He has me, my husband and his mother.'

This relationship with *ba* begins at an early stage, once the *sava mahino* has passed and the mother and child return to the patrilineal household. A nursery rhyme sung to children extols the virtues of *ba* to children.

Mothers tend to discipline children and be stricter with them than is *ba*, who may be more indulgent. My visit to Manisha, her mother Reena, and two-year-old Shaan in May 2001, shows the nature of relations between the three generations. Manisha and her husband are both Brahmans. They had a 'love marriage' and live in a flat in Harrow with their son. Manisha's husband's brother lives in another flat in the same block, but their parents live in America. Reena lives in Birmingham in a joint household with her husband, three sons and their wives, and visits her daughter and grandson once a month. I visited them a week before Manisha's second child was due and Reena had come to stay for four weeks for the birth. Manisha told me how Shaan speaks Gujarati and

English and knows which language to use. I do not look like someone who would speak Gujarati so perhaps it is not surprising that, when I addressed him in Gujarati, Shaan at first looked confused and answered me in English. After about an hour, he began to say some words in Gujarati to me, with a smile on his face. I asked his grandmother, Reena, about her relationship with Shaan and she answered:

I love Shaan so much. I miss him when he is not with me. When he was eight months I had him to stay for a week when Manisha went to Switzerland. He was so happy, he never looked for his mummy. When she came back, I was just sitting outside in the garden with him, he was so happy.

Manisha said, 'What about when I went to the wedding? Tell her about that.'

Reena went on, 'He was here all day and not even once did he ask me where's mummy. He was at my house in Birmingham then. Even at bedtime, 9 o'clock, he had his milk, cleaned his teeth and I changed him into his pyjamas. He said goodnight to *dada*, *mama*, and *mami*, my daughter-in-law. He said goodnight to everyone and then we went to sleep together. When he woke up at night he just said *ba*, *ba*.

Manisha said, 'Tell her where he sleeps.'

At which Shaan answered for Reena, saying, '*ba*, *ba*, *ba*.'

Reena laughed and agreed, 'Yes, he sleeps next to me, of course.'

I asked Reena where Shaan sleeps when she stays with them in her daughter's flat in Harrow. She answered, 'He sleeps in his room. But the day before yesterday he cried and cried for an hour, one whole hour.'

Manisha: 'But what was he saying?'

Reena: '*Ba*, *ba*. I want to play with *ba*. *Masti*, which is playing around, throw a pillow around, jumping and chasing each other, like hide and seek.'

Shaan suddenly looked excited and shouted, '*Masti*, *masti*.'

Reena asked him: 'Where do you do *masti* with *ba*?'

Shaan replied: 'Bed!'

Manisha and her mother clapped this response and Reena gave Shaan kisses and he and his grandmother started to play together; she pretended to be a *chutli* (sparrow) that pecks his nose. Reena always speaks Gujarati to Shaan, but Manisha speaks a mixture of both languages. The play became noisy so Manisha tried to stop him running around:

'Shaan don't do that. *Dudh pivo*? [Do you want to drink milk?]

Manisha then spoke about the different way her mother related to Shaan compared with her more Western attempts to discipline, control and stick to routines.

'You know that night when he cried, all he said was *ba*. Because we put the mattress out for her. At 7 o'clock he had his dinner, at quarter to nine he had his milk. Then at nine o'clock it is brush your teeth, wash your face, you know, read a book, that sort of routine. That day, all they had done was play, and all my mum has to do is to go boo, and he is crazy. He just changes in the different atmosphere and goes mad. He is a different person with my mum. There is a very, very special bond between them. It is not that my mum is here all the time. So that night when we put him in his cot, we had people over, we weren't in our pyjamas, we normally get changed and lie down. That day we didn't, we just put him in his cot. He just called *ba*, *masti*, all the time. I couldn't take him out, because once I have put him in his room, he stays there. I am a bit scared because I know that he is in a routine, he may know that he can come out, so I just stayed with it. He was crying and crying and I went every five minutes, I know it is supposed to be every ten minutes, but I couldn't leave him so long. I thought he is going to be sick, I know he is, and he did actually throw up, through all the crying you see. It was OK, I cleaned him up and *ba* came in and all he said was *ba*, *ba*. Every night I say to him Mummy loves you, Daddy loves you and *ba* loves you. If I miss one out he will tell me which one. I don't think he minds the order, but we all have to be there.

Reena's approach of dependence on kin and close physical contact day and night differs from her daughter Manisha's insistence on separation and independence, as advocated in Western childcare manuals. Shaan's behaviour described above shows his confusion with these two approaches, when both women are present and give him different messages. There may be an assumption made by Western-trained health professionals, that parents wish their children to become less dependent on them and inappropriate advice may be given by them on childrearing. Parents, who have been educated in Britain and live away from their families, may be confused by the contradictory messages they are receiving from relatives and health professionals.

Manisha is very happy and proud of the close relationship that has developed between her son and her mother and actively encourages it. The situation described earlier in the chapter, where Sita's son Shiv stays with her mother-in-law every week is not so relaxed. She is concerned about the influence she is having on him through co-sleeping and asks 'what magic' she has been doing on him. The relationship children develop with their natal kin may differ from the one they have with their father's kin. When in Ahmedabad, I observed Radhika every weekday being cared for by her *ba* and *dadaji*. She joined with them in their daily activities, enjoyed trips to the shops with her *dadaji*

and went to the *mandir* (temple) with him most days. Perhaps because this was an everyday relationship that was expected and routine, it differed from the occasional meeting between Shaan and his *ba*, which was special. Radhika enjoyed a more relaxed relationship with her *masi* (mother's sister) and her *nani* (mother's mother). It is likely that the relationship children enjoy with their mother's kin is more relaxed than with the father's kin and this is reflected in the more informal kinship terms used.

Involvement of other kin

Grandparents often care for grandchildren when their mothers return to work, and see this as an important part of their duties within the joint family. I remarked above how an elderly grandfather in Ahmedabad told me that now he was retired he would like to spend time going on religious pilgrimages and become more involved in temple life, but he was obliged to look after his youngest son's two-year-old daughter while her parents were at work. In Ahmedabad I was able to make some detailed observations of grandparents caring for their grandchildren. This involved everyday activities in the home and visits to temples, shops, friends' and relatives' houses.

The children shared their midday meal with their grandparents often of *rotli* (chapati), *khurdi*, (vegetable soup), *dahl* (lentils) rice, *shak* (vegetable curry), and *dahi* (yogurt); not all these items would be offered at one time and sometimes only one or two of these foods would be given. In the early afternoon the grandparents and the children would sleep; this was the hottest time of day and any activities outside were discouraged. In the early evening the front doors were opened and people would visit freely without prior arrangement and the children might be taken off to play with other children or teenage girls, and be away from their families for several hours. At times I voiced my concern for their safety, but was always reassured that they were well known in the area and would be looked after.

In Harrow women have told me how they miss this involvement that the rest of the community have in children's care. Deepa, a member of the Patel community and a mother of two teenage children, explained to me:

What happens in India, the children grow up and you don't even realise. The family, neighbours and everyone, they just look after them. But here it is so difficult because they are in the house all

the time. My parents always say, we don't know how you grew up, but look at this now, it is so different.

Children as young as six months are included in the daily *puja*, worship at the family shrine in the home, and taken regularly to the temple and as toddlers they may take part in preparing materials for the rituals. I observed children in Ahmedabad helping their *ba* fashion the soft wax used for making *divo* (candles) and preparing the *prasad* (offering to the gods). They sit with their hands together with *ba* and wave their hands through the smoke of the candle, wiping it over their eyes and then heads, as she does. They appear to enter into the solemnity of the occasion. One little two year old girl, Radhika, in the household where I was staying, understood very quickly that I was interested in ritual observance and used to come and take my hand and lead me to the shrine and show me where to sit when one was being prepared.

I visited local temples with Radhika and her grandparents *ba* and *dadaji* (paternal grandfather). A favourite one to visit was a local Shiva temple. We travelled by rickshaw and Radhika excitedly chanted '*mandire*' (to the temple). When we arrived, she would remove her shoes and run over to the large bell suspended from the roof, which everyone should ring on arrival to inform the god of their presence, and there she waited until an adult came to lift her up so that she could ring it. She would copy the poses of the other women and often sit crossed-legged on the floor while the *arti* (hymn) was sung. The tray with the *diva* (candles) was passed round and she would join the others in putting her hands through the smoke and wiping it over her eyes and head. After the devotional part was finished she would go to look for the *prasad* (offering), which had now been blessed by the god and become a symbol of the presence of god to take back to the *ghar*. She was just two years old, but she participated in the solemnity of the occasion. Adults told me that when children participate in religious activities it is seen as a good omen for a family. Because of their relative purity, children are seen as closer to the gods and in some circumstances may be thought to embody a goddess and be worshipped by others. These ideas have been expressed to me in both Ahmedabad and Harrow.

In Harrow, children are encouraged by their grandparents to participate in daily *puja* (worship) at the family shrine. Visits to the temple may not be so frequent because of the distances one has to travel, but many families may take children several times a month and on special occasions. Grandmothers encourage children in appropriate and

respectful greetings to both kin and the gods. A Brahman grandmother, Mrs Desai, proudly told me what her seven-month-old grandson, Yogesh, could do and invited me round to her house to watch him. She said:

Yogesh can put his hands together and bow his head when someone says *jai Swaminarayan* [blessings of Swaminarayan – a common greeting used by members of the sect]. He claps his hands in tune to the *arti* [hymn] and puts his hands out to the photo of the Swaminarayan guru on the wall in the living room, saying *Bapa* [honoured father].

Figure 27. Seven-month old boy clapping to the *arti* with his *ba*.



Figure 28: Seven-month old boy and his *ba*, looking at the photograph of the Swaminarayan Guru.



I saw Yogesh to do all these things and watched him clapping in a similar manner to his *ba* to the Swaminarayan *arti*. It may be unusual to see a child as young as seven months participating so actively, but it is also apparent that the grandmother's excitement and enthusiasm encouraged the child's responses. The reader will recall that Deepa's eleven-year-old daughter Reshma told me how her *ba* had taught her about the gods and how this built up a special, long-term closeness between them. I asked her whether this closeness with grandmothers stays and her mother Deepa answered:

It does, and with the *Masi* (aunties). It's like they have many mothers.

In the evenings in Ahmedabad, after the evening meal, many parents and other family members take their children outside to talk with neighbours, family and friends. They sit on walls or benches in the street. The older men often dressed in cool, white *dhotis*, the women in Punjabi dresses and the children in shorts and T-shirts. The evening is the coolest time of day and the women have told me that it is their 'break time', when the daily chores have been done. Some wealthier families may have scooters and often enough one may see both parents, together with one to three children, riding on one scooter in the direction of a floodlit local park. The grandparents usually stay with their friends near their home. When they arrive at the park, parents may buy balloons for the

children and then sit in groups on the grass to watch them play. Some sing songs or nursery rhymes for their children and others just sit and talk while the children run on the grass. The parks usually close at 11pm when a warden rings a loud bell and families begin slowly to move towards the gates.

Parents I spoke to in Ahmedabad, told me that the evening is a special time for families with children. They would always take their children with them in the evenings wherever they went and would never leave a child at home. In Harrow, despite the cooler weather, parents and children are sometimes seen walking in the evening in summer. Visiting friends' and relatives' houses together with one's children does happen in the evenings, and here there is also an expectation that children will sleep in the afternoon, so they can eat and socialise with the family.

That children should be included in family activities and cared for by many women does not fit with the advice showered by health workers on Gujarati mothers in the UK. Pregnant women are bombarded with information, often via Western style antenatal classes that are based on the psychoanalytic model of the primacy of the mother-child bond and attachment theory. Most Gujarati children in India and the UK and others of South Asian origin begin multiple attachments from birth.

Susan Seymour working in Orissa, observed similar child-rearing practices there to those I have seen in Harrow, where the child forms a close bond with many women:

Love as it is found in the Western romantic tradition that assumes an emotionally laden pair-bond that is intense, exclusive, and highly individualised, is not what is inculcated. In fact, the Indian cultural model views such love as dangerous, individualistic emotion. Instead, a concept of love that is based upon familial interdependence and a sense of duty (*dharma*) to one's own relatives is encouraged. Initially it is communicated to the child by various persons through constant physical contact - holding, feeding, carrying, and co-sleeping (Seymour 1999:85).

The child may call other female kin *ma* or *mata*, and may show more intense attachment to them than to his or her biological mother. I was speaking recently to a mother expecting her second baby, who was voicing her concerns about how she would cope with two children and how her two-year-old son would react. She said he would be jealous of the attention his grandmother may give to the new baby; he had such a close relationship with her mother he would find it difficult to share her with a baby. She was unconcerned however, about how her son would react to her giving the baby attention and breastfeeding.

Deepa, a Patel woman living in central Harrow, supports her younger sister Puja with her family. They have a sister who has learning difficulties and their mother has little spare time to help her. Neither of them lives in a joint family and both are wealthy enough to have their own homes. Deepa's children are now teenagers and she is not in paid employment, so she has more time to offer her sister whom she tells me is very important. Puja's children are small: Mita is two years and Raj one month old. Deepa told me about the relationship she has with her sister's daughter Mita.

When Mita is here in the house, she is mine, she is a child of the whole family. She calls me 'mum' and we are very close. I will not do anything to the exclusion of Puja's children. When Mita is here, she spends the day with me and sleeps with me at night.

Several theorists have tried to apply Western, psychoanalytic models to aid understanding of the South Asian psyche. Kakar (1981) uses a psychoanalytic model to explore the 'inner world' of the Indian, through his own psyche as an Indian living in Europe and the USA. He begins by discussing the development of the ego through multiple attachments with many caregivers. He acknowledges that the roots of culture and a person's sense of identity are determined by that person's experiences of earliest care as an infant, his argument then shifts to a Western model of childcare. He takes a Freudian stance, which appears to contradict his own Indian childcare practices. He explores in great detail the primacy of the mother-child bond and a male child's obsession with his mother's sexual body. Any observations he may have experienced or observed of Hindu joint family childcare practices appear to be ignored. Kakar uses the Hindu ideals of *moksha* (salvation), *dharma* (duty) and *karma* (the cycle of births and deaths), as well as interesting examples of myth and epic, to explain the psychological make-up of an Indian person, but I find his individualistic, psychoanalytic precepts unconvincing.

Kurtz on the other hand has tried to devise a theory of Hindu child rearing by re-shaping Western psychoanalytic theory through emphasising the link between motherhood and the great Goddesses and their interchangeable nature, which he argues can also be applied to multiple human mothers. He concentrates on the relation between human and divine mothering by interpreting data on childrearing and, later in the book, on pathological case histories. His aims are to establish a new psychoanalytic approach in line with the structure of Hindu divinity (Kurtz 1992:7).

Kurtz argues that Western child rearing patterns should be used as standards against which Hindu patterns can be measured and criticises others for not taking psychoanalytic theory into account. He admits that Susan Seymour's work in Orissa gives interesting insights and observations, but says that like Minturn she fails to apply a Freudian analysis. The family group and not the mother is at the core of his model of Hindu childrearing. The mother pushes the child towards the wider family and the members pull the child away from the exclusive attachment to the mother.

In response to subtle prompting by adults, the Hindu child, seemingly without being forced to do so, abandons the intense early attachment to infantile forms of pleasure, i.e., unrestricted oral, anal, and phallic gratification. This contrasts with the Western case, in which the child is gradually, but forcibly, made to abandon exclusive attachments to love objects and immature pleasures in return for the mature, approving love of the parents (Kurtz 1992:61).

Within a Western context it is difficult to argue that a Hindu child has unrestricted oral, anal or phallic gratification. Breastfeeding by the mother may be quickly replaced by bottlefeeding by the grandmother, the child will wear disposable nappies, and there is no evidence to suggest any unrestricted phallic gratification. My observations would confirm the push away from the intense mother-child bond towards the wider female kin, as well as the corresponding pull by them, but I find the psychoanalytic argument employed here unconvincing. From birth the grandmothers are involved in the care of the infants. In a local hospital's neonatal unit the grandmothers sit with their daughters or daughters-in-law by their premature infants in the incubators; most Western mothers sit on their own, occasionally accompanied by the infant's father. When I asked a grandmother from a Shah family why this might be, she replied:

She has just had her first baby, she will not know what to do. I have to be with her to help.

My observations suggest that the intense relationship between a newly born infant and his or her mother that Kurtz describes does not occur, the infant is part of the wider group from birth. Although he does admit the indulgence of grandmothers he sees it as similar to that of their Western counterparts (Kurtz 1992: 83), without recognising the major role they play in caring for the child. Weaning and toilet training are addressed and Kurtz describes a relaxed child-led approach that does not differ greatly from that now advocated by Western childcare specialists. The relaxed, gradual way these are instigated is unlikely to involve any traumatic psychological split between the child and

the mother as he suggests; there is more likely to be a gradual identification with the group, through participation in social activities.

Seymour saw that children were socialised to identify with the family as a whole and to value the collective unit above their own individual interests. She sees problems in the application of Western theories of child development that focus upon individuation in societies where group attachment is stronger than that to a single caretaker. Her descriptions of other women in the household caring for children are similar to those I observed in Harrow and Ahmedabad.

While nursing, a mother responds physically to her child but withholds empathic attention thus encouraging the child to seek emotional satisfaction in relationships with others, not in an exclusive relationship with her (Seymour1999: 82).

Seymour predicts that changes may happen as western-style educational achievement and professional goals may encourage a move away from a culturally ideal interdependent self toward a more independent and autonomous self (1999:270).

The second generation of Gujarati people in the UK have experienced the education system in this country and many moved into professional careers, but many in Harrow still choose to live in joint families until after the birth of their first child. The education a child receives at school or college, or living in a Western country, in my observations has not yet moved many young Gujarati people away from the joint family and the close bonds of interdependence they have experienced from infancy. The sense of *dharma* (family loyalty, or duty) is central in their lives. Many educated young people want to carry this through to the next generation by marrying someone who holds similar ideals of the sense of family.

Through experiences of being cared for and nurtured by women within the family, a child learns to depend on wider kin. This is a common experience for children in South Asian families, as reported by Wadley (1999) in Central and West India and Seymour (1999) in Orissa. Wadley, like Kurtz, sees the Indian symbolic connection between mothers and goddesses. She sees the words *mata* and *ma* connoting warmth, protection and life-giving power, and ideally all Hindu children should honour their mothers. She also argues that there is a link with the cow here, which is sacred and the producer of white fluid, milk, and is known as the mother-cow, *gao mata*, in Hindi (Seymour 1999: 59), or *gai mata* in Gujarati. Cows need to be nurtured and protected by the whole

community and as I observed in Ahmedabad, and they are fed with *rotli*, every night. If the cow comes to eat these, it is considered a good omen for the family, as if they are in some way sharing of the family substance. To kill a cow in India is considered an even worse crime than killing a Brahman. The sacred nature and purity of cows' milk and its value for children was examined in the chapter five.

Comparisons with Western patterns of childrearing are difficult and artificial because of the very different kin responsibilities that are established from this early stage of childhood. Minturn undertook a research project that tried to establish pancultural factors in child-training practices and to use them to describe the similarities and differences in six cultures (Minturn 1964:43). She took as her standards Western concepts of various aspects of childcare, such as maternal warmth, and tested these out in various cultures across the World, including one Indian, Rajput village in Uttar Pradesh. Although some anthropological data was given, she did not do an in-depth kinship study, so the complexities of the interactions between women and children were difficult to see. She concluded, however, that when there are other women in the family to help, that mothers do less of caring for young children. The disciplining techniques she describes are similar to those I have seen, such as threatening and frightening behaviour from the mothers, to make the children do what they were told.

Discipline or teasing?

The disciplining strategies used by parents here may appear sometimes inconsistent and confusing for children. I saw similar behaviour in the UK and in India, where threats of witches or *bhago* are commonly used. One three year old Lohana child told me of her fears about noises coming from the next flat, which sounded to me like furniture being moved around. She said to me with a frightened expression on her face:

Bhago is coming to get me. I have not been a good girl.

Her mother often threatens her with this witch and has herself a fear of witches, which she expressed to me at Halloween. She had become suspicious of a neighbour who had the figure of a witch suspended in her window and she interpreted this as a threatening act towards her.

In Ahmedabad, elders greet children by squeezing their cheeks, hard enough to leave marks, yet they respond with pleasure and not pain. I have no evidence of this greeting

being used here and parents have told me that this would be unacceptable here and might be considered as child abuse. A teasing game is more common here, when a parent or grandparent pretends to be angry with the child, and then smiles or laughs. This can continue several times, so the message of whether the child has misbehaved or not is difficult to gauge.

In general 'pancultural' aspects of childrearing, as suggested by Minturn (1964), are unhelpful because within every country or community the meaning of being a parent or a child will differ within the complex web of kinship interactions. Children make their own sense of their lives and the network of interdependence in which they find themselves.

The lives of children in Ahmedabad and Harrow have in common the way they integrate themselves into the family group from birth, through the experience of being cared for by several female kin. The personality development of the Hindu child has been described extensively by Carstairs (1968): the way a child goes through conscious and unconscious processes to understand the world, and comes to relate initially to his or her mother and then the wider group. He identifies problems the child has in coming to terms with the personality of the mother as warm and indulgent on one hand but a terrible, bloodthirsty goddess on the other. Rivalry with the father for the mother's attention is a concern for the child, especially when the father at weaning, takes his or her place in the bed. Carstairs does not discuss how the child at this point move into the aunt's or grandmother's bed, as my study suggests, and gain warmth and security from this closeness.

The exclusive relationship the child has with his or her mother has also been over-stated by Kakar (1981), which I discussed earlier. I have found here a sharing of the caring of children among women, who can at times, be competitive. Seymour's findings in Orissa are similar:

.....the love between a mother and her infant- like other potential dyadic love relationships- should be contained so as not to threaten the interdependence and cooperation of the larger group. Not only are mothers too busy to devote themselves exclusively to an infant's care, but they are not supposed to do so. Besides, in joint households there are many caretakers assisting the mother and vying for the child's attention (Seymour1999: 279).

The pull away from an intense, love-laden relationship with their mother by the household, towards a warm one with their *ba* (grandmother), *masi* (mother's sister), or

kaki (father's brother's wife), continues in Harrow as well as Ahmedabad. In some households a child may have a closer attachment to his or her *ba* or *masi* than to his or her own mother, who may see her role more as disciplinarian or educationalist. These multiple early relationships make a foundation for continuing interdependency within the joint household and wider kin networks, and also as a child grows and experiences the wider interconnectiveness and belonging within the caste or community, and with the whole Gujarati-speaking world.

Conclusion: the child in ritual

In the introduction I described a two-year-old child, Yogesh, who's Grandmother was proud of the way he was becoming a proper Gujarati. She saw his first years at school as important and said it would be worth paying for a private school where he would learn to respect adults, speak and write Gujarati, eat proper vegetarian food and learn about religion. In this conclusion, I examine some of the insights into the issues highlighted by Yogesh's grandmother that emerge from this study and how they throw light on the process of becoming Gujarati in Britain today.

From birth onwards children are engaged in relations with others and for any given child the process of making sense of the world and other people is mediated by those relationships. To explain this process Toren argues for

'a unified model of how we become who we are in which mind and body are aspects of one another (rather than separable systems) and, from birth to death, each one of us humans makes sense of the world by making meaning out of meanings that others have made and are making – a process in which knowledge is at once maintained and transformed. In this perspective, what we call history is an analytical artefact of the more fundamental embodied history that makes each one of us what we are and in the process provides us with our ideas about the world' (personal communication 2002).

She has also argued that the whole person is implicated in this process and 'any act is at once affective, symbolic and material i.e. intentional' and 'particular forms of intentionality constitute and are constituted by the politico-economic processes that describe collective relations' (Toren 1999:111). She insists that anthropologists need to study children in order to understand relations between adults. Although this study has not been entirely focused on children, it has been looking at households with small

children and the interactions between adults and children of different ages in everyday activities, rituals, food and kinship.

From birth (or even before birth) Gujarati children have contact with other members of the household kin and wider kin network at meals, rituals and festivals. My informants have emphasised verbally and through their actions, the importance of ritual practice within the household and outside, and how it becomes an integral part of their lives. Rituals begin before birth in the household, with certain family rules being followed concerning special foods and conduct of the pregnant woman; then in some families there is a more formal gathering of kin in the seventh month of pregnancy. I have been told that an unborn child gains knowledge about his or her mother – her emotions and religion – and of kinship through her bodily fluids. If the mother thinks good thoughts in pregnancy and when breastfeeding, her child will grow to be a good person. As a child grows his or her experiences come initially through contact with the mother's body and then after birth through multiple contacts with kin. More formal rituals may be performed around life-cycle events, which have to be conducted at certain auspicious times on the Gujarati calendar, or as directed by the astrologer. Everyday rituals take place at the household shrine and ritualised behaviour is often seen, for example putting the red spot, *chandlo*, on the forehead is always done with the right ring finger; *rotli* are broken with the right hand and twisted around the vegetables in the *shak* (vegetables); and rice is eaten by rolling it into a small ball between the thumb and the first two fingers. Family rules determine how and when rituals take place and these follow the male line; so a woman moving into a household will have to follow the rules of her father-in-law. The meaning of the ritual is often not known, the most important thing is that the rule is followed.

Yogesh's mother had a ritual for him in the seventh month of her pregnancy because her father-in-law believed in it and she was following the family rules. She considered this a particularly auspicious occasion, because a leading Swaminarayan guru who happened to be visiting Britain at the time conducted it and she invited two hundred guests. Other people have told me that their family does not believe in it, so they will not do it. There can be anxieties attached to not doing rituals: a Jain woman told me her baby was abnormal because she had not done the pregnancy ritual.

Levi-Strauss has argued that rituals are a response not to existential, but to epistemological anxiety; his argument is both subtle and convincing but it does not entirely rule out Turner's.

When Turner [in *The Drums of Affliction*, 1968] states that religious rites 'create or actualize the categories by means of which man apprehends reality, the axioms underlying social structure and the laws of moral or natural order', he is not fundamentally wrong, since ritual does, of course, refer to these categories, laws and axioms. But ritual does not create them, and endeavours, rather, if not to deny them, at least to obliterate, temporarily, the distinctions and oppositions they lay down....(Levi-Strauss 1971:680).

Levi-Strauss maintained that ritual is concerned not to create ideas but rather to obliterate the distinctions and oppositions that arise in discourse, especially in mythical discourse. Levi-Strauss stressed that rituals are created in response to the anxieties provoked by conscious reflection, which separates humans from their experience.

Ritual is not a reaction to life; it is a reaction to what thought has made of life ... it is a response to the way man thinks of the world (Levi-Strauss 1971:680).

This may indeed be the case, but even so I have found Turner's analysis of ritual to be especially applicable to my own findings. Turner had gone beyond the structural-functionalist view of ritual held by anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown and introduced history and time into his methods and analysis. He suggested that human social life is the producer and product of time and advocated a 'processual view of society'.

The social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being (except so far as 'being' is a description of the static atemporal models men have in their heads), and for this reason studies of social structure as *such* are irrelevant (Turner 1974:24).

In *The Ritual Process* (1969) and in later essays (1982,1986) Turner applied the 'processual view' to his analysis of ritual in which there are social rhythms and flows, in a similar vein to biological, climatic and ecological rhythms and flows. Rituals are performances and enactments, which flow from one stage to the next, the order and character being of secondary importance to the experience of the participants.

The experience of subjective and intersubjective flow in ritual performance, whatever its sociobiological or personalogical concomitants may be, often convinces performers that the ritual situation *is* indeed informed with powers both transcendental and immanent (Turner 1982:80)

For Turner, ritual is 'richly textured', in which all the senses of the participants and performers are engaged: they *hear* music and prayers, *see* visual symbols, *taste* consecrated foods, *smell* incense, and *touch* sacred persons or objects (ibid: 81). Ritual, he argues is capable of societal change, which emerges through creative modification at all or any levels, and communicates in groups at the deepest levels of values.

Turner drew on van Gennep's (1960) analysis of *rites de passage* in which he argued that there are clearly defined stages of rites of separation, threshold rites, and rites of re-aggregation for which he used the terms: preliminal, liminal and postliminal. Novices are separated from society and pre-ritual ties are broken and new relationships afterwards are compulsory. Van Gennep had also emphasised that almost all rituals were associated with transition from one situation to another and Turner extended his argument to suggest that 'ceremony indicates and ritual transforms' (Turner 1982: 80).

The pre-liminal stage of the rite involves the novice being secluded or separated in some way. The process continues into a liminal phase through which the status of the participants is reversed and the weak become strong, the strong become weak and there is social levelling. Within life-cycle rites the novice may be subjected to humbling, stripping or pain accompanied by mockery. The attributes of liminality are always ambiguous, they are betwixt and between and neither here nor there. Rank and status disappear and passivity, humility and nakedness are apparent. *Communitas* emerges from liminality, when social structure appears to be no more, and feelings of common humanity are expressed. For Turner, *communitas* has 'an existential quality; it involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men' (Turner 1969:127). *Communitas* is expressed through liminality, marginality, inferiority and can be speculative and generate imagery and philosophical ideas; as opposed to structure which is this-worldly and pragmatic (ibid 133). During the ritual process marginal people may appear who are poor or deformed and symbolise the moral values of *communitas* as against the political views (ibid 110). I came across an example of this while visiting Vadodra in Gujarat during Navratri, when we met two transvestites. My informant explained to me afterwards that they were 'important people' or *hijra*, who belonged to a certain religious sect and would often appear at religious gatherings and life-cycle rituals, where they would sing and dance and expect to be given money. He explained the importance of giving them money, or they would inflict a curse on the child or the

family. I have no evidence of marginal people appearing in rituals in this way in Britain, although I have been told of the existence of *hijra* groups.

The final phase of the ritual process is the reintegration of the disturbed social group or the social recognition of a transformation. When applied to the life-cycle rituals described in the last chapter, this could be the group's acceptance of the child's new transformed status within the kinship network.

Religious gatherings, whether during Navratri, Diwali, *bhajan* or *satsang* engender feelings of social levelling through liminality and *communitas*, the experience of the ritual link the participants with each other and with the divine energies. Turner's work has given insights into the ritual process and society in general that other anthropologists before him were unable to do.

Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing-a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and *communitas*. There would seem to be - if one can use such a controversial term - a human 'need' to participate in both modalities. Persons starved of one in their functional day-to-day activities seek it in ritual liminality. The structurally inferior aspire to symbolic structural superiority in ritual; the structurally superior aspire to symbolic *communitas* and undergo penance to achieve it (Turner 1969:203). The women participating in Navratri, as described in chapter 3, demonstrated their female energies, breaking down the barriers of caste, class and wealth on these special days. Through the liminality of the ritual, they experienced the strength of *communitas* they had with each other and celebrated their femininity and fertility.

Before Turner's introduction of the idea of *communitas*, Durkheim had recognised the importance of the collective as making possible an 'effervescence' that contributes to man's creation of an ideal world 'above the real world where his profane life passes' (Durkheim 1976:422). Durkheim's study of religious ideas and experience moved the emphasis away from the individual to the group and produced the idea of 'collective representations', but in his endeavours to find a positivistic method in social science, he was unable to move from the synchronic to the diachronic (Bloch 1989:21). Durkheim

acknowledged the importance of history but was unable to incorporate it in his methods or analysis. In attempts to make anthropology a science, functionalism rejected history and studied social and cultural processes without consideration of history. It is worth noting here, in passing, that Levi-Strauss (1971) in his exhaustive volumes on myth found a method of creating an anthropological conception of history by analysing synchronic transformations in a particular myth over a wide geographical area. His ideas about ritual, especially as set out in *The Naked Man* (1971:667-684) were a direct response to his understanding of mythical discourse as speculative epistemology.

Here it is interesting to note that ritual tends to be talked about by my informants not in terms of meaning, but in terms of who should do what, when, and how, which connects with both Levi-Strauss's position and with an argument made by Toren (drawing on Lewis 1980) that most, if not all, behaviours have a ritualized aspect – an aspect that can be rendered explicit as 'a rule'. She points out that

'adults are usually capable of ascribing a meaning to ritualized behaviours, but from the child's point of view that meaning cannot be obvious; it does not declare itself. For the child, the significance of the behaviour may be simply that 'this is how you do X' (Toren 1999:119).

She argues further that the childhood experience of learning a ritual behaviour or series of behaviours is crucial for the process through which, over time, they come to ascribe meaning to that behaviour such that its performance becomes symbolic of that meaning. Her Fijian ethnography shows how, in rendering meaningful the ritual and ritualised behaviours enjoined on them by their elders, children eventually come to hold the idea that such rituals and ritual behaviours are mandatory: that they *must* be performed and their practice enjoined too on others because their meaning makes them so. Her analysis builds on observations made by Levi-Strauss and Bloch to show that

... its manifestation as 'rule' is the fundamental *raison d'être* of ritual and *for this reason* its meaning aspect is bound to be always and inevitably secondary (Toren 1999:122).

Turner argues that the rules of the ritual 'frame' the ritual process, but the ritual process 'transcends its frame', as a flowing 'performance and enactment', not confined by 'rules or rubrics' (Turner 1982:79). The particular family rules about rituals to be practised, foods to be eaten, gods to be worshipped and whom one should marry, are the concerns of most Gujarati families. It is in the performance that meaning arises through liminality and *communitas*, and this is transformed through the enactment. In my research I found that what matters to my informants is following the rules and that, indeed, the meanings

made of these rules are always secondary. When I have pressed people for reasons for ritual action, I have been given answers such as:

It is what we have always done. We do not have an explanation. It is passed through generations.
and,

We do not understand it ourselves, we just follow.

Ritual has been a central theme in this thesis and this model gives insights into the process whereby Gujaratis in Harrow continue to see themselves as different from other South Asian groups and the rest of the encompassing society. Within a diaspora there may be a strong desire to retain rituals and practices and perhaps adhere more closely to detail than was thought necessary in the country of origin. Calendrical and life-cycle rituals are practised widely. Turner's argument here is that rituals are performances that have to follow in precise order. The religious sect or household will dictate the order according to the priest in the temple or the oldest woman in the kin group. Turner argues that life crisis events occur at birth, puberty, marriage and death and tend to be performed on individuals. Calendrical rites almost always refer to larger groups and often to whole societies, at seasonal moments such as harvest festivals. In the case of the Gujaratis these tend to be based around the birthdays of the gods or specific religious festivals.

Returning to Yogesh and his experience of ritual and visits to the temple. At the age of two, he already greets the priest in an appropriate manner. Where has this behaviour come from? My observations of Yogesh at home since he was a small infant suggest that children's active involvement in ritual may begin as early as in the first year of life. At seven months old, Yogesh could sit on his own on the floor of the family home and point to the photo of Bapuji, the Swaminarayan Guru on the wall when requested to do so by his *ba*. When she sung the *arti* (prayer) he joined in by clapping his hands like she did, receiving considerable approval from her. Yogesh has a close relationship with his parents, his *dadaji*, but especially with his *ba*.

Earlier in this chapter, I showed how the intense relationship between grandmother and grandchild involves not only caring for the child's physical needs and co-sleeping, but involving the child in ritual. When Nikhita asked her mother-in-law 'what sort of magic' she had been teaching her son when he spent the night with her, she was asking

about what rituals they had done and what religious stories they had read. Reshma, as I described in chapter three, told me how she learnt about religion through the close relationship she had with her grandmother. This was the first thing that came to her mind when I asked about her family.

Through these experiences of ritual, a child comes to know that there is a certain way of doing things and that things must be done in that way, but attaches no meaning to the particular practices other than (perhaps) 'this is what we do in our family'. Children under six years may know, for example, that girls sit in the front and boys behind them at rituals. Children copy and imitate adult behaviour and make sense of it in their play. For example three-year-old Bina had two Barbie dolls, one dressed in Western clothes she called Helen and one dressed in a sari she called Kirti. In Bina's imaginary play, Barbie Helen watched TV and listened to pop music and Barbie Kirti lit *diva* (candles), said prayers to the god and made *rotli* (chappati bread). Bina was very aware of the differences between these two dolls and how ritual was important for Barbie Kirti. In like fashion, on one of my visits to her house during Diwali, she pointed to her nextdoor neighbour's house and said, 'They do not have Diwali'. I asked her mother why she said so and she explained that her neighbours were West Indian and Bina had already worked out that they would not be celebrating Diwali. Toren (1999) has suggested that children up to the age of 6 or 7 imitate adult behaviour and follow rules of behaviour enjoined on them by adults because they have the idea that these rules must indeed be followed and/or because they may get into trouble if they do not. They do not advance any other reason for such practices beyond the sheer doing of them. Bina was beginning to understand difference and through her dolls had demonstrated the importance of ritual for her Indian doll. She had also worked out that her neighbours look different from her family and relatives, and that only people who look like her family celebrate Diwali. Her behaviour and what she says shows us how she is making sense of her world. Although she as yet had no rationale for the family rituals, she knew they were important in her household and for people who looked like her family. Toren (1999) argued that by the age of 6-9 years children are beginning to realise that ritual behaviour has a meaning beyond itself and that they are also differentiating between those who are 'like us' and 'not like us' (Toren 1999:119). Toren's observations here are conjectural; my own observations of three-year-old Bina suggest that she had already constituted an idea of difference and had already begun to articulate this with an idea about the

significance of ritual – at least in the sense that she was matching the observance of Diwali with people's appearance. The processual nature of this kind of awareness is not the same in all children and some may develop this at earlier stages than others as a function of their particular experience.

Ritual and ritualised behaviour vary across households and I was often told in response to my questions about specific rituals that; 'My family does not believe in it', or 'In the olden days it was done....but it is not practical now', or 'Our family only does it for boys'. Each household has its own particular variation of a common theme of how a ritual is done and the oldest female member of the kinship group is expected to offer guidance to the others on the details.

Collective action at festivals and large gatherings of kin and friends especially when singing and dancing take place are important for group cohesion and continuity. For Turner (1974) rituals create reality and humans come to understand the world through living through it, participating in collective action, moving through phases of liminality social levelling and *communitas*. It is through the performance of ritual that kin relations and those in the wider sociality network are cemented, renewed and transformed. The rites performed give continuity, reassurance and stability and tend to be conducted in a similar fashion whether they are Navratri or Diwali celebrations in Harrow or Ahmedabad.

Turner argues that ritual symbols have many meanings, but referents tend to polarise between physiological phenomena, such as blood, sexual organs, birth, death and so on and a normative or ideological pole of meaning which includes kindness to children, reciprocity, generosity to kinsmen, and respect for elders. He suggests that if there is a high level of *communitas* in the society, then individuals will see no conflict between themselves and society. This, he argues fits in with Durkheim's notion of morality as being an essentially social phenomenon (Turner 1974:55-56).

I would disagree with Vertovec's argument that these ritual practices have been 'truncated' or 'refashioned' in line with social change or popularised to make them attractive to diaspora-born Hindus (Vertovec 2000: 17). On the contrary, I found the rituals practised in Britain, even by younger people, closely follow the same lines as they did forty years ago. Recently, I have found myself explaining to a professional, Brahman grandmother from Mumbai about the *chhati* ritual (six-day ritual) because her

relatives in India have been telling her she should perform it for her new grandson, but she did not know what to do. She thought this discussion with me was very amusing, but told me it was not uncommon for women in urban India to ask their British relatives about the correct way to perform rituals.

Moral continuity is achieved through ritual action, which is constituted within a specific, historical and economic context. Children experience ritual through the social relations they have with their kin beginning at birth (or before), through which they constitute their own ideas of self and others and specific ideas of the world. Through multiple caregivers, children constitute a world of relationships in which interdependency is an integral part of kinship. Transformations occur in ritual practice and ritualised behaviour in different ways in different households. Meanings may be attached to rituals by certain older children and adults but are largely unimportant because ritual is primarily 'just what we always do'. Gujarati people (Hindus and Jains) in Britain continue to share a specific sense of difference that separates them from other South Asian groups and the indigenous population.

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Glossary

The following are words used in the Gujarati vernacular. Diacritics have not been used in the main text, but have been included here for clarity of pronunciation.

ahimsā or *ahinsā*- a Sanskrit term implying non-violence to living creatures. An ethical principal of Jainism and adopted by some Hindus. Taken to extremes, it could mean the avoidance of green-leafed vegetables for fear of eating small creatures and covering one's mouth when outside.

Ambāji-one of the *matāji* (goddesses). Worshipped during Navratri. A large, beautiful temple is devoted to her in the North of Gujarat, near the Rajasthan border. She is portrayed riding on her 'vehicle' a lion.

arti- a ritual act of worship.

bā- grandmother, mother's or father's mother or grandmother. Implies a relationship of warmth from an elderly woman.

bhābhi- sister-in-law.

balmovātā- the hair-cutting ceremony to remove the 'birth hair', done at one and a quarter years, or at two and a half years.

Baniyā- or Bania, trader or merchant, also known as Vaniya or Vania.

bahen-sister, including cousins and close friends.

bhāi- brother, including cousins and close friends.

bhāi-bij- the day after Diwali when *bhai* visits *bahen*'s house. She cooks him a meal and he gives her a present.

bhakti- devotion usually involving emotion and fervor.

bhajan- gathering of people to sing hymns and worship a god or saint.

bhut- ghost that can be beneficent or malevolent.

cha- tea is boiled with milk. *Marsala cha* is spiced tea.

chāndlo- red mark made on forehead before religious rites, sometimes called *bhindi*.

chār-rastā- crossroad, literally four roads.

chhāti- the ceremony done six days after birth when Vidhata, the god of fate writes the child's future.

choghadiyā- auspicious and inauspicious time-periods on a calendar for performing rituals.

dādā- paternal grandfather.

dādi- paternal grandmother.

dāhi- home-made yogurt or curd, eaten with most meals.

dāhl- lentils cooked in various spices. Eaten with rice.

darshan- the viewing of a god, and being seen by that god. Demands a level of purity and the wearing of certain clothes, usually made of silk.

deva/devī- male/female deity.

dharma- religious duty or the way of truth.

dikshā- Jain or Hindu religious initiation into asceticism.

divo – or *Divā* plural- candle made of *ghee* and moulded around a wick, used in *pujas*.

diwālī- or a pan-Indian term, or 'deepavali'- the Festival of Light in October/November.

foi- father's sister, who plays an important part in life-cycle rituals.

gāi-mafā- the cow-goddess. Cows are venerated and cared for by local people in India. To kill a cow is a worse sin than killing a Brahman.

Ganesh- the elephant god, the first and most important god to be worshipped on any auspicious occasion-moving house, getting married, going to university or any journey. A Ganesh puja takes place at the beginning of life-cycle rituals. Ganpati celebrations take place in September, when effigies of him are carried on open carts through the streets. In Mumbai, he is taken to the sea and submerged in the water. In Britain people may fill troughs with water in public halls and submerge images of Ganesh in them.

garbo- earthenware pot used for *puja* at Navratri.

Gāyatri- one of the *mataji*, who rides on her 'vehicle' a swan.

garbā- dances done at Navratri.

ghar- house, joint household or home.

ghee- clarified butter used in cooking and for making *diva*.

ghol- sugar beet.

gnāti- Sanskrit for caste, from the root *gnan*, Gujarati term usually used is *nat* or *najat*.

gnān-knowledge.

gotra- clan-like unit from one of the seven Rishis. Important when arranging marriages.

guruji- a male spiritual leader who may travel to Britain from India several times a year. Female spiritual leaders are usually called *mataji*.

Holi- spring Hindu festival when bonfires are lit and coloured powders thrown.

Jāti- A colloquial term meaning caste but can also refer generally to a variety or type- such as a plant.

Jalebi- strands of sweet, fried wheat eaten on special occasions such as New Year's Day.

Janoi- sacred thread tied during ceremony for boys over 7 years in the Brahman and Lohana castes. After the tying of the thread they are sent to study and when they return they are considered to be men. The thread consists of many single threads twisted together, each one reminding the man of his obligations- to his god, his parents, his teachers etc. He cannot get married without it because he is not considered a man. Occasionally the thread is tied before the wedding.

Jiv- the souls of microscopic organisms living on roots and green vegetables, which must not be killed, especially observed by Jains.

kākā- father's brother.

kājāl- soot mixed with castor oil, used for putting around infant's eyes.

kankoo- red vermillion powder used for making chandlo.

karma- action which accumulates and attaches itself to the soul, so determining a person's fate after death and whether he or she is fit for reincarnation.

kātlū- a sweet food made of nuts, glue, honey and *ghee*, given to mothers after birth.

khir- a rice pudding made for the *mataji* at life-cycle rituals, but can be consumed at other times as well.

khichdi- a rice dish that is easy to digest and is given to children and convalescent people.

kul- 'root' or common ancestor.

kuldevi- lineage goddess.

kutumb- family or lineage.

kholo bharvo- literally 'putting in the lap', referring to the rice exchanged between the woman's mother and mother-in-law at the 7th month of pregnancy ceremony.

Krishnā- worshipped as the incarnation of Vishnu. He is very important god in Gujarat. *Jayshe Krishna* being one of the main greetings.

ladu- sweet food given at very special occasions, such as after the birth of a boy.

lotā-the utensil on which a doll-like picture, or a coconut with a picture pinned to it of the *matāji* in life-cycle rituals-see photograph.

lyo- take.

mandir- temple devoted to one god or religious movement.

mantra- chant or reading of Sanskrit, which produces positive energy and auspiciousness.

māmā- mother's brother.

māmi- mother's brother's wife.

māsā- mother's sister's husband.

māsi- mother's sister.

mātāji- a pantheon of female deities which have varying levels of purity attached to them. People often refer to *Mataji* as one goddess as well as many.

melu- unclean or impure.

mug beans-green lentils used in many rituals.

murti- sacred Hindu or Jain idol.

masti- mischief or horseplay.

nānā- maternal grandfather.

nāni- maternal grandmother.

najar-lāge- the evil eye, a glance or look, the eye of jealousy, inflicted by someone known to the person, but not kin.

nāt or *najāt*- caste.

Navrātri- festival of nine nights. *Garbas* are held in open spaces in Gujarat and inside in halls in Harrow.

pāni- water.

parothā- fried wheat bread, which is flat, but thicker than rotli.

Paryushan- Jain eight-day festival held in September. Women may fast for 6-16 days.

prasād- offerings of fruit, sugar and nuts to the gods. Occasionally cooked foods are given.

pujā- ritual worship of the gods at the household shrine or in a temple. It usually involves the giving of prasād.

pujāri- a Brahman priest who conducts rituals.

puri- puffed up fried, wheat bread.

rākhi- coloured threads tied around *bhai*'s wrist by bahen at Rakshabandhan.

Rāndalmā- one of the *mataji*, who is evoked during life-cycle rituals. She is thought to protect pregnant women and young children.

rangoli- coloured powders mixed with water and thrown at Holi also used to make floor decorations at Diwali and on other special occasions.

rotli – flat bread made of wheat, which is eaten daily as a staple food.

rotlo or *rotlā* (plural) a thick bread made from millet rather than wheat flour.

sādhu- a temple priest, sometimes called 'saints' in the Swaminarayan movement.

samāj- caste association.

sanskār- the moral identity of the household. Similar to the Hindi word *samskara* meaning life-cycle rituals. Rituals transform the living body removing deficits and infusing positive qualities.

sāsu- mother-in-law.

savā-mahino- a month and a quarter- the time a woman should stay in the house after having a baby.

savā-varshni- a year and a quarter-the usual time for a hair-cutting ceremony.

*sevā-*action on behalf of others-no expectation of return.

shāk- vegetables .

shakti- female, divine energy. ‘*Shakti points*’ in Gujarat are places where the goddesses are thought to have left parts of themselves, as divine concentrations of energy- Now they have become pilgrimage sites.

shrimant- pregnancy or referring to the seven month of pregnancy ritual.

sidhu- raw food given to the Brahman from a ritual.

slok- songs of praise or hymns to the gods.

suā- spices put in water for women to drink after childbirth.

Tirthankara- ford builder-one who founded and re-founds the Jain tradition.

tulsi- sacred basil leaves used in ritual.

varsnā- attachment to the house and worldly goods, which has to be released after death.

vidhyā- knowledge, which can be sacred.