

Roots of Religious Tolerance in Pakistan and India

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To the screams of a small child in Turbat who, in
1992, was burnt alive...*in the name of God !*

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PREFACE

Much of this work below was part of my Ph.D. dissertation. I designed my Ph.D. program as an inquiry into the nature of spirituality and what in it allows for a connection with, and more tolerance and acceptance of, the "other." I had been working with religions and spirituality for a long time. My associations ranged from the evangelical, orthodox and pro-Khomeini Muslim groups to the mystical schools of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism, spread over three continents. The movement was first into the orthodox and then more and more into the mystical side of religions. I was still a physics student at the University of Minnesota when I realized that mysticism is not just something to study but something requiring direct experience. The realization took me straight to a monastery in Sri Lanka.

As I went through philosophy of science, consciousness studies and clinical psychology in subsequent degree programs, my interest and involvement in spirituality continued to deepen. It was only when I was ready to start my Ph.D. program that I decided to make the study of religion and spirituality my main academic focus.

As I was designing my Ph.D. program, I was aware of the growing trend of intolerance in the South Asian subcontinent and it was something that I was concerned about. I had a vague sense that it may be the essence of spirituality that could counter this growing trend in the region. Thus, since I was tied to Pakistan by birth and interest, I decided to work with Hinduism, the outer forms of which are considered to be the most different from the outer forms of Islam. Hindus embody the "other" for the orthodox Muslims in Pakistan. Yet, I was aware of the rich interaction over the centuries between the mystical traditions that grew within the two religions. What allowed this interaction that seems so far-fetched in the present era? To answer this question and get insights into the growing intolerance, I decided to study some symbols of commonality between the two traditions.

I started my exploration in Sindh, during one of my visits to Pakistan, where mystical traditions have held a central place in the society for centuries. There are Hindu temples there that were visited by both Hindus and Muslims until recently. I sat at the temples and shrines of the area and read their literature and related texts. Many of these places belong to the Gorakhnathi tradition. After visiting many Gorakhnathi sites from Sindh to Peshawar, I realized that none of the sites or the saints associated with them was "living." By living, I mean a symbol of unity that is still alive in the psyche of the sub-continent.

In the Gorakhnathi texts that I was reading I kept coming across references to Ranjha, who had become a Gorakhnathi *jogi* at Tilla Jogian—the center of all Gorakhnathi schools in India—near Jhelum. In the beginning I kept passing over his name because in the subcontinent Ranjha is known not for his spirituality but in the context of romance and folklore. In Punjab he is the most popular embodiment of the "Lover archetype." Then one day, all the pieces fell into place. I realized a connection of the Lover Archetype in folklore and myths, as the one who knows the union and interconnectedness of all things as

described by mystical traditions, to the problem of structural and formal differences that divide the followers of orthodox religious traditions. I will come back to my reasons for choosing to work with Ranjha in more detail later.

In 1989, after years of Buddhist practices, I formally returned to the tradition of Sufism, the symbols and metaphors of which I was more grounded in. As opposed to the beginnings of my Buddhist journey, where one can stay somewhat detached and in the observer mode, Sufism, being a devotional path, immediately starts working on an opening of the heart. At least that is how the journey was for me. Fortunately, this had important implications on my academic pursuits also.

In December 1992, when Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in India because of the demolition of the Babri mosque, I was still studying in California. Many places of worship were destroyed in India, Pakistan and other countries, and hundreds of people died. This was a turning point in my academic pursuits. This was the time when I realized that what may have been an intellectual curiosity for me in the beginning had grown into a quest that was very close to my heart. My work and its implications had taken on a spiritual dimension with a sense of an emotional duty. It is the pain and suffering of the people who get caught in the fires of intolerance that motivated my work and it is to them, therefore, that I have dedicated this exploration.

When I came back to Pakistan in 1993 after finishing my course-work for a Ph.D., I was very clear about wanting and needing to be a part of activist and social movements in the country. I got involved in the women's struggle and gender issues and was fortuitously offered the job of representing the Center for Democratic Development in Islamabad, which is a part of the Human Right's Commission of Pakistan. My involvement in the social struggle and my position in the

Commission allowed me to find out firsthand what was being done about the most pressing social issues in the region. I found that few people in Pakistan were focusing on long term solutions to growing religious intolerance in the country. After some years I realized that hardly anyone was working on the issue of religious tolerance with the kinds of approaches that I had in mind. In the realm of religious discourse, we have the hardcore orthodox fanatics on the one hand and the liberals on the other, many of whom have a leftist, communist background and can get quite fanatic themselves in their opposition to anything that vaguely resembles a religious idea. The leftist discourse on religion is a simplistic reduction of religion as a purely socio-economic phenomenon, a perspective that makes them almost irrelevant to the masses of Pakistan, who do have a lived sense of religion that they want to retain, on some level.

It was under these conditions that I decided to withdraw from my general Human Rights activities and focus more on the issue of religious intolerance in the region. Given that there is a lack of approaches that acknowledge the place and importance of spirituality in an individual and in society as a whole and at the same time challenge the formalism and intolerance of religious structures, my work became even more important to me. I feel more certain of what we are up against, its connections to other systemic issues and the support and obstacles we can expect from groups within the society if we try to design and make interventions in this volatile area. And I feel more grounded in my resolve to get some useful insights into the roots of tolerance that we once knew and lived, and discover the root causes of intolerance in the sub-continent and possible interventions to counter the trend.

Introduction

Indo-Pakistan subcontinent has been a land of paradoxes. The fact that there is a growing trend of religious intolerance and fanaticism in the region can be seen and felt quite clearly by those living in the region. Whether this trend is reinforced by the local political parties or by the socio-economic interests of specific groups or even by the role of the USA in global politics, the fact remains that incidents and patterns of religion-based violence, have been on the rise in recent years. These are the trends that make the news today.

Paradoxically, there are other tendencies, not as newsworthy, in the psyche of the subcontinent that have allowed a co-existence of diverse groups in a way that may be unparalleled in any other part of the world. In the last few centuries these tendencies may be getting more and more suppressed but they still remain an integral part of the collective psyche of the subcontinent. This collective psyche has roots that are thousands of years old. What is required in present times is to try to identify which of these roots allowed for a *relatively* more tolerant, harmonious and peaceful coexistence in the region and to explore whether these roots can be drawn upon and strengthened now (though, not in a revivalist way) to counter the streak of intolerance.

There is, however, a problem in doing these analyses today. In the post 9/11 world, with the USA raging its 'war against

terror' across the globe, most of the religious discourse is coloured by it or is seen to be somehow related to it. The discussion in western media of terrorists and religious fundamentalists and the need and means of dealing with them is so all-invasive and 'ever-present' that it is difficult to separate issues of religious intolerance that are rooted in the psyche of the region and are more or less independent of these recent developments from those that are viewed, defined and dealt with from the outside. It makes it harder for Muslim individuals and groups, for example, to question or challenge the intolerant streak within their own psyche and understanding of religion as that would be seen as towing the American line. There is a very real danger at present of losing sight of the real, deep-rooted issues that need to be dealt with within the region.

Our present exploration into the roots of tolerance in the subcontinent does require us to focus our attention initially on deep-rooted historical patterns and injustices within the religious interactions in the region that continue to undermine or block these tolerant tendencies. Historical wrongs that still lie dormant in the psyche have to be acknowledged, healed or somehow dealt with if we are to reverse the trend of increasing intolerance in the region. This has to be woven into any interventions – which is what this study leads to, towards the end – if they are to take root in a meaningful way. Thus in this study of long-term changes in the deeper religious psyche of the area, if there is an analysis of the establishment of Muslim power in the subcontinent through the use of force or of the much earlier establishment of the Brahmanic power through the subjugation of the local population and their religions, it needs to be understood independent of the polarized discourse of the post 9/11 world of the last few years.

In relation to the underlying tolerance in the psyche of the subcontinent, in general, especially till a few centuries ago, it seems that several religious traditions could exist side-by-side in a way that is becoming more and more unimaginable today.

There are records of tensions and rivalries between followers of different traditions but there are also countless examples of spiritual traditions overlapping, borrowing and reaching new syntheses in the region. There were Sufi saints that were revered by followers of all religions. There were Hindu Yogis that had 'dargahs' (a word typically used for Sufi shrines) and were called Pirs and were honored by Muslims. Examples of such people and places, where the religious boundaries overlapped, can still be found all over India and Pakistan. Over time, in this environment, there developed new religious traditions, like Sikhism, borrowing heavily from both, Islam and Hinduism. There existed jogi panths with a large number of both Hindu and Muslim followers who retained their religious affiliations in addition to being jogis (Briggs, 1938). It is clear that the sense that religions are mutually exclusive that we witness today and that also appeared at least in some of the texts and theologies of those times could not have been reflective of the lived experience of the people, who could accept and incorporate variable and multiple religious identities quite comfortably.

The period of the Mughal emperor, Akbar, from 1556 CE to 1605 CE, is considered by many to be very liberal, as far as religious freedom is concerned. Some details of the period in Part One may substantiate this view. It is during this time that an Indian poet, Damodar, composed the first written version of the Heer Ranjha legend, in Punjabi. We will come back to this legend a little later. Interestingly, it is also during Akbar's era that we witness in India, the first signs of the first revivalist movement anywhere in the Islamic world. It was during his great-grandson's reign (1658-1707 CE) though, that this fundamentalist streak fully manifested itself. Akbar's era therefore becomes very interesting for our purposes.

It also appears that the roots of intolerance, though they may not have been as visible in the everyday life of the subcontinent, are quite old as well. The patriarchal religions that invaded the region by forceful, political or ideological means brought formalized intolerance into the spiritual, religious, political, socio-economic and even the spiritual systems of the area. These are the roots that have grown stronger and more visible over the last few centuries. The struggle between orthodox Islam and Brahmanism made the everyday life of people more and more polarized. Sikhism, while it may have been welcomed by the people of Punjab, met with strong resistance from the Mughal rulers and turned militant and formal itself. Christian missionaries used the social oppression of Brahmanism and the political oppression of Islam to convert people to Christianity, further formalizing and polarizing the everyday lived spiritual and religious experience of the people. Thus, even if we believe that the motives behind religious intolerance today are political or socio-economic, the fact remains that it is the polarization and rigidity of the religious identities that opens them up for abuse by specific interested groups, which in turn increases the polarization and rigidity, and so these vicious cycles continue. That religious identities can directly or indirectly become the basis for extreme violence and bloodshed became clear in the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.

The factors that further fuel this streak of religious intolerance in the subcontinent are many. For one, the partition of 1947, directly or at least indirectly, on the basis of religion, left some unanswered questions as to the place of religion, especially in the newly formed Pakistan. Intellectual, passionate and heated arguments between opposing sides, all quoting speeches and political 'facts', continue to this day. Religious and religion-based motivations were used by many leaders and visionaries of that era on this and that side of the new border. There are other factors, rooted in psychological insecurities of

the people of the subcontinent when it comes to their religious identities, some that we will discuss later and others that cannot even be discussed due to restrictions that have taken on legal forms. Another factor is the disillusionment of people with the corruption and failure of the political and economic systems over the recent decades that make them an easy target for those who offer divine, god-given solutions to these problems.

The fact is that religion-based parties are a powerful force in the political life of Pakistan today. Much before that, in India, parties with religious ideologies, riding the wave of religious intolerance, even found a way to gain political control of the country. The number of religious riots between Hindus and Muslims and Christians continues to rise all over in the subcontinent. In 1992 the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the riots and killing that followed was a clear sign of the changing times. The violence that erupted in Gujarat a decade later showed clearly that these were not isolated occurrences in India. In Pakistan we witnessed for a while an exponential growth in the number religious schools, madrassas, fueled by global political trends of course, that to this day continue to churn out trained, fanatic warriors, ready to give and take life in the name of god. These ‘taliban’ exist in huge and ever-increasing numbers in the country. There are several fanatic, jihadi movements that gain strength in the society. The Tableeghi Jamaat, with the broadest base, though not overtly violent, remains perhaps the most extremist group in terms of its most orthodox understanding of the religion. For women, there are movements like Al-Huda, with modernist, supposedly enlightened rhetoric, that push women into deeply orthodox interpretations of Islam. All of these developments, on both sides of the border, clearly show trends that have to be addressed if the region is to pull out of this downward spiral of intolerance.

While the level of intolerance continues to rise, for several reasons, there are not many deep-rooted, long-term interventions countering this trend. Considering the scenario on the Pakistani side, one would expect the civil society and organizations with a somewhat leftist political orientation to come up with a counter-strategy. The left however insists on viewing religion as nothing more than a socio-economic phenomenon and so there is a tendency to reduce the issue to groups with political and socio-economic interests making use of people's emotions. There is a resistance to acknowledge that these religious emotions have a social reality, independent existence and roots. Thus, while these civil society groups are doing exceptional work in certain areas such as human rights or women's issues, when it comes to religious issues, their strong reaction against religion as merely a tool to control the masses, makes their work irrelevant in the eyes of the average person. Religion and everything that sounds religious, including all spirituality, to many of these liberal and progressive social activists and scholars, is something that people need to be freed of. "Secular" frequently becomes synonymous with "anti-religious" in these circles. Their response to religious oppression, religious discrimination and religious violence at times becomes simplistic, superficial, reactive and confrontational. A deeper understanding of the genesis of these behaviors is generally absent and considered unnecessary. Derogatory remarks towards the religious leaders (mullahs) or towards the 'intellectually inferior masses that are still under the spell of superstition, religion or spirituality', are quite common. For the ordinary people though, religion, or many times a sense of lived spirituality, has a place in everyday life that they are not willing to give up. The social interventions of the secular activists therefore remain on the periphery of the society and are quite irrelevant to the average person on the street or in the village.

Besides the two groups mentioned above, the religious fanatics and the handful of liberal fundamentalists, there is still a

very large number of people, perhaps the majority, that maintain a link with the spiritual traditions of the region. In terms of seeking possible solutions to fundamentalism in the region, one wonders if these spiritual traditions could offer some interventions that are relevant to the everyday lives of the people. Folk spirituality itself has now been somewhat formalized. There are many who would go to shrines, but the power of the liberal and pluralistic poetry of the mystics seems to be getting lost over time. Especially in the cities, where most of the fundamentalism is rooted and where most of the religious riots occur (Nandy et al, 1995; p.8) and among the middle classes, the spirit of this folk poetry and folk spirituality seems to be vanishing. Seeking solutions in spirituality could have its advantages as well as very serious disadvantages but the whole question remains to be fully explored.

In order to explore the factors in the psyche of the subcontinent that allowed for tolerance and that may be drawn upon today to counter the growing trend of religious intolerance, one can proceed in several different ways. Perhaps the most obvious way would be to rely on theological and spiritual texts from the past and analyze what they tell us directly about the issue. However, in the tradition of the sub-continent spirituality (not necessarily religions), there was a well-established bias against writing explicit exegeses about spirituality. Thus there are not that many books to start with. In addition, most of these books were written from one or the other religious tradition and there was usually a conscious attempt to portray a specific picture of their own traditions and its appropriate relations with the other religious traditions around. Also the emphasis almost completely was on how things *should be* as opposed to how it really was. Their conscious, intellectual preaching even when they were directly talking about religious tolerance therefore

may not capture the experience and essence of the lived sense of tolerance in this region.

Mythology, on the other hand, has its origins deep in the psyche of a people. It reflects, mostly unconsciously, the deepest truths of the people and the culture of the region. Moreover, those who tell these stories and sometimes even those who formulate them are usually not consciously trying to preach these truths. The more a myth is a true reflection of the deeper truths of a people, the more deeply rooted it gets in their culture and the more popular it becomes. (For a more complete discussion on the use of mythology for such an analysis, see Appendix I)

Thus, if we desire to understand the specific factors in the deeper psyche of the subcontinent, roughly during Akbar's era, Heer Damodar, provides us with that opportunity. The legend of Heer, one of the most popular stories of at least the Punjab, took deep roots and remained so in the popular and spiritual culture of the area. Heer Damodar is rich with encoded information about the cultural realities of the region in that era. Through a hermeneutic analysis of the way religion was looked at and talked about in the legend and by analyzing how religious and spiritual symbols appear in the text, one can get to a deeper understanding of the factors that contributed to a relatively more tolerant and harmonious coexistence of different religious traditions in that era (for an explanation of a hermeneutic analysis, see Appendix II).

Before getting into the legend and its analysis however it is important to sketch the socio-cultural context of the Indian subcontinent in general, and the Punjab in particular, and look at the major currents of religious interaction and transformation and how they affected the milieu during that period.

Part I provides this background against which we can explore and analyze the legend. It is this matrix in the background that gives form to the text. The folkloric legend reflects aspects of this matrix. In constructing the background, I

have left out introductory-level details, whether religious or socio-political, that are well-known enough. I would, on the other hand, spend some time on aspects of history that are controversial or require a re-framing of events. These aspects are moreover selected in relation to the main theme of religious tolerance in the area. In other words, these are aspects of the history of the area that would have an impact on the way people would view a particular religion or relate to people of that religion. Their discussion in Part I leads to specific areas of interventions on either side of the border that will be explored more towards the end of this book.

Part II starts with the story of Heer as written by Damodar during Akbar's era. The story is followed by an analysis of the main themes, especially the spiritual patterns that emerge in the text. Certain aspects of these patterns and the nature of reality that they seem to operate in and reinforce, are outlined. Given the strength of, or the emphasis on, these aspects of reality it becomes possible to understand why intolerance was not as much of an issue for people of the subcontinent at that time as it is today.

In **Conclusion**, we observe how the picture of religion that emerges in the everyday lives of people, is very different than what it seems to us today. It is this different sense of religion and spirituality that seems to be crucial in determining how people of different religions could live together harmoniously for so long in the subcontinent.

The ultimate goal of getting an insight into the factors that contributed to tolerance remains to be able to better design social interventions that would counter intolerance in a way that is relevant to and rooted in the traditions of the subcontinent. In the **Epilogue**, we explore some of these possible interventions.

1

Religious Interaction in the Subcontinent

There are interesting and significant questions in the history of the subcontinent that need to be reconsidered. For Example, was there a 'Hindu' religion before foreigners gave the religions of the whole region this geographical name of 'Sindhu' or 'Hindu'? Who did it serve to have all various religious traditions of the area lumped together under one umbrella term? Do Brahmins have a right to the social, political, economic and even religious power base in India? If the concept of Varna (caste) or even what justifies the castes, the concepts of Karma and reincarnation, were not present anywhere in the original texts, the Vedas, of the Brahmins, when and how did these terms gain credibility enough to justify a whole spiritual social order – Dharma – in India? In relation to Muslims in India, what was the legitimacy of their political power in India? And how accurate is it, in any case, for Indian Muslims to talk about the Arab invasion or the Afghan rule over India as the time when 'we came to India' or 'when we ruled India'? What does it say about Muslims in Pakistan today if they want to identify themselves with Timur Lung and glorify the

names of Muhammad Ghauri and Mehmood Ghaznavi? These and many other questions need to be answered if we want to understand the role of religion and the interplay of various religious identities in the subcontinent. There are scores of delusions related to religious developments and interplay that are carefully guarded on a collective level, both consciously and unconsciously, that need to be challenged if we are ever to face and deal with the reality of religion-based oppression and injustice in the region. Guarding illusions and delusions in the collective psyche takes its toll in the overall psychological and social development of the people. This background discussion is necessary also because it provides the backdrop against which the legend of Heer can reveal its deeper meanings.

Heer Damodar is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural history of the Punjab and the Indian subcontinent. It is against the socio-cultural realities of that time that the legend can be properly analyzed. As a famous historian of the subcontinent wrote, "once a literary product has been examined and understood in the context of that age, it becomes easier to utilize it" (Nizami, 1982; p.4). How the legend and its meanings become relevant in the present age and how they may be utilized is something that emerges as we go along.

When we talk of the history of the sub-continent, we are looking at several thousand years of socio-cultural, political and spiritual history. There are volumes upon volumes written on various aspects of this history. We have to be clear about what part of it is most relevant for us here. What *is* clear is the long-term goal of this inquiry. The goal here is to explore and understand the issue of religious intolerance in the subcontinent and maybe in the South Asian region in general. I therefore let the purpose of the study define what is relevant in the history of the subcontinent. In terms of religions, I keep my focus more on

what is now referred to as 'Hinduism' and Islam. The formal aspects of these religions have mostly been viewed as diametrically opposed to each other, embodying the "other", and so provide us with an appropriate bipolar tension for our purposes here. They are also the two most relevant religions in terms of religious interaction in the subcontinent today.

In terms of selecting relevant aspects of history that we need to look at, in relation to Islam, for example, we would be looking at the Sufi developments rather briefly as much has been written about that and its relation to tolerance and pluralism. We would however be looking more closely at the role of the Muslim conquests and the establishment of Muslim states in the subcontinent and how that could have influenced the interaction between Muslims and others in India. Here we need to keep things in perspective as traditionally communities within India have had rather isolated developments and an Afghan overthrowing a Turk Sultan in Delhi may not have had much influence over how a Muslim farmer in Punjab interacted with his Hindu neighbor. Of course, when villages or towns were destroyed in the name of religion or if the farmer was suddenly required to pay a lower tax than his neighbor, because of his religion, that certainly could have strained their relationship.

The history of religious interaction that had emerged before the arrival of Islam had a role to play in how Islam developed in the subcontinent. Because of these pre-Islamic religious patterns, both of the two major streaks that developed within Islam in the region, the Sufi and the fundamentalist streak, had something unique, that could not be found anywhere else in the Islamic world. Certain aspects of earlier religious developments in the area therefore need to be understood before the relationship between Hinduism and Islam becomes clearer. The tendency of the Brahmanical social order, for example, to assimilate other religious traditions and how it made compromises to counter the threat created by other religions that grew in reaction to it or

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outside of it, creates patterns of religious interaction in the subcontinent that need to be brought out. We therefore start with the group of religions that come under the umbrella term of 'Hinduism'.

2

The Brahmanical Tradition and Hinduism

Hinduism

In writing about Hinduism in the context of its relation to other religious traditions, the most significant fact might be that the term 'Hindu' did not really refer to a religion originally. Coined by those coming from the outside, the term referred to a geographical region and the people of that region. This is not just a semantic issue as within this region there were people belonging to an amazing range of relatively isolated religious and spiritual traditions that were all lumped together later under this one term. The pluralistic traditions of south Asia were dealt with in this manner not just because of the insensitivity of the foreigners but also because this was in line with the assimilative tendency of the group in power within this region – the Aryans (Brahmins and Kshatriyas). We will discuss briefly how, over time, they developed one social power structure through a sacred law within the region that attempted to divide the population in a very rigid hierarchical system. The

Aryans of course were on top of this social order and the lowest castes were often treated in very inhumane ways. To assimilate more and more tribes and people within this 'sacred' social order, the Aryans had to, again, over time, absorb and assimilate these people through various mechanisms and processes that are outlined below. The effects of this process of assimilation and the process itself still continue to this day. It therefore served these power groups to allow outsiders to lump together all people of this region by giving them a common name, 'Hindu', and a common religion, 'Hinduism'.

'Hindu' is the Persian version of the term 'Sindhu'. 'Sindhu' is the Sanskrit name for river Indus. 'S' in the beginning of a word in old dialects of Persian becomes an 'H'. Thus 'Sindhu' becomes 'Hindu' in Persian and the region around river Indus and farther east becomes 'Hindustan' – 'land of the Indus' or 'land of the Hindu'. Hindu was also a term originally used by the foreigners for all the people of this region. The name India is similarly rooted in Indus and all the people of India, whatever their religion might have been, thus became Indians or Hindu.

That Hinduism was a blanket term for all earlier religions of the Hindus, of the people of this geographical area, would not have been as significant if it was only a semantic issue from a long time ago. The fact that this umbrella term caught on so completely is rooted in and represents major religious and mythological manipulations with very serious social and power implications over thousands of years. What is included in 'Hinduism' today was not *a* religion at all in earlier times. Let us start with the sketches of very early spiritual traditions in the area, from before the arrival of the Aryans, and then see why and more importantly, how the Aryans tried to bring them together over time.

Early Indigenous religious developments (Pre-Aryan)

One of the problems that we face in trying to reconstruct the early development of religions in the subcontinent is that most of the early traditions and their developments and interplay was pre-literate. Only the Brahmins memorized their texts and made a living out of reciting and chanting them (Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads etc.). Most of what we know of the early theology of the sub-continent is what survived in the incorporated form of these Brahmin texts. There are those today who make a good case for separating the lived tradition from the textual religions (Ashish Nandy, for example). They also point out how when the British and other Europeans got interested in the religions of India, it was their bias in favour of the philosophical, metaphysical, written texts of the Brahmins that contributed to the discounting of all the other more common strands of "lived" traditions of religion and spirituality (Nandy et al, 1995) like the Bhakti or Devi worship. It is therefore not only incomplete but irresponsible to view religious interaction in this area as a textual and philosophical phenomenon without regard to its significance in the larger scheme of things. The traditions of preliterate people need not be overlooked just because they are harder to access, textually. Thus in spite of the obvious difficulties, there is a need to construct the picture of religious developments in the subcontinent from a time before the Aryans came to the subcontinent.

There is enough evidence to suggest that forms of spirituality existed in the region before the coming of the Kshatriya and the Brahmins. We know these strands and trends by their differences to the Aryan spirituality, in character or in essential nature, by the fact that until quite late they were rooted much more in the indigenous languages and resisted being Sanskritized, by their closeness in form to the non-Vedic agricultural or matriarchal cultural systems and by their connection to the pre-Aryan archeological finds in the area.

Could the nature of goddess (Devi) worship, for example, be a form more fitting to the Kshatriya, nomadic warriors, or to the indigenous population that had a relationship with the land through agriculture? Alain Danielou observes:

“The conception of supreme divinity as a woman, a mother, a womb, does not seem to have had at first any place in the Aryan scriptures, which are the religious books of a patriarchal society....Some of the people who came to be integrated into the Hindu fold had always worshipped the divine Mother”
(Danielou, 1964; p.256)

In the archeological records found all over the earliest Indus Valley civilizations we find the presence of the goddess figures that seem to represent the most important deity of the time (Majumdar, 1951; p.186). We shall come back to the patriarchal nature of the Aryan scriptures that Danielou refers to in some detail later.

There are scholars who believe that the characteristics of devotional practices such as image-worship or deva-puja are most certainly non-Aryan in nature and may even be pre-Aryan or pre-Vedic (Vedic literature being associated with the Brahmins/Aryans). This tendency of giving physical form to deities and then having a deeply emotional connection with them showed up most powerfully in the Bhakti tradition much later on but had earlier manifestations in temples devoted to particular gods and goddesses. The relationship between devotion, temples and spirituality remained concentrated mostly in South India where Brahmin influence was minimal for a long time. As opposed to these indigenous traditions the Brahmins conducted their Vedic rituals in sacred spaces that were created for those particular rituals and destroyed afterwards. This form again was

more fitting for the relatively nomadic culture of the Aryans. This is why we have almost no temples devoted to the primary Vedic gods (Indra, Brahma, Agni etc.) anywhere in India. Even in the later times, a few centuries before the common era, when the Brahmins had fully defined a social order for the subcontinent, the temple priests were looked down upon as somehow involved in lower forms of religious practices (Laws of Manu 3:180). The god and goddesses that most of the temples were devoted to have pre-Aryan or non-Aryan roots, as we will show a little later.

Common in the archeological finds from the pre-Aryan era is the three faced deity (trimukha) wearing a horned head-dress (once even a trishul, a trident), seated cross-legged on a throne, with penis erect and surrounded by wild animals including buffaloes. This figure is also connected to fertility and to bow-hunting. These characteristics clearly have a one-to-one correspondence to, who is referred to, somewhat uncomfortably, in the early Vedic literature as, Siva, Rudra or Pasupati – ‘Lord of the animals’ (Majumdar, 1951; p.186-87). In Thomas Hopkin’s view

"Indus religious interests seem, in summary, to have revolved around the worship of male animals raised to sacred status, the parallel worship of a horned male figure represented as Lord of (male) Creatures, worship of the lingam as the supreme symbol of male powers, and a conservative emphasis on order, restraint, and purification by bathing. Worship of the female powers of fertility and fecundity may have constituted a subsidiary cult at the popular or domestic level." (1971; p.9)

Here Hopkins makes reference to pre-Aryan ascetic practices. Elder also makes the connection of asceticism to the seals with the horned god seated in cross-legged posture of the later yogins, found in the Indus Valley excavations (Elder,

1970). Thus some form of the ascetic Yogic practices seems to be pre-Aryan as well. The Atharva Veda talks of ascetics, Vratyas, living outside of the community who have fallen from pure Aryanhood (Elder, 1970). It indicates that these early Aryans were involved in practices that were most probably indigenous and non-Aryan in origin.

The Aryan Invasion (Establishment of the Brahmin Power)

Of all the people who have invaded the Indian subcontinent and established their power and control in this land, the Brahmins have done so most efficiently and effectively. The Aryan or more specifically the Brahmin subjugation of the people of the land was so complete and so deep that it would be hard to find its parallel anywhere in human history. They established their position of power first in the northern subcontinent and eventually all over India through an elaborate process of creating religious and spiritual traditions and folklore over hundreds of years. Their extremely privileged social position was justified through carefully creating, inducting and interconnecting concepts like karma, punerjanama (reincarnation), dharma (sacred social order) and varna (castes; literally meaning *color*). None of these concepts are part of any of the Vedas—the earliest writings of the Brahmins. The Brahmins had an unparalleled ability, also through spinning spiritual folklore, to assimilate any other spiritual or religious tradition into their own dharmic reality always resulting in further expansion and strengthening of their position and power in the society. There was also a tendency to eliminate any tradition that resisted assimilation. Most of the formal religious interaction in the subcontinent, including the almost complete elimination of Buddhism in India and the fanatic streak in Indian Muslims, can

be seen as a dance between the Brahmin tendencies to overpower and the various reactions to these tendencies.

Before the Brahmins came to the subcontinent however, according to most of the historians of the area, there had been earlier Aryan migrations, mostly of nomadic warriors, from the North and North West. It is generally accepted that these Aryans came from Central Asia, entering the region through the Punjab. These Aryans eventually constituted the Kshatriya caste—the warriors and the rulers. It was around 1500 BCE when the later Aryans, the Brahmins, moved into the North and center of India (in the Madhyadesa) and started composing or structuring the collection of Sanskrit hymns that were known as the Vedas (Grierson).

There is a new development mostly within some Indian historian circles that claims that there was no Aryan migration into the subcontinent at all; that Aryans were always a part of the Indian society. They claim that the Aryan texts are much older than any of the earlier estimates. They can take it back to 20,000 years ago and some claiming that they had existed as such before the dawn of time. These new versions of history had even been introduced in the school textbook in some districts of India. Why such ideas would originate and this ethnocentric rewriting of Aryan history becomes clear by the end of this section, once we have seen the way Aryan power was developed and sustained in the region. What is being done today and the methods employed to do it, are not much different than what has been done over the centuries. Whenever there was a need, new versions of history and texts were created. For now, however, we proceed with the history accepting the general view of the Aryan migration of the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins into the Indian subcontinent.

The Brahmins, not being warriors, allowed the earlier Aryans to maintain their power as rulers in the land. Their own position was established, maintained and justified, more than anything else, through the articulation of dharma – a sacred social order that divided the society into rigid social classes and castes. The

Brahmins assumed the position of the priests, the highest and purest of all castes. They were responsible for conducting all sacrifices and rituals. In addition they were responsible for instructing everyone else on all religious and spiritual matters including how best to live their lives. Everyone was given a role and place within this social order. And over thousands of years, it was mostly the dharma and the power structure inherent in this sacred law that was preserved and strengthened through all kinds of religious mixing and manipulations.

Before getting into how dharma was justified, it would be useful to recognize what it did and continues, on many levels, to do to the Indian society. The caste that a particular group is assigned to has always had serious real-life consequences for the individuals within the group. The laws governing the lives of each caste and the limits of their interaction have been minutely defined, mostly through a document, about two thousand years old, called Manu Smriti, Manu Samhita or the Laws of Manu, or sometimes simply referred to as the Dharm Shastr. The text contains twelve chapters, with an average of over 200 articles per chapter. Manu, who is described in the text as one of the gods, tells the “great sages... precisely and in due order the sacred laws of each of the castes” (1:1-2). All translations of the quotes in this section are from George Buhler (Laws of Manu, published by Motilal Banarsidass/Unesco. 1961)

As mentioned above, when the Brahmins started coming to the subcontinent, there developed an understanding between them and the Kshatriyas where they could both share power over the indigenous population in their own domains in a way that would strengthen each others position. This is clearly reflected in the Dharm Shastr:

“Kshatriyas prosper not without Brahmanas, Brahmanas prosper not without Kshatriyas; Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, being closely united, prosper in this (world) and in the next.” (9:322)

The task of ruling the people and of fighting was prescribed for the Kshatriyas:

“A Kshatriya, who has received according to the rule the sacrament prescribed by the Veda, must duly protect this whole (world).

For, when these creatures, being without a king, through fear dispersed in all directions, the Lord created a king for the protection of this whole (creation).

Taking (for that purpose) eternal particles of Indra, of the Wind, of Yama, of the Sun, of Fire, of Varuna, of the Moon, and of the Lord of wealth (Kubera).

Because a king has been formed of particles of those lords of the gods, he therefore surpasses all created beings in luster;

And, like the sun, he burns eyes and hearts; nor can anybody on earth even gaze on him.

Through his (supernatural) power he is Fire and Wind, he Sun and Moon, he the Lord of justice (Yama), he Kubera, he great Indra.

Even an infant king must not be despised, (from an idea) that he is a (mere) mortal; for he is a great deity in human form. (7:2-8)

The kshatriyas are asked through the use of army to be ready to strike and gain what they do not possess yet, to protect what they have and to always explore means, through the use of power or otherwise, to increase their kingdoms. After the battles the warriors are allowed to take booty of valuables, animals and women as long as a choice portion of the booty goes to the king (7:96-103).

If the right to rule the lands and to increase the rule and to collect booty is what the Kshatriyas get in the deal, the Brahmins perhaps get an even better share in this deal. The articles quoted above also say that once the king has augmented what he owns, let him liberally bestow what he has acquired on worthy men (7:101). The ‘worthy men’ are of course the Brahmins, as giving and keeping treasures with the Brahmins shows up at many places in the Manu Samhita, for example:

“But the king shall bestow, as is proper, jewels of all sorts, and presents for the sake of sacrifices on Brahmanas learned in the Vedas.” (11:4)

“... and in order to acquire merit, he shall give to Brahmanas enjoyments and wealth.” (7:79)

“...for that (money which is given) to Brahmanas is declared to be an imperishable treasure for the kings. Neither thieves nor foes can take it, nor can it be lost; hence an imperishable store must be deposited by kings with Brahmanas.” (7:82,83)

Treasures kept in temples for safeguarding was thus not an unusual practice in India. As far as keeping treasures goes, any treasure found by a person, depending on his caste, only a portion of it could be kept by him, even if he was a king, unless he was a Brahmin, in which case “he may take even the whole (of it); for he is master of everything” (8:37).

The position reserved for the Brahmins is not without reason, according to Manu Samhita, and is justified because of their superiority *in origin* to all others:

“On account of his pre-eminence, on account of the superiority of his origin, on account of his observance of (particular) restrictive

rules, and on account of his particular sanctification the Brahmana is the lord of (all) castes (varna)”. (10:3)

Also, “whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brahmana; on account of the excellence of his origin...” (1:100)

Much more than the lord of all castes, therefore, “he is by right the lord of this whole creation” (1:93)

In relation to the king, therefore “whatever meritorious acts (such a brahmana) performs under the full protection of the king, thereby the king’s length of life, wealth, and kingdom increase” (7:136). Thus, the Kshatriya king is required to “daily worship aged Brahmanas who know the Vedas and are pure” (7:38) and keep in his court, in the most distinguished position, a learned Brahmin, with whom he should deliberate on the most important affairs of the kingdom (7:58).

The list of privileges to Brahmins compared to other castes goes on and on, from the children of Brahmin wives getting more inheritance to the protection of their property to their own physical security and wellbeing. Even if they commit all possible crimes, for which those of other castes would lose their lives, they should only be “banished”, without any damage to their property or body (8:380).

At the lowest end of the four Varna were the dark-skinned Shudras. Chapter 8 of the Manu Samhita describes the punishments for them for various crimes. They were much worse than those of the three higher castes. For simple behaviors showing disrespect to others of higher origin than them, they could have their tongues cut out, have red-hot iron nails driven into their mouths, have hot oil poured into their mouths and ears and have their hips branded. For actually hitting someone of a higher origin with a hand or a foot, the hand or the foot would be cut off and for other more serious crimes they would lose their lives. The severity of these punishments would not be unusual, especially for the times when these laws were written, except for

the inherent inequalities based on the assumed essential nature of people by birth, and the fact that while other laws come and go, in some form these basic inequalities have survived down to this day.

Based on their essential nature, the Shudras were born to “serve meekly” those who were born higher than them (1:91). Thus according to the Laws of Manu, *“a Sudra... may compel to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent (Svayambhu) to be the slave of a Brahmana. A Sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate in him, who can set him free from it?”* (8:413,414). However, if he really served a Brahmin master well, his highest duty, he could attain in his next life a higher caste! (9:334). In this lifetime, however, his social life and social interactions were strictly limited. He was not to associate with the Brahmins (4:80), other than for serving them. For example, he could under no circumstances have food with a Brahmin (4:211). But, perhaps more importantly, he was to have no access to the religious and spiritual texts or practices, not even to the sound of the texts being recited, “his service of those born higher than him, being enough for him” (4:81, 99).

Below the lowest caste were many tribes that were considered too low in their essential nature and therefore outcastes. A Brahmin would have to take a bath to purify himself if he was touched by one of these people (5:85) and some of these tribes were therefore required to live outside of the villages and to leave the villages and towns before nightfall (10:51,54).

The main norms that this Dharm Shastr has been there to protect and ensure are the privileges and the duties, more privileges for some and more duties for others, of the Aryans and the indigenous people of the subcontinent. The four castes had to observe their proper occupations (or else they would be migrated in their next lifetime into “despicable bodies” (12:70)),

especially the lower castes, who, if they “swerved from their duties, they would throw this (whole) world into confusion” (8:418). And thus anything that causes a mixing of the castes “cuts up even the roots and causes the destruction of everything” (8:353). This “everything”, this social order, made sacred, had to be and for the most part was, successfully protected.

The justification for the sacred dharmic laws and therefore for dharma itself, which is seen as a fundamental premise of what came to be known as Hinduism, simply put, is that one is born in a particular social class or circumstance as a direct result of what one must have done in one’s earlier lifetimes. So, no matter how low one’s social status is, one must stay within the parameters set for one by the Brahmins because that is exactly what one *deserves*. If someone revolts against the social order or even crosses the boundaries set by it, one would be accordingly born even lower in the next lifetimes. If however one accepts and serves the social order and those who were born higher than oneself, as they too deserved to be higher because of their earlier lifetimes, then one has a chance of improving ones circumstances, *the next time*, in the next birth.

It is interesting that concepts like karma and rebirth that are essential for this justification of dharma were developed or incorporated, as needed, over time. None of these concepts appear in any of the four Vedas or in the texts known as Brahmanas that were composed in the following six to eight hundred years (Tull, 1989; p.25). In fact the very first articulation of the Karma doctrine appears in the late Brahmanic and early Upanishadic period (800 BCE – 600 BCE) in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad (Tull, 1989; p.28). As opposed to the Brahmanas that dealt mostly with sacrifice and ritual and that mostly reinforced the essential role of the Brahmins in the society, the Upanishads were discursive texts that sought to express the nature of reality (Tull, 1989; p.3). Before the Upanishads there was only one mention

slightly suggestive of Karma and rebirth in the Rig-Veda. It talks of an individual after death as follows:

“May your eye go to the sun, your life’s breath to the wind. Go to the sky or to earth, as is your nature; or go to the waters if that is your fate. Take root in the plants with your limbs” (Rig-Veda 10.16.3; O Flaherty, *The Rig-Veda*, p.49).

This passage however, by itself, according to most scholars, amounts to no great significance in the general Vedic views, in terms of supporting ideas of rebirth or Karma (Tull, 1989; p.26; Keith, p.401). It was only in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad that a clear statement of Karma was finally articulated as “a man becomes pure through pure deeds and impure through impure deeds” (Prabhavananda and Manchester, 1957; p.109). This statement is directly followed by its connection to rebirth: “As a man’s desire is, so in his will; as his will is, so is his deed; and as his deed is, so is his reward, whether good or bad... Thus he who has desires continues subject to rebirths”. Transmigration of the soul is articulated very clearly at other places in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, like:

“As a leech, having reached the end of a blade of grass, takes hold of another blade and draws itself to it, so the Self, having left this body behind it unconscious, takes hold of another body and draws himself to it” (Prabhavananda and Manchester, 1957; p.108)

Thus with concepts of Karma and rebirth in place, the justification for the sacred law structuring the society into various Varna was complete. The Upanisad thus states:

“Brahman created out of himself priests, warriors, tradesmen, and servants, among both gods and men. There is nothing higher than the law. The Law is the truth” (Prabhavananda and Manchester, 1957; p.81).

As the overall justification and treatment of castes go, if one is relying on a particular Upanisad or any other text someone

may justifiably argue that it is but one text among so many and that perhaps if we were to look elsewhere a very different picture of Karma may emerge. Let us therefore move to the Bhagavad-Gita at this point as it remains one of the most well-known and well-respected texts of Hinduism according to most from the East or West. References to Gita, for example, are found throughout Emerson's journals and letters since he considers it "as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence..." (Miller, 1986; p.155). In comparison to the Gita, according to Thoreau, "our modern world and its literature seems puny and trivial" (Miller, 1986; p.156). One can go on and on quoting praise for the book from all over the world. What is relevant for us here is that there seems to be a consensus that it is one of the most established and authoritative sources of Hindu wisdom.

Bhagavad-Gita is a small book placed within the sixth book of the Mahabharata, a huge war epic, composed of 18 books. The epic was composed over the centuries between 400BCE and AD 400 though the tribal wars it tells the story of were fought in the Punjab early in the first millennium BC. (Miller, 1986; p.3). The Gita is a dialogue between Arjuna, a Kshatriya (warrior) by caste, who is leading his army in one of the battles and Krishna who appears as his charioteer in the text. The whole dialogue takes place before the battle starts, as Arjuna stops his chariot in the middle of the battlefield where the two huge armies were ready to fight and kill each other. He starts having ethical concerns over his Dharmic duty, which was to be a warrior:

*"I do not want to kill them
even if I am killed Krishna;
not for kingship of all three worlds
much less for the earth!" (1:35)*

Thus, refusing to fight, he lays down his bow (1:47). Krishna however puts an end to his ethical doubts about his dharma

through his teachings, telling Arjuna that if he were to properly understand Dharma, he would not grieve over the living or the dying (2:11). He urges,

*“Look to your own duty;
do not tremble before it;
nothing is better for a warrior
than a battle of sacred duty...
If you fail to wage this war
of sacred duty,
you will abandon your own duty
and fame only to gain evil.” (2:31,33)*

In addition to telling Arjuna that he should not abandon his sacred duty, he went further to assert that in some way, Arjuna *could* not stay away from his duty as it was so very intrinsic to his nature. Thus towards the end of the Gita he says:

*“Your resolve is futile
if a sense of individuality
makes you think, “I shall not fight”
nature will compel you to.
You are bound by your own action,
intrinsic to your being, Arjuna;
even against your will you must do
what delusion now makes you refuse.” (18:59, 60)*

There are those who try to justify this sacred duty and nature on the basis of personality that one develops through one’s life experiences. The Gita makes it clear that this nature is *intrinsic* and *essential* to one’s being in the sense that one is born with it. As Krishna explains:

“The action of priests, warriors,

*commoners, and servants
are apportioned by qualities
born of their intrinsic being. (18:41)
...action that is essentially service
is intrinsic to the servant (18:44)*

These qualities that are intrinsic to one's being, that are part of one's spirit, that being the reason why one is born in a particular caste and therefore given specific duties, are detailed in the Gita in several places. A few examples are given below:

*Man's spirit is set in nature,
experiencing the qualities born of nature;
its attachment to the qualities causes
births in the wombs of good and evil." (13:21)
all creatures in the world
are either divine or demonic... (16:6)
Brilliance, patience, resolve,
clarity, absence of envy and of pride;
these characterize a man
born with divine traits.
Hypocrisy, arrogance, vanity,
anger, harshness, ignorance;
these characterize a man
born with demonic traits." (16:3,4)*

And all of this was done through divine intervention, so that Krishna says clearly:

*"I created mankind in four classes,
different in their qualities and actions..."*

It is clear that there was no easy escape from this rigid social order for people, unless they revolted against the belief system *in its entirety*, since there was even a price for revolting, spanning

lifetimes, as long as they were staying within the system. Rejecting all of this was hard to do as this involved not only the Brahmanical beliefs and gods but was made to involve beliefs and gods of the indigenous populations as well, as will be discussed below. Thus given the whole argument, Krishna reinforces that even if one thinks that there is something wrong with the Dharma, one should still not give up ones duties and one's place in this social order.

*“Arjuna, a man should not
relinquish action he is born to, even if it is flawed;...
(18:48)*

Also,

*“Your duty done imperfectly
is better than another man's done well.
It is better to die in one's own duty;
Another man's duty is perilous. (3:35)*

Thus Dharma is the only issue that even a text as full of spiritual insight and wisdom as the Gita would not compromise on. In fact it does everything to reinforce it. There are those who would argue that this aspect of the text is to be taken metaphorically. They say that the battleground of the Gita is within oneself and it is the inner fight that is being referred to in the dialogue. But after the dialogue ends, as the story continues in the Mahabharata, Arjuna did pick up his bow and fight the war as Krishna and his own Dharmic duty required him to. These wars that are being used to teach us a lesson are a real part of the history of the Punjab (Miller, 1986; Introduction) with real warriors and real bloodshed. When Arjuna is told that because he is born in the warrior caste, heroism, fiery energy and refusal to retreat in battle are all intrinsic to his nature, this could not be just symbolic. And if fighting a war for a Kshatriya was a metaphor, what about when Krishna asserts that it is the Dharma of lower castes to be involved in commerce or

farming and for castes even lower than that to be serving others because that is in their intrinsic nature (18:44)? What would commerce be a metaphor for? It is naïve, at best, to accept excuses like 'it is only a metaphor'. Dharma and the caste system that resulted from it with all of its social injustices, perhaps much worse than bloodshed, were not a metaphor but a reality in the everyday lives of millions upon millions of people in India.

When Gita was composed there had been, for many centuries, competing ideologies in the society, like Buddhism and Jainism, that offered people an alternative to the rigidity and oppression of the Dharmic order. These ideologies did not recognize distinction between people on the basis of colour and offered the possibility of ultimate liberation to men and women of all castes alike. Tribe, clan and caste system had started to disintegrate in the society and the social supremacy of the Brahmins was challenged and under a serious threat (Ryan, 1985; p.4). In fact starting with the end of the sixth century BCE, according to Hopkins, "the Brahmin tradition was on the defensive" (1971; p.510).

Faced with such challenges, the Aryan Sanskrit tradition rarely failed to take strategic steps to counter resistance and, at all costs, save their Dharmic order. The Upanishads were being written when Buddhism and Jainism took form in the subcontinent. Many non-Vedic ideas of the Yatis, Munis and the Sramanas, by now common among the Kshatriyas, like the final liberation, Moksha, and monotheistic thought, were incorporated into the Brahmanical tradition. The concepts of the Brahman and Atman were retained and given a central place. Yoga had developed outside the older Brahmanical circles. "Given Vedic sanction in the Upanishads, it provided a means of release that rivaled Buddhist meditation without compromising the concepts of Brahman and Atman." (Hopkins, 1971; p.67). In order to include Moksha (final liberation) as a possible goal, asceticism was given a place in the tradition, and a fourth Ashrama of the Sannyasi (an ascetic stage of life) was added to the original three

of Brahmachari, Grihastha and Vanaprastha (Encarta 96). According to Elder, the Kshatriyas during this time were also recognized as spiritual teachers (1970; p.43).

Some of these strategic compromises made by the Brahmins are clearly evident in the Gita. One of them was to, for the first time in Vedic literature, open the doors of the final liberation from the cycle of rebirths, Moksha, to the non-Brahmins. The other religious traditions, as mentioned above, had already opened this level of spirituality to all people. So Gita, finally recognized that women and commoners and men of low rank and even ‘men born in the womb of evil’ could attain Moksha (9:32). However, the trick was that, while the other religions did not recognize castes at all, in the Gita, it was exactly through the performance of Dharmic duties that people could attain Moksha in this very lifetime. As Krishna explains: “His spirit quickens to sacred duty, and he finds eternal peace...” (9:31)

The Gita also represents other more broad-based compromises and interventions needed to counter the Buddhist and Jain threats. Through Gita and Mahabharata, the Brahmins made a major compromise and incorporated the devotional, Bhakti tradition, popular in the indigenous population, into the Brahmanic fold. According to Radhakrishnan and Moore, it is in the Mahabharata that the emphasis on Bhakti towards a personal god was recognized for the first time in the Brahmanical tradition (1973; p.99).

Bhakti Marga is commonly understood as the path through devotion and surrender. The Encyclopedia of Religions describes it as a path of exclusive devotion to a divine or human figure, representing or embodying the ultimate reality (Eliade, 1987; p.130). There seems to be a general consensus that Bhakti was a development outside of the Vedic or Aryan tradition. There are however a few verses of the Vedas that portray an almost

devotional relationship to the Vedic gods. The following verses from the Rig-Veda could perhaps be quoted in this regard:

"Agni, thou art our Providence, our Father thou: we are thy brethren and thou art our spring of life." (1.31.10)

"Thou quickly passest by all others, Agni, for him to whom thou hast appeared most lovely, wondrously fair, adorable, effulgent, the guest of men, the darling of people." (5.1.9)

"I long for Indra with my heart and spirit." (6.28.5)

"How and what love hath he (Indra) for those who love him, who have entwined in him their firm affection?" (10.43.1)

"Where, O Rudra, is that merciful hand of thine which is healing and cooling?" (2.33.7)

"We meditate on that excellent splendour of the god, Savitri: may he stimulate our thoughts." (3.62.10)

- (Quoted by Dhavonamy, 1971)

While we may find such isolated expressions of devotion in the Vedas, Bhakti was not a well-developed sentiment or a coherent tradition within the Vedic tradition. It was mostly used only in the relatively "give-and-take" manner in rituals and sacrifices. In the indigenous mindset, on the other hand, different even from the formalized Bhakti Marga, Bhakti seems to be more a part of the everyday lifestyle. Vivekananda says that Bhakti is not for the attainment of any object (like Moksha) but "is its own fruition, its own means and its own end" (1955; p.177).

There are several factors that show the indigenous, non-Vedic origins and nature of Bhakti traditions. They usually did not observe caste or gender discriminations. Most of them remained rooted till quite late mostly in the Dravidian population. The devotional tradition of the Alvars, for example, out of whose devotional activity the Bhagavata Purana was produced, remained mostly limited to the Dravidians and

unaffected by the pantheistic philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads (Zaehner, 1962; p.127). The activities of the Alvars were common in the 8th century CE with most probably much older roots. Their language was Tamil and not Sanskrit and among them were Shudras, outcastes and female saints like Shri Andal. (Zaehner, 1962; p.127)?

Even before the Mahabharata, the Upanishads had also started incorporating some of the Bhakti ideas. The form of devotion that slowly emerged in this context can be exemplified by, "not because of desire of a husband is the husband dear, but because of desire for the Self is a husband dear..." of the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (2.4) or the following passage from the Mundaka Upanishad:

*This Self cannot be obtained by instruction,
nor by sacrifice nor by much learning.
He is to be obtained by him alone whom he
elects;
to him this Self reveals his own real form
(3.2.3)*

- (quoted by Dhavamony, 1971)

This was a new idea as typically Brahmins were known for their performance of sacrifices for kings and others and for their religious instruction and here the idea is that the ultimate Atman within reveals itself more through devotion. The Atman or the Divine Self within oneself, however, retained a somewhat impersonal character. In the later centuries, though, the Upanishadic thought moved from the "Pantheistic Brahmanism" of the Vedas and the earlier Upanishads to a personal God that would be higher than the ultimate Vedic god, Brahman. It is in the Katha and the Svetasvatara Upanishads that a fully developed Upanishadic Bhakti tradition emerges. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad the personified *Atman* gets identified with Rudra (Siva)

and His immanent form, Shakti. Here, as Hopkins observes, Siva is recognized not just as *a* god but *the* God (1971). The Upanishad declares, according to Dhavamony, that "its entire teaching will become manifest only to him who has the highest love for God and for the guru.

*To the great-souled man who has loyal
and great love (bhakti) for [his] God,
who loves his spiritual master even as his God,
the matter of this discourse will shine with
clearest light,...(6.23)"*

- (Dhavamony, 1971)

Most important for us here, going back to the first coherent incorporation of the Bhakti tradition in the Mahabharata, is not just that the *devotional path* was taken over by the Vedic tradition but that *the god* to whom the local population was devoted to was assimilated as well. There were several ways in which this assimilation would happen. The most common, evident in Gita / Mahabharata also, was through the idea of incarnation of Vedic gods.

Krishna, before the Mahabharata, was not a Vedic god. Krishna Vasudeva was apparently a hero of a Yadava tribe devoted to the worship of Bhagavata—an infinite and eternal god of a monotheistic religion. Before the 4th century BCE, Krishna, under the name of Vasudeva, became identified with Bhagavata. In order to establish Brahmanic authority, according to Hopkins, myths like those of Krishna and Bhagavata were woven into the popular Sanskrit epics (like the Mahabharata) that “could be used as sourcebooks by a variety of theistic groups while preserving their essentially Brahmanical orientation” (Hopkins, 1971; p.96). Thus in the Mahabharata Krishna becomes an incarnation of the Vedic god, Vishnu, bringing all of his followers into the Vedic fold. In the Gita,

Arjuna addresses him directly as “Vishnu” (11:24). Krishna explains the phenomenon of incarnation to Arjuna as:

*“Where sacred duty decays
and chaos prevails,
then, I create
myself, Arjuna.
To protect men of virtue
and destroy men who do evil,
To set the standard of sacred duty,
I appear in age after age. ”* (4:7, 8)

So all who turned to Bhagavata or Krishna in devotion without much regard perhaps for caste and therefore closer in that regard to the new religions of Buddhism and Jainism, were now turning to an incarnation of a Vedic god who required them to strictly observe their sacred duty, their Dharma, binding them to the whole caste system. Besides Vishnu, Krishna also gets connected to the Upanishadic literature (as the Supreme Brahman; Ch.10) and the Sankhya system (as the Eternal Purusha; Ch. 11) in the Gita.

The idea of incarnation was used as early in the Aryan tradition as the Vedas themselves where gods like Brahman or Vishnu or Indra would become incarnate to save the gods or conquer the world. Grierson discusses how incarnation was used for taking on possible totem-worship of the fish or the tortoise or the boar or the dwarf through Vishnu.

Vishnu, in other parts of the Mahabharata, is also connected to Narayana who also becomes one of Vishnu’s incarnations. Narayana, a non-Vedic god otherwise, was first mentioned in the Vedic literature in the Satapatha Brahmana and later in the Taittiriya

Aranyaka (where he is also referred to as Hari) and in the Dharma Sutras also he was identified with Vishnu (Hopkins, 1971; p.89).

Just like Krishna and Narayana became identified with Vishnu through the Mahabharata, Rama-Chandra, more commonly known as Ram, another hero of the non-Brahmin population, became yet another incarnation of Vishnu in the other major epic—Ramayana.

Bringing yet more popularity to Vishnu, Krishna's connection to Vishnu was established through the Sanskrit Purana literature which may be even closer to the non-Vedic Bhakti tradition than what was developed through the Gita. The Puranas started taking shape about the same time when the Mahabharata was taking its final form. They also were huge mythological epics that wove together Bhakti to Siva and Vishnu with the Brahmanical teachings on Dharma (Zaehner, 1962, p.126; Hopkins, 1971; p.96). Hopkins describes the Puranas as the principle scriptures of theistic Hinduism (1971; p.95). The Vishnu Purana presents us with a Krishna that is not the austere teacher of the Bhagavad-Gita, conversing with some mythic warrior on a battlefield, but a lover, cowherd god. In the Vishnu Purana and the later Bhagavata Purana, mentioned earlier in relation to the Alvars, Krishna appears as a child and as the young boy playing and dancing with the gopis.

In addition to newly acquired Vaishnava Bhakti (devotion to incarnations of Vishnu), Eliade points out two other major religious traditions that were woven together and incorporated into the Vedic Bhakti: "the bodily mortification and spiritual withdrawal of the Sramanas" as Saiva Bhakti and the "pre-Aryan cults of spirits and goddesses" as the Shakta schools of Bhakti (1987). We will mention the inclusion of the goddesses in the Brahmanical fold below. Here, let us consider briefly the ascetic tradition that became a major part of the Vedic tradition.

Devotion to Siva was mentioned in the Svetasvatara Upanishad, as quoted above. Pasupata is a religious system that

was mentioned in the Mahabharata to have been revealed by Siva and is connected to the Svetasvatara Upanishad. The descriptions of the devotees include leading of ascetic lives, smearing of the bodies with ashes, nakedness, matted hair, living in cemeteries and burning-grounds and peculiar sexual practices. The worship of the eternal creative *Lingam* was also common (Elder, 1970. P.36; Hopkins, 1971. P.97). The distinct set of personal qualities of Rudra-Siva himself (Siva-"the auspicious"-being an attribute of Rudra), according to Hopkins, as discussed above, is "derived from sources outside the Upanishads and, to some extent, from outside the Vedic tradition itself." (1971. p.69). As Sir John Marshal declares, "The cult of Siva-Pasupati (Rudra) was borrowed by the Vedic Aryans from Mohenjo-daro culture" (Majumdar, 1951; p.203). B.K. Ghosh and many other scholars present various arguments to strengthen this position. These practices and the ascetic yogin god are part of the Tantric tradition that is also considered by many scholars to be outside of the Vedic, Brahmanical tradition. The devotees were not limited to Aryans and anyone could be initiated as an ascetic. It therefore seems quite clear that the Aryan tradition either borrowed from, identified with or connected to these already existing ascetic and devotional traditions of the indigenous population of the sub-continent.

In addition to incarnation, another way that many gods and goddesses got related to the Brahmanical tradition was through their relationship with the Vedic gods. Hanuman, described as a monkey-god, became the cunning assistant of Rama and therefore of Vishnu in the Ramayana. Parvati was married off to Siva while Skanda and Ganesha became their sons. River goddesses Ganga and Sarasvati became consorts of Siva and Brahman. Many other goddesses like Durga, Kali and Lakshmi got attached to Siva and Vishnu as well.

Beyond incarnations and relationships to Vedic gods, there were other ways of making the argument used to assimilate one tradition also applicable to another group, sometimes without even changing the texts much. Thus, Grierson explains, in the case of Lakshmi and Vishnu, “so entirely is she looked upon as one with Him that the textbooks are deliberately silent about her; for say they, 'She has done all that He has done, and when we tell of Him we tell of Her’” (p.542). Similarly, Shakti, the energetic (feminine) divine power, having a central role in Tantric schools, became an aspect of Siva. Thus all that had been assimilated into the Saiva tradition also became applicable to the Shakti schools. The whole of the Saiva tradition still needed to be brought more strongly under the Brahmanical fold. Thus the 344th section of the 12th book of the Mahabharata relates a legend where Rudra and Vishnu have a fight and after Brahma intervenes, Rudra accepts the superiority of Vishnu. This is when Vishnu declares: "He who knows Me knows Thee. He that follows Thee, follows Me. There is no difference between Us two." (Grierson; p.542)

Discussion

Whatever the strategy to do so, this Brahmin tendency to bring everyone under the same Dharmic umbrella in fact ended up being praised by many. This assimilative mindset, according to Radhakrishnan, "takes all groups and communities into its one truth and one life" (1957; p.xxix). What is interesting is that no one could himself convert to being a Brahmin. Like a Jew, you are a Brahmin only if you are born a Brahmin. But, unlike Jews, the Brahmins would bring others into their very tight religious and social system even though no one could join them as an equal. The “one truth and one life” of the Brahmins meant extremely different everyday realities for people living within that system, depending on their birth (skin colour of their community, really), with no possibility or option for change within a lifetime.

What remains of interest to a social activist or to anyone believing in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or even basic right to equality by birth for all human beings is how this kind of a system could survive this long without being seriously questioned in the mainstream. In older times one could explain its survival by the fact that non-Aryans did not have access to the language or the texts that after assimilation had their own gods telling them to follow the Brahmin Dharma. But the fact that none of the foundations of the Dharmic reality were really Vedic and that they were all creations over time, as needed by the Brahmins in response to changing social conditions, has been known for a long time now. Why in this age of Human Rights and anti-racist movements has the whole basis of a Dharmic system on the basis of skin color or Varna not been dismantled, speaks for, besides other things, the depth of the power base of the Brahmins in India. The major initiatives that did address issues of social injustice of the caste system mostly asked for more rights or representation for the lower castes but they generally did not really challenge the existence of the system in the first place. The fact is that even the constitution of India mentions the backward castes, even if it is in the context of giving them more rights, giving credibility to the existence of the caste system. Gandhi could eat with the lower castes and clean the toilet with them, but would it not have been better if he had shed the whole system all together. It also is an indicator of the level of disempowerment of the non-Aryans over thousands of years. But there are obviously other reasons why the Brahmin Dharma has not been challenged more directly.

One obvious reason is that it was the Aryan Sanskrit texts, written down, that formed the basis for 'classical Hinduism' that the rest of the world got to know through the several translations in the last couple of centuries. As mentioned above, it was the

Brahmins who made a living out of writing, chanting and memorizing these religious texts. Non-Aryans were strictly restricted from at times even listening to, much less learning or adding to these texts. The translators and scholars, mostly Western, in addition to being biased in favour of written texts as opposed to lived traditions, as mentioned earlier, were not unfamiliar in their own backgrounds with social hierarchy and concepts of 'nobility by birth'. For the Westerners, in addition, there has always been a romanticized notion, made much worse in the 1960s, of the 'mystical east' and from that perspective it is not 'cool' to look into the socio-political and economic motivations behind some of these spiritual-sounding traditions. Also made common in the 1960s were the notions of cultural relativism and sensitivity where questioning anything from another culture was again seen as 'uncool' in the '*whatever, man*' kind of an ethical stance. But perhaps most importantly the Brahman social oppression remained mostly unchallenged because, as opposed to violent or political subjugation that can be revolted against, the ideological, psychological and spiritual subjugation by the Brahmins was so deeply internalized by the people of this land that they could never really recover from it. Various Buddhist or Muslim empires rose in power and fell in due time but the power base and control of the Brahmins on the psyche of the land was so complete that it could not be undone, down perhaps to the present day.

As the world now moves more into discussions of human rights and social structures of basic human equality one would foresee uncomfortable questioning of the oldest color-based social system still surviving in the world. That may not happen however. The Brahmanical tradition that created and sustained the system has an equally long history of surviving such threats through successful manipulations of history and texts. Many from outside the system would shy away from questioning the spiritual sounding basis of the system, in the name of cultural sensitivity. As for challenges from

within the system, when the psyche is subjugated on a deep, spiritual level, the subjugation fully internalized, for thousands of years, there is very little chance of it being questioned in any meaningful way. In this scenario it would not have been difficult to predict the response of the Brahmanical tradition to the possible threat to the sanctity of their texts. They are already putting in place the new history that claims that the Brahmins and Kshatriyas never migrated into South Asia and were indigenous to the land and that their Sanskritized texts were formulated thousands of years before the Buddhist and Jain threat to the Dharma. There are of course textual and ‘scientific’ arguments created to justify these assertions.

3

Socio-Political Development of Islam in the Subcontinent

While reading Muslim historians or historians using Muslim historical texts as their primary sources, one needs to be mindful of a particular tendency. Mubarak Ali, a brilliant contemporary historian, points out that "history... reflects the trends and tendencies of a society" (Ali, 1992; p.12). Muslims, especially Indian Muslims, have a general tendency not to question or analyze the religion of Islam and many of the things that get associated with Islam. Any serious criticism or even critical inquiry into the basics of Islam could be seen as doubting Allah or the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) or the Quran and can be punishable by death in Pakistani law. Muslims are expected to have an unquestioned faith in religion and all matters related to religion. Thus, when a certain portion of history is seen as Islamic history, there is a tendency among Muslim historians to manipulate the facts to make them fit the framework of Islam. The historiography of the Muslim rule in India, according to Mubarak Ali, "is full of such manipulations which create great hindrance to the understanding of our history; . . . our historical consciousness remains narrow and stagnant" (Ali, 1992; p.12).

For this section on Muslim socio-political history in the subcontinent, we will use references from a mix of Islamic and non-Islamic Asian to non-Asian sources. For the Arab invasion I rely mostly on Chachnama, documentation of Mohammad Bin-Qasim's campaigns by Arab historians translated later into Persian and recently in English (by Mirza Kalichbeg Fredunbeg). For Babur I rely mostly on his own writings almost to the exclusion of other writers on him. What we focus on are records of interactions with people of other religions, primarily Hindu, and of their religious sites. Even if one is able to argue with a few facts presented below based on the source or the interpretation of it, there is a general pattern of abuse and humiliation of the local people and their religion at the hands of many of the Muslim rulers and invaders in India that is hard to deny.

THE ARAB INVASION

The inhabitants of the subcontinent are not unfamiliar with foreigners migrating into their areas or invading their territories. Among the Muslims, the first ones to reach India were the Arab merchants who settled in the coastal towns of South India in the first century of Islam (7th Century CE). The first major military expedition arrived in Sindh in 711 CE. This was the time of the Umayyad Caliphate, when Hajjaj bin-Yusuf was the governor of Baghdad, and the Indian sub-continent fell under his jurisdiction. He had sent several agents and two small expeditions to India earlier also, but the final major expedition, to make India a part of the Arab empire, was sent under the leadership of Muhammad bin-Qasim.

Islamic history gives an interesting account of how Hajjaj, upon request, had sent the expedition to free some prisoners,

including some women, when their ship got robbed and they were made captives. A case is made that Muslims had to come to the sub-continent to protect the honor of those women. The facts, as revealed in the accounts of the Arab historians of the time who were documenting everything carefully in a text that reached us as Chachnama, translated into English by Fredunbeg, seem to reveal motives that were not that pure. Muhammad bin-Qasim had his first encounter with the Indians at the port city of Debal where the pirates had seized the ship. In this fight Hajjaj had sent special orders not to offer any mercy or protection to any of the residents of the city. Maybe no one was spared in Debal because it was here that the Muslim women had been enslaved. But the dishonoring of women could not be the only reason behind this invasion. According to Tarikh Massumi, the ship that got robbed at the port city of Debal was carrying besides riches, Indian female slaves for the Caliph (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.70). Also as part of the booty after the invasion of Debal, Indian women, including 700 who had taken shelter in an idol-temple in the heart of the city, were distributed among the soldiers. The best ones, including the two daughters of the ruler of Debal, were sent with one fifth of the booty to the Caliph (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.86). When the fort of Raor was taken by the Arab army, Dahar's sister and many other women set themselves on fire to avoid being taken by the army. When Dahar was killed, thirty young women of royal blood were sent to Hajjaj with the head of Dahar and other treasures (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.155). Much later, the circumstances of the death of Muhammad bin-Qasim also tell us about the place of women in the Arab mind-set. One of the two daughters of Dahar who were sent with other spoils of war to the Caliph told him that they were not virgins because Muhammad bin-Qasim had slept with them for three nights before sending them to the caliph. The caliph's pride was so hurt thinking that he had been sent 'used' women that he issued orders that led to the death of Muhammad

bin-Qasim. Later when she told the Caliph that she just wanted to avenge the bloodshed that the Arab army had caused in her land, and that the Caliph could have inquired into the charges against Muhammad bin-Qasim before issuing fatal orders, he had the two sisters brutally murdered also (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.193-197). The point to remember is that the distribution of women in particular, and slaves in general, just like any other kind of property, was a standard practice among the Arabs. The honor of a few random women, even if they were Muslims, would not be something for which the Arabs would undertake such an expensive expedition.

Long before Muhammad bin-Qasim was dispatched to Sindh, Hajjaj had been surveying the area to see how beneficial it would be to invade it. Two smaller expeditions had already been sent by Hajjaj before 711 CE (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.2). Muhammad bin-Qasim was sent not just to free some captives, but to make Sindh a part of the Muslim empire. The Caliph was certainly looking for some monetary benefits also. It is recorded that Hajjaj had asked the Caliph if he could send an army to invade Sindh, promising that they would send back to the treasury twice the amount spent on the whole expedition. It is also recorded that Muhammad bin-Qasim sent, out of the spoils of war, much more than twice the amount spent on the expedition, to the treasury of the Caliph (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.191). And what was sent to the treasury was only one fifth, according to Muslim law, of what was actually taken as booty by the Arab armies in India.

But to collect such booty and then to impose an ongoing tax called *jizya* (tribute paid by non-Muslims making them protected citizens of a 'Muslim state'), required a show of power and violence. As Hajjaj wrote in a letter to Muhammad bin-Qasim, one of the ways to acquire a kingdom is by "the use of overawing force, power, strength and majesty and checking and

expelling the enemy" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.101). We have already mentioned the treatment of Indian women at the hands of the Arab army. At Debal, in the first confrontation with the local forces, it was on the orders of Hajjaj that Muhammad bin-Qasim, as we have mentioned above, spared no one. All males of the age of 17 and above were put to the sword (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.3). The bloodshed in this first interaction must have spread the terror of the Arabs in the surrounding areas establishing what could happen to others if they refused to submit to the new invaders. Hajjaj explained the idea to Muhammad bin-Qasim saying that the harshness is necessary so that "your name may be widely known and your enemies be subdued and mortified" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.171) Some time later after Dahar's death when the fort of Raor was taken, thousands of soldiers who were taken as prisoners of war were beheaded. Sixty thousand were taken as slaves from the fort. The riches were plundered by the army. Women were distributed among the troops, after sending the best ones, of course, to Arabia. As mentioned above, Dahar's sister and many others burnt themselves to death to escape what was to follow. What is of significance is the response of Hajjaj to this victory. After congratulating Muhammad bin-Qasim, he went on to criticize him for being too lenient with the enemy. He wrote, "Henceforth grant pardon to no one of the enemy and spare none of them, or else all will consider you a weak-minded man" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.155). Hajjaj's basic strategy for establishing a kingdom, that Muhammad bin-Qasim had to follow in India, was to use fear and intimidation.

While wealth was being plundered in Sindh, and treasures and slaves sent back to Arabia, the whole expedition was carried out in the name of Allah. Religion, therefore, became an important factor. It was used to justify the violence and build the spirit of the Arab army on the one hand and to humiliate and break the spirit of the enemy on the other. Before the fight with Dahar on the banks of Mehran, Muhammad bin-Qasim received a letter from Hajjaj

reminding him that "with the aid of angels, the swords of Mussalmans will naturally overpower the unbelievers. The great and glorious God will make those beings of unclean and wicked nature food for the swords and lances of the faithful" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.113). Every correspondence from the Caliph or Hajjaj tried to give a religious tone to the expedition. On the other hand, degradation and destruction of what was held as powerful and sacred to the Indians was a way to break their spirit and subjugate them. Right before the first conflict started at Debal, using two shots from a very large catapult, the Arabs destroyed the idol temple at the heart of the city. *Then* they started to fight. Also, as a general trend, Muhammad bin-Qasim would replace the main temple of the city he would conquer with a mosque. Mubarik Ali notes that the early Muslim rulers would build a mosque in a newly occupied territory even if there was no Muslim population there (Ali, 1992; p.22). After Debal, Muhammad bin-Qasim moved to Nerun (present-day Hyderabad) from where he wrote the following to Hajjaj:

"It is hoped that all the forts of the infidels will be conquered and taken possession of, and in lieu of the Kafir's place of worship mosques and Muslim prayer-houses will be built, and pulpits for calling the faithful to prayer and preaching sermons constructed...It is also hoped that idols and other signs of idolatry will be removed and clean swept off, with the help of God" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.100).

This was written after Muhammad bin-Qasim built a mosque in place of the Budh (Buddhist) temple in the city. It is important to remember that the Arab army was welcomed in Nerun without any hostility or aggression. In fact there were exchanges of gifts and honors and general good-will between the Samani ruler of

the city and Muhammad bin-Qasim. The people of Nerun had peacefully agreed to pay the taxes and consider themselves under the rule of the Caliph. But exploitation, abuse and humiliation, religious and otherwise, to subjugate the people, were built into the very nature of the whole Arab expedition.

As far as early conversion to Islam is concerned, it is commonly said by Muslim historians that there has not been any compulsion in religion in the Islamic history of the subcontinent. Yet it is noteworthy that once the Arabs declared parts of India as part of the Islamic empire, the treatment was not the same for everyone and there were some advantages to converting to Islam. For instance, after Brahminabad was taken, Muhammad bin-Qasim addressed the residents (after beheading 6000 prisoners of war) saying, "I let you go this day. Those among you who become Mussalmans and come within the fold of Islam shall have their tribute remitted, but those who are still inclined to be of their own faith, must put up with injuries (gazand) and tribute (jizia) to retain the religion of their fathers and grandfathers" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.165). This was not all. Those who converted to Islam also got their property and wealth and estate returned to them. Given these options, quite a few may have considered switching their religion, at least officially, to escape economic and other kinds of oppression.

An argument is made often that there was much discrimination on the basis of birth before Islam came to India, in the form of the caste system, and therefore many of the oppressed communities would obviously want to convert to the new religion that was based on equality and brotherhood among its followers. While it may be true, at least in theory, that an Islamic society is based on equality and justice, it was not necessarily the case in the beginning of the Muslim rule in India. While in the beginning Muhammad bin-Qasim may have had intentions of creating a society on Islamic principles, when he was faced with the task of running the new system, he opted for

the support of the Brahmins, especially in the task of revenue collection. The Brahmins, after the city of Brahminabad was taken, were spared and were entrusted with the job of collecting the revenue. Some of the social structures were kept the same as originally defined by the Brahmins. The Jats of the Luhanah tribe, for example, were subjected to particularly harsh treatment before the Arabs. They were not allowed to wear silk or velvet, they were required to carry an identifying scarf on their shoulders and a dog besides them so that they could be easily distinguished. If they committed theft, their children and other members of their families were burnt to death. Such treatment of someone, by virtue of his or her birth in a particular tribe, seems against the very spirit of Islam. But Muhammad bin-Qasim chose to side with the Brahmins and decided not to change these social customs, whether the Jats were Hindus or Muslims (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.170). Starting with Muhammad bin-Qasim, the Muslim ruling classes also chose to keep the administrative structures intact. In most of the places, Muhammad bin-Qasim left management and administration in the hands of the Brahmins (Yusuf, 1970; p.75). As Muslim rule started to get established, the powers and privileges of the Hindu zamindars (landlords) were also left untouched (Ali, 1992; p.5). We therefore see a trend of the already oppressive Brahmin class making links with the new Muslim rulers.

Some time after the establishment of the Arab rule in Brahmanabad, the priests and monks came to Muhammad bin-Qasim and requested permission to build and repair temples so that people could continue worshipping as before. Muhammad bin-Qasim checked with Hajjaj and was told that as long as they are paying the tribute, they are considered zimmi (protected subjects) and that "we have no right whatever to interfere with their lives or their property" (Fredunbeg, 1985; p.169). This

seems a marked deviation from the earlier stance of Hajjaj but we have to remember that the control of the Arabs by executing the powerful and destroying the sacred sites had been achieved and now the rulers wanted to win over the classes who could make the system work for them. Sir William Muir observes that this was the beginning of a new phase in Islamic history where idolatry was allowed in exchange for *jizia*. Until then, *jizia* was an option only for people of the book (basically Christians and Jews) and idolaters were always treated more harshly (Rapson, 1987; P.3). But then as S.A.A. Rizvi, a well-known historian of Islam in India, observes, Shariat, or the Islamic law, was not applicable to India as it had been developed in lands with an overwhelmingly Muslim population (Rizvi, 1965). Thus new patterns in Islamic theology and its social application were emerging in India right from the time of Muhammad bin-Qasim.

As we have seen above, the initial hostile attitude of the Muslim invaders soon mellowed. But to some extent the initial tone that was set with the destruction of the temples, taking of slaves, including women, and bloodshed, continued, to varying degrees, with exceptions, throughout the Muslim rule in India.

After the death of Muhammad bin-Qasim, the Arab empire did not grow much beyond Sindh and Southern Punjab. In Sindh a majority of the people were most likely converted to Islam in the early days because of the invaders' political power. As a result there were few sectarian or fiqh squabbles (Ali, 1992; p.39). Sindh also escaped some of the political upheavals of the Muslim Caliphate as it was always on the periphery of the Empire (which was always based in the Middle East). In 836 CE, Musa, a governor of Sindh, died and before dying nominated his son, Amran, as his successor. According to Sir Wolseley Haig, "when provincial governments in the East begin to become hereditary they are in a fair way to becoming kingdoms" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.9). The Arab rule in Sindh remained somewhat stable and

isolated. Islam thus did not reach the heart of the Indian subcontinent through the invasion of Sindh by the Arabs.

THE TURKISH INVASION

Among the Muslims, it was the Turks who invaded Northern India for the first time. As opposed to Muhammad bin-Qasim, they faced tough resistance, especially in the bloody battles they had to fight with the Rajputs (Ali, 1992; p.18).

In 988 CE, a 27 year old Mahmud Ghaznavi deposed his brother and ascended the throne of a kingdom comprised of Afghanistan and Eastern Persia. The following year he received a robe and some titles from the Abbasid Caliph. At this time he vowed to undertake an expedition against the idolaters of India every year. His first invasion of India though, took place in 999 CE or 1000 CE (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.13). According to different accounts, the number of Mahmud Ghaznavi's invasions on India vary from thirteen to seventeen. He continued to annex some parts of India to his empire but his primary motive appears to have been collecting the booty that he took back with him every time. He, along with the rulers and tribes that used to join him from Central Asia, would plunder through the villages, towns and cities of India taking back riches that made these expeditions worth their while. According to the Cambridge History of India, the slaughter of Indian men and taking their women and children as slaves was a common practice of Mahmud Ghaznavi. For example when he found the fortress of Beyt Shankodhar in Kathiawar at his mercy, after Bhimdeo had fled, he slew all the males present and took all the women and children prisoners. In his last incursion into India, after killing all the Jats around Multan, again he carried off the women and children as slaves. (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.25)

To humiliate the Hindus, Mahmud Ghaznavi, showing his iconoclastic zeal destroyed many temples including the famous Shiv Mandir at Somnath. People from thousands of villages surrounding the Somnath Mandir believed that Shiv would protect them against the invader. To prove them wrong, he killed the inhabitants of the villages that came in his way. The bloodshed continued all the way to the temple, which was taken, and its central idol held sacred by about 10,000 villages was shattered and all the gems and treasures taken away. But this was not humiliating enough. It is said that fragments of the idol were sent to Ghazni to be put in the steps of the Jami Mosque so that people would walk over them (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.25). But the reason for humiliation seems primarily to make people submit to him and make offerings to him. It was common to have treasures buried under the temple idols, thereby making these temples attractive to an invader. For if Mahmud Ghaznavi was interested in fighting against the idolaters he would not take expeditions in the summer to Muslim areas in Central Asia where his sole purpose was conquering and pillaging. In any case, in the subcontinent he rode forth in the name of the religion.

The iconoclastic nature of Mahmud Ghaznavi, in Islamic history, is not something that is mentioned with shame or embarrassment but something that is admired, boasted of and gloated over. As Sir Wolseley Haig writes, "to the Muslim historians Mehmud is one of the greatest champions of Islam" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.26) We will come back to the treatment of history especially by the post-independence historians of Pakistan where figures like Mahmud Ghaznavi appear as the ultimate heroes.

By 1021 Mahmud Ghaznavi had formally annexed Punjab to his kingdom which a century and a half later was the only province left of his vast empire which his descendants could claim as their kingdom. Thus in Punjab, the Turks had a presence for a long time. But the Turk rulers excluded all local

and non-Turkish Muslims from high ranks or from becoming part of the ruling elite. On the other hand, for the locals "the image of the Turks emerged as blood-thirsty, cruel, violent and greedy. The bitterness of the conflicts created such a hatred that both communities resisted integration with each other" both culturally and religiously (Ali, 1992; p.19).

THE PERSIAN INVASION

After Mahmud Ghaznavi, his descendants were not able to retain the kingdom, which continued to shrink. During the time of the Ghaznavids we start hearing about the princes of Ghur, who are often described as Afghans but were really from Eastern Persia. In 1175, Muhammad Ghuri defeated Khusrau Malik, a successor of Mehmud Ghaznavi, with the help of a Hindu Raja, Chakra Deo of Jammu, and established himself in India. He appointed Qutb-ud-din Aibak as his viceroy in India as he himself continued to treat Ghazni as his base and would only come to India on expeditions every few years. Qutb-ud-din Aibak, who Haig calls "the real founder of Muslim dominion in India" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.40), in 1193 captured Delhi from the Jats and made it his headquarters. Delhi was destined to be the capital of Islamic power in India. After the death of Muhammad Ghuri in 1206, Qutb-ud-din Aibak declared himself the Sultan of the Indian part of the kingdom and thus started the period of the Delhi Sultanate. While South India continued to have somewhat independent political developments, most of Northern India, including the parts of Punjab that we eventually will be focusing on more, remained under the Delhi Sultanate.

Let us briefly consider what the Persians did to the people of the subcontinent. Soon after Qutb-ud-din Aibak made Delhi his headquarters, both he and Muhammad Ghuri attacked Kanauj

and Benaras and after killing the Raja took his treasures as booty. But before Ghuri returned with the booty to Ghazni, several of the temples in Benaras were destroyed. In 1202 Aibak attacked Kalinjar from where 50,000 men and women were taken as slaves. Many of the temples are said to have been converted into mosques (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.43).

After Qutb-ud-din's death in 1210, Altutmish, who had at one time been a slave of Aibak, took over Delhi. Let us look at some examples from his rule. In 1232, after he had recovered his old fief of Gwalior which a Hindu Raja had captured after Aibak's death, he put 700 Hindus to death in cold-blood just to make a point. However he does seem to have had some religious devotion. He greatly respected Khawaja Qutb-ud-din Bakhtiar Kaki, a Sufi teacher who had been in Ghazni and Multan and who came to Delhi at the end of his life. Altutmish built the famous Hiran Minar, a great column of red sandstone, in honor of the great Sufi. At the foot of the great column, though, it is said, was buried the great lingam that was brought from Ujjain when the temples of the city, including the famous temple of Mahakali, were destroyed, in 1234. There are other reports though that the lingam was buried at the threshold of the Friday mosque of Old Delhi instead. (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.55)

These are just a few examples but the list goes on and on. What is clear is that the earlier trends of taking slaves and booty and the destruction of temples were continued through this period also. The beginnings of the invasions by Muslims, whether Arabs, Turks, Afghans or Persians, were quite violent and humiliating for the people of the subcontinent. Once their rules were established though, as Haig observes, "there is no reason to believe that the position of the Hindu cultivator was worse under a Muslim than under a Hindu landlord." (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.90)

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Delhi Sultanate continued until the beginning of the 16th century when we have the beginning of the next major segment of the Muslim rule in India—the Mughal empire. The Mughal era is often referred to, by Muslims, as a golden era in Indian history. Before we reflect on Babur and the foundations of the Mughal empire, though, it may be important to consider briefly the influence of Timur Lung, an ancestor of Babur, on the subcontinent. Timur went through India at the very end of the 14th century CE. The following are examples of his interaction in the subcontinent taken from the Cambridge History of India (1987). During the journey, Timur, went through Pak Pattan, where he visited the shrine of the great Sufi poet Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganji-Shakar. After the visit, the citizens of Pak Pattan were flogged, plundered and enslaved. A few days before reaching Pak Pattan the town of Talamba had seen a massacre. From Pak Pattan he moved to Bhatnair where after a general massacre the city was burnt and laid waste. Town after town perished as he proceeded towards Delhi. 100,000 Hindu captives were slain right before Delhi was attacked and taken. Many of the residents of Delhi performed the rite of jauhar (ritualized suicide). Large bodies of Hindus were slaughtered daily and many were taken as slaves. All within a few months "the whole of northern India was in indescribable disorder and confusion . . . (Timur left) after inflicting on India more misery than had ever before been inflicted by any conqueror in a single invasion. . . . The kingdom was completely dissolved." (Rapson, 1987, Vol. III; p.200)

It was a century after Timur that Babur, one of his descendants, started making his way into the subcontinent. Babur did not take the rule of India from the Hindus. By this time, as is evident in Baburnama, there were almost continuous power struggles between Muslims of foreign origins over the

boundaries of ‘their’ land in India. These struggles of course were not only political but often resulted in bloodshed and battles of varying magnitude in this area. Their armies, to keep them interested, in addition to the institution of maal-i-ghanimat had the privilege to plunder a little on the side. Babur makes casual references to this behavior every now and then in his memoirs, such as, on their way (the army) they “plundered a little” (all references of Baburnama from translation by Thackston, 1996; p.464) One wonders how all this fighting over land and bloodshed and plundering appeared from the perspective of the local population of this area, both Hindus and Muslims. As discussed earlier, because Muslims in India started, though much later, to identify themselves with these foreign invaders, they have had to come up with all kinds of justifications and explanations and myths and stories so as not to take on any guilt over the obvious injustices. When a group of 50 horsemen take up arms and go around plundering wealth of local villages, we have a definite name for it. We call them robbers. On a larger scale the behavior of many of the Muslim invaders was of a very similar nature.

Babur did not come into India to create a kingdom. Invading India initially meant for Babur acquiring means to recapture Farghana and Samarqand, the territory of his forefathers. In his memoirs he details his impressions of Hindustan: “Hindustan is a country of few charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits there is none; of manners none...” (p.518) While comparing himself to two other invaders of India that we have discussed earlier, Ghauri and Ghaznavi, Babur writes of the land that he already possessed before Hindustan: “dependent on me were the countries of Badakhshan, Qunduz, Kabul and Qandahar, but no reckonable profit came from them” (p. 480). So therefore... the invasion of Hindustan! After identifying all the defects in Hindustan, Babur adds quite plainly, “pleasant things of Hindustan are that it is a large

country and has masses of gold and silver” (p.519). These treasures after each conquest were taken by the conqueror, distributed amongst his companions and their armies and sent back to Afghanistan and all over (p.522). However, after the invasion, establishing a kingdom of course had the advantage of ongoing revenues. In 1528, Babur recorded detailed lists of how much money he received from each state or region. Overall, he wrote, “the revenues of the country from Bhira to Bihar are 52 krurs” (p.520).

In terms of Babur’s treatment of non-Muslims, even before he crossed river Indus for the first time, right after he took over the fort of Bajour in 1519, in his memoirs, he claims to have killed 3000 men, taking their women and children as captives. This he justifies was because these people were enemies of Islam and due to their “heathenism and hostile customs” (p. 370). Outside the fort he ordered to build a tower of heads (p.371). Ten days later, the people of Kehraj were told to give 4000 ass-loads of rice for the use of the army and “they could not give (all) the grain and were brought to ruin” (p.374). A few days later an army was sent to the villages of Panj-Kura. “The people escaped but their corn and animals were taken from their houses. (374). Twenty days later, the day he approached river Indus for the first time, in passing he mentions an old tomb of a Qalandar named Shahbaz along the way. He writes, “Thought I, ‘what is there to recommend the tomb of a heretic Qalandar for a place in air so free?’ and ordered the tomb destroyed and leveled with the ground. The place was so charming and open that we elected to sit there some time and eat a confection (majun)” (p. 377). One could go on and on with the examples but the frequency and the casualness with which Babur mentions these acts shows almost a total absence of any ethical or moral dilemmas for him in relation to his treatment of this land, its heritage or the lives of its people.

As opposed to the trend of fighting other Muslims of foreign origin for land in the subcontinent, Rana Sanga was a local Hindu ruler that Babur ended up having to fight with. Much earlier though, in 1528, when he took over Chandiri from Rana Sanga's control, Babur writes: "We made general massacre of the pagans in it and, as will be narrated, converted what for many years had been a mansion of hostility, into a mansion of Islam" (p. 484). This desire to create a 'mansion of Islam', by ending all hostilities through a general massacre, was never mentioned, of course, when he had to fight the mighty opponent, Ibrahim Lodhi, another Muslim, two years earlier. But in fighting a Hindu opponent his rhetoric continues to change in his memoirs. In his final battle with Rana Sanga he sent everyone an announcement that as a Muslim he was giving up wine and talked of abandoning 'sinful appetites' now that as he put it, "we had put on the garb of the holy warriors and had encamped with the enemy of Islam over against the infidels in order to slay them". (p.554). He also created a division between the Hindus and the Muslims of the land he controlled by announcing to abolish the tax (tamgha) for all the Muslims (p.553). Right before the final battle, when he saw the morale of the army and the leaders really down in facing the Rana, he writes:

"At length after I had made enquiries concerning people's want of heart and had seen their slackness for myself, a plan occurred to me; I summoned all the beg and braves and said to them, 'God the most high has allotted to us such happiness and has created for us such good-fortune that we die as martyrs, we kill as avengers of His cause. Therefore must each of us take oath upon His Holy Word that he will not think of turning his face from his foe, or withdraw from this deadly encounter so long as life is not rent from his body.' All those present, beg and retainer, great and small, took the Holy Book joyfully into their hands and made vow and compact to this purport. The plan was

perfect; it worked admirably for those near and afar, for seers and hearers, for friend and foe". (p.556-557)

Babur dies a short time after defeating Rana Sanga. He spent his whole life acquiring land and in 1530 left behind his kingdom, not so well-established, in the hands of his elder son, Humayun.

Humayun, spent all his life struggling to keep the territory acquired by his father. While before his death he had won back most of it, there were times when he *hardly had* a kingdom. His main struggles, like his father, were against his own family members and other non-Indian Muslim rulers in India like Sher Shah and Shah Hussain. Sher Shah of Sur, an Afghan, remained his greatest rival. It was Sher Shah Suri who really ruled the Indian Empire between Babur and Humayun's son Akbar.

Sher Shah Suri is generally remembered as a just ruler. Yet certain incidents of violence stand out. In 1543, Sher Shah laid siege to the fortress of Puran Mal of Raisen. While this was a political invasion, there was also an alleged accusation that Puran Mal, a Rajput Hindu, had enslaved Muslim women and kept them in his harem. After holding a siege for some time Sher Shah struck a deal with Puran Mal that if they were to hand over the castle, he and his followers would be allowed to move away with their families and property. But, after the gates had been opened, at night, the Afghans decided to attack the Rajput camp. The Rajputs decided to take the lives of their wives and daughters first and then die fighting (Majumdar, 1951; p.81). Everyone was killed except for a few women and children who were enslaved. A daughter of Puran Mal is said to have been given to some minister to be trained as a dancing girl and three sons of his elder brother were castrated (Rapson, 1987, Vol IV; p.53).

But there *are* justifications offered for this act by Muslim historians. It is said that Sher Shah was perplexed by the oath on

the Quran that he had taken to let the families of Puran Mal's followers walk away in peace. But his conscience was freed when he was told by his Muslim scholars that considering the dishonor of the Muslim women, an oath that should never have been sworn in the first place, was not binding (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.53). Not much needs to be said about such self-serving arguments. One could point to the Hindu women who were enslaved and became a part of the harems of most Muslim Rulers of India. One could point to Sher Shah's own treatment of the women taken from the Rajput camp including the very daughter of Puran Mal. His morality does not seem to be much above Puran Mal's to justify such a bloody invasion. The argument does throw light on the kind of reasoning and justifications used by Muslim historians in writing the history of the subcontinent.

Yet, overall, Sher Shah is remembered as a just and tolerant ruler. W. Cooke says, "Sher Shah was the first who attempted to found an Indian Empire broadly based upon the people's will... He had the genius to see that the government must be popularized, that the king must govern for the benefit of his subjects, that the Hindus must be conciliated by a policy of justice and toleration" (Majumdar, 1951; p.89). However, we see that even in the reign of such a just ruler, severe cases of moral failure can be found. Akbar followed Sher Shah Suri's reign and took the ideas of a popular government and social justice and co-existence further in innovative ways.

AKBAR

Akbar is perhaps the only Muslim ruler of India who can justify his annexationist tendencies on the basis of the usual Muslim argument of offering the people a better option with peaceful and harmonious co-existence for all. He, from the very beginning of his career, seemed able to think independently,

originally and creatively. Ascending the throne at the age of thirteen, in 1556, he relied heavily on his mentor, Bairum Khan without whose backing, according to many analysts, Akbar could hardly have retained the throne. Within four years, though, Akbar overthrew Bairum Khan with the help of his step-mother and her party known as the Maham Anaga. In another two years, before he was twenty years of age, he successfully overthrew the Maham Anaga also and truly became independent. Within a few years, as far as religious policies are concerned, as we shall see shortly, he showed remarkable ability to break away from old traditions of his forefathers and the accepted norms of Muslim rulers.

There are many factors that may have played a part in the liberal religious policies of Akbar. His family was not orthodox to start with. In relation to the major split within Islam—Shia and Sunni—his father was a Sunni while his mother was a Shia and later his mentor, Bairum Khan, was also a strong Shia Muslim, highly resented by the Sunnis. As opposed to the orthodox Muslims, Akbar was also influenced by the Sufis, who have always been more tolerant and accepting of the others. Abdul Latif, a Sufi saint, was his early tutor. Later Shaikh Mubarik and his sons, Abul Fazal and Faizi, known as the closest companions of Akbar, were all inclined to Sufism and were anti-ulama (ulama being the orthodox religious scholars of Islam). From 1562 onwards, for eighteen years he made an annual pilgrimage to Ajmer, center of the unorthodox Chishtia Sufi order, to pay homage to Khawaja Muin-ud-din's shrine. His son, prince Salim (better known as Jehangir, the next Mughal ruler) was named after Shaikh Salim Chishti, a Sufi saint whom Akbar had asked to pray for a son.

From the beginning, Akbar developed links with Hindus. He married Hindu Rajput princesses, including the mother of Jehangir, who were allowed to practice their religion in court.

Starting as early as 1562 he prohibited the practice of enslaving prisoners of war and converting them to Islam. He abolished the tax on Hindu pilgrims and would frequent their holy places. He abolished the tax on non-Muslims, the *jizya*, which was a major source of revenue for the state. This act has been described as "an assertion of Akbar's will and conscience against a tradition of all the Muslim conquerors of India, sanctioned by centuries of custom, against all his advisors" (Binyon, 1932).

It is often stated by Muslim historians that Akbar's policies toward Hindus were developed with an eye to gaining their loyalties. While gaining the loyalties of Hindus by recognizing their power and status as subjects of the state is not such a bad policy in itself, it seems clear that there were deeper principles guiding Akbar's policies. Certain examples can be pointed out where he took a stand against oppressive and intolerant Hindu customs also. *Sati* and child-marriage were declared illegal and remarriage of widows was strongly encouraged (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.274). Thus it is clear that his religious policies were more than just political ploys.

In understanding Akbar's spiritual development one cannot discount his inner drive towards mysticism that was evident from his early years. From his youth, Badauni tells us that "he passed whole nights in praise of God and would sit many a morning alone in prayer and meditation on a large flat stone in a lonely spot" (Majumdar, 1951; p.133).

His interest in, as well as reverence for, any faith that can lead one to the truth was also evident from his early years. During his life he explored, mostly through dialogues and sometimes experientially also, Shia, Sunni and Sufi versions of Islam, both orthodox and heterodox Hindu traditions, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism. At first he would invite religious scholars to his court. But later he founded an *Ibadat Khana* (house of worship) at his capital, Fatehpur Sikri, where at first Muslim scholars of all sects and inclinations, and later

scholars of all religions, came to participate in debates and dialogues. It was during these dialogues at the Ibadat Khana that Rapson writes, "he soon had the doctors of law cursing and reviling one another, and their vituperations and vulgar abuse at first diverted and afterwards disgusted Akbar. (Once the Shia joined in) . . . the wrangles between various sects and the intolerant violence of the orthodox gradually alienated Akbar from Islam" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.114). It was also after realizing the evils of religious discord and the resulting intolerance, violence and strife, that in 1582 Akbar introduced what is generally seen as a new religion, Din-i-Ilahi. It was an attempt to bring together all religions "in such a fashion that they should be both 'one' and 'all,' with the great advantage of not losing what is good in any religion, while gaining whatever is better in another" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p.130). More than starting and spreading a new religion, this system of "ethical rationalism," (Majumdar, 1951; p.138), seemed to propose a new attitude towards religion. It can be seen as an attempt at religious syncretism perhaps crudely in line with Kabir and Nanak. Din-i-Ilahi upheld no dogmas or gods or prophets. The religion ended with Akbar's death, but as Meera Singh describes it, it did not seem to be the intention of Akbar to start yet another religion for the masses. Its doctrine, Sulh-i-Kull (universal tolerance), did make him a ruler for all the people of his kingdom "rather than the leader of a militant and dominant minority, alien in faith, and to a great extent in race, to the nations of India" (Rapson, 1987, Vol. IV; p, 153).

During half a century of his rule, Akbar was able to draw and build on the atmosphere of religious tolerance and acceptance in the subcontinent. But he also came to be resented and opposed by the religious orthodoxy, especially the Muslim ulama. In their view the true Muslims were persecuted in the era. Mujaddid Alf-i-Sani, a key figure in the revival movement of

Islam in the sub-continent, "condemned the decades of Akbar's reign when the king was wrongly guided and the Musalmans were oppressed" (Rizvi, p. xvi). Given the past of Muslims in India, Akbar's reaction to the Muslim orthodoxy is somewhat understandable and it is also to be expected that any attempt to give equal status to the other religious groups would be felt as oppression by the Muslims.

Akbar's reign and his policies, especially religious, have been analyzed in detail and his new religion has been the center of controversy and much criticism. On the one hand are sources like Badauni and the Jesuit priests who always wanted to win the emperor over to their side of orthodox religion and therefore strongly criticized his religious innovations, and on the other hand are his court historians and companions like Abul-Fazl and Faizi who would write in support of anything he introduced. Thus depending on the primary sources being used, an argument can be made in support of or in criticism of Akbar's religious experimentation. Yet, considering the texts from both sides, the spirit of what he was attempting seems clear. His policies generally supported an atmosphere of religious tolerance and coexistence and encouraged an exchange of religious and spiritual knowledge and practices. He continued to move away from religious orthodoxy, formalism and bigotry and towards an appreciation of spirituality, not specific to any religion but on a human level. That appears to be the hallmark of half a century of Akbar's rule over most of the sub-continent.

It is during such periods that one would expect art forms to flourish. Indeed, during Akbar's time, architecture, gardening, calligraphy, painting, music and poetry flourished under the patronage of the court. There appears to have been a revival of texts written in philosophy, theology and literature in Persian as well as in Indian languages (Majumdar, 1951; p.171). It is in this socio-political and cultural period that the legend of Heer and

Ranjha was written down for the first time (based on the existing versions today, discussed in more detail below).

Interestingly, it is in this liberal and pluralistic reign of Akbar that we observe the roots of an Islamic fundamentalist movement developing in India. The most powerful streak within Islam however, during Akbar's reign, remained the Sufi developments. Let us briefly outline these two streaks in the Muslim psyche of India.

4

Sufism and Orthodox Islam in the Subcontinent

SUFI DEVELOPMENTS

I will keep the description of Sufi developments in the subcontinent to a bare minimum. This is partly because some references to Sufi schools will be covered in the following section on Fundamentalist tendencies in Islam as, though it may seem counter-intuitive on the surface, the development of Sufi thought was closely linked to the initial development of orthodox Islam in India. Much has been written on Sufi developments in India and other than elaborating on a few concepts that we may need to use below, I will refer the reader to S.A.A. Rizvi's classic work, A History of Sufism in India.

It is generally accepted that Islam was spread in the subcontinent, besides other factors already discussed, through the Sufis. The Sufi traditions, focusing more on experiential reality and inner transformation than outer form and structure, were generally quite open to incorporating new ways of doing things. Chishtia – the largest Sufi Order in India – developed interesting new ways to integrate Islamic Sufi practices with Hindu mystical practices. In the local spirit of lived religion, it was common for people to recognize a holy person irrespective of which religion he

or she belonged to. In general therefore there was a great acceptance and even devotion from the local, non-Muslim population to the Sufis in the area. Most of the local Muslims could understand and relate to this kind of shared spirituality. The Sufis themselves ranged in their attitudes, beliefs and practices from the more orthodox who would never compromise the Shariah and Sunnah on the spiritual path, to the more heterodox who would recognize spirituality beyond structure and formalism. The two extremes are briefly described below.

Within a few centuries of the advent of Islam there developed within its mystical side a spiritual streak, the roots of which may be much older but the essence of which was captured by a 12th century Arab philosopher and Sufi, Ibn al-Arabi, in the concept of Wahdat-ul-Wujud. The term means “unity of being” and it stands for the pantheistic extreme in Sufism. Ibn al-Arabi in his profound philosophical treatises would make shocking and provocative comments such as seeing God in a horse, just to drive the message home. Many of the well-known Sufis of Turkish and Persian traditions, for example the 13th century poets Jalal-ud-din Rumi and Hafiz Shirazi, belonged to this school and believed in Wahdat-ul-Wujud. In India a term Wahdat-ul-Shahood was coined to capture the idea that there is union with the Divine only to the extent of witnessing Him. This was the more orthodox strand of Sufism that retained an essential duality between the Divine and the phenomenal reality.

The idea of Wahdat-ul-Wujud meant an underlying unity and therefore tolerance and acceptance of all other divine forms and spiritual paths and traditions. An example of a few verses of Rumi will demonstrate this:

*“I have given each being a separate and unique way of
seeing and knowing and saying that knowledge.
What seems wrong to you is right for him.*

*What is poison to one is honey to someone else...
Hindus do Hindu things. The Dravidian Muslims in India do
what they do.
It's all praise and it's all right.*" (Mathnavi, II; translated by
Barks and Moyne, 1988)

In India where Rumi was very influential, along with many other Persian poets, the idea and attitude took deep roots. It actually resonated with the already existing attitude in the psyche of the subcontinent that knew this kind of pluralism quite well.

Most of the Sufis of South Asia, whose wisdom, in the form of their poetry, still guides the everyday life of not only Muslims but Sikhs and other non-Muslims as well, belonged to the pluralistic, *wahdat-ul-wujud* kind of spirituality. Examples of popular Sufis over the centuries include Khawaja Moin-ud-din Chishti, Nizam-ud-din Auliya, Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai, Sultan Bahu, Khawaja Farid, Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah. Akbar, during whose reign Damodar wrote his *Heer*, was known for his support for this kind of spirituality.

FUNDAMENTALIST AND REVIVALIST TENDENCIES IN INDIAN MUSLIMS

In the time of Akbar, as we have already pointed out, the *ulama* were invited for religious debates and discussions but as Akbar grew tired of their petty squabbles on minor religious issues, he moved away from them and on account of that and his religious innovations many of the *ulama* fell out of favor in his reign. What we see in the reign of Akbar's grandson, Aurangzeb (1658-1707), is the embodiment of a certain orthodox current that developed parallel to the dominant Sufi streak in the Muslim psyche of the subcontinent.

Let us look at some representative movements and individuals who played a part in the revival of Shariah in India. The purpose is not to have an exhaustive list but to present some examples to bring

out the underlying patterns and some important aspects of the revivalist tendencies. The references in this section, unless specified otherwise, come from S.A.A. Rizvi's extensive documentation in *A History of Sufism in India* (1975). Saiyid Muhammad Jaunpur (1443-1505), well-established in both the theological discourses and the mystical side of Islam, declared himself to be the Mehdi (the promised Messiah) at the end of the 15th Century. His Mehdawi movement, though it incorporated many of the ascetic and Sufi practices and ideas, remained strictly within the limits of the Shariah and developed a spirit of exclusivity, more typical of the orthodox fanatic movements. He claimed that those who did not follow him were not Muslims and in fact were Kafirs (p.89). The movement, after such a claim, was often persecuted by the *ulama*. The atmosphere of 'peace for all' which dominated Akbar's reign no doubt saved the Mehdavis according to S.A.A. Rizvi (p.133), but by the end of Akbar's reign they had ceased to draw crowds of new converts. The influence of the movement remained restricted to Gujarat and Sindh and a few other small parts of the empire. According to the analysis of M.W. Mirza also, the effects of the movement remained confined to a small section of the Muslim population and fizzled out by the end of Akbar's reign (Majumdar, 1951;. P.666)

S.A.A. Rizvi in his thorough analysis of the revivalist movement during the Mughal era comments that "in the wake of the millennium of the Islamic era, there appeared an intense desire among a section of the Muslims in India to study Hadith and other branches of theology" (p.135). A little later, we shall look at some of the possible causes of this desire. Shaikh Ali Muttaqi, a contemporary of Jaunpur launched an assault on the Mehdavi movement while generally working for the revival of the Shariah. His students include Shaikh Muhammad bin Tahir and Shaikh Abdul Wahhab Muttaqi. A student of the latter, Shaikh Abdul Haq

Muhaddis Dehlawi (1551-1642) started a school of advanced learning of Hadith, Fiqh and theological studies in Delhi. Before that he had also spent some time at the Ibadat Khana of Akbar but moved away as he did not find the atmosphere congenial to his orthodox temperament. The thrust of his life's work, which he shared with his predecessors was to revive *Shariah* and *Sunnah* in their pristine purity (the emphasis was very much on somehow reviving and retaining the *purity* of it all). His father was a disciple of a pantheistic Sufi teacher and he himself knew the mystical paths quite well. But as he wrote in a letter to Sheikh Farid, "Muslims should first of all acquire adequate knowledge of the Shariat and Fiqh and later on attend to Sufism" (p.163).

The Naqshbandiya, probably the most popular order in India after the Chishtiya, are generally quite orthodox and always put the Shariat above the Tariqat (the Sufi path). Until the end of Akbar's reign, the Naqshbandis continued to wield considerable influence on the Mughal courts (p.182). Khawaja Ubaidullah Ahrar, one of the earlier leaders of the Order, knew Babur well when Babur was young and later the emperor stayed devoted to his descendants. Akbar married off his sister to the great grandson of Ahrar and he also arranged the marriage of his son, Danyal, to the daughter of Khawaja Naqshbandi, another saint of the Order.

Khawaja Baqi Billah (1563-1603), a key saint of the Naqshbandis and an intimate friend of Sheikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlawi was again a promoter of the revival of *Shariah*, *Fiqh* and *Hadith*. Emphasizing the dangers associated with the doctrine of *Wahdat-ul-Wajud* he nevertheless, like a large number of Sufis in India, practiced it, albeit in the framework of *Shariah* (p.191).

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, popularly known as Mujaddid Alf-i-Sani, set the foundations in India, of what was to become the first revivalist movement in the whole of the Muslim world. Interestingly Shaikh Ahmad was born in 1564 during Akbar's reign and got to spend time in the eclectic atmosphere of the

Imperial court. Moreover he was the most eminent disciple of Khawaja Baqi Billah, the Naqshbandi saint mentioned above. He was initially trained by his own father who wore a Khirqa (a Sufi teacher's robe) and had the honour of being allowed to initiate people in Chishti as well as Qadri order. In short, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was touched closely by all the major strands of Sufism in the subcontinent. Like his father before him, he enjoyed the company of ulama and saints of his time and was well-trained in Tafsir, Hadith and Shariah besides being a Hafiz (one who has committed the Quran to memory). He started out writing against the Shias and moved on to the "Kafirs." His ideology is described more as a reaction against eclecticism by S.A.A. Rizvi who writes:

"Those factors and currents, which had brought about an integration of the different sections of the Indian population during four hundred years of Muslim rule in India, especially under Akbar, he deemed to have sullied the purity of Islam and the political, social and cultural life of the Muslims. He therefore, took it into his head to act as a cathartic, purging the religious, social and cultural life of the Muslims of all the so-called undesirable influences and un-Islamic practices."
(1965; p.212)

This embodies the fundamentalist streak in the psyche of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Let us consider some of the reasons for this fundamentalism.

REASONS FOR FUNDAMENTALISM

The fundamentalist tradition in the Indian Muslims does not seem to have a clear and independent development. On the surface it may seem like there would be two distinct camps, those involved in the heterodox Sufism, involving concepts like *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* and those concentrating on orthodox Islam

with emphasis on *Shariah* and *Fiqh*, with not much of an overlap. But we see that almost all of the leaders of the fundamentalist movement were either exposed to or were a part of the Sufi developments. It is almost as if the fundamentalist streak grew from within the changing spirituality of Indian Islam. Perhaps it was a reaction to the heterodox or synthetic developments within Islamic spirituality and religion. In any case, if the reign of Akbar is known for the most inclusive forms of spirituality, it is also here that we see the beginnings of what later grew to be rigid Islamic fundamentalism in India.

There are all kinds of other factors that could be relevant here. For example, as opposed to most other parts of the world where Islamic states were established, in India, Muslims always remained a minority within a larger non-Muslim majority. The *Wahdat-ul-Wajud* that developed in other parts of the Islamic world may have presented different challenges to the Indian Muslim mind. The possibilities of syntheses were endless here, in the middle of hundreds of very well-developed forms of spiritual traditions. The Chishtiya experimentation with the local forms of spirituality, for example, brought forth all kinds of interesting developments, including the creation of Qawwali as a way to bring together Sufi poetry and music with mind-altering repetitive rhythms and themes. While this experimentation can be viewed as positive in the development of more and more intense forms of spiritual practices, there is something in the essential nature of a patriarchal religion that is threatened by it. The drive of the formal patriarchal religions is towards clarity and definition and a relatively stable formal structure and this kind of fluid creative spirituality that tends to go in all directions is not in line with the basic drive and generates a certain level of insecurity. The tension between formal Islam and the indigenous spiritual mindset is something that can be explored better in the folklore as we work with the text below.

Perhaps some level of insecurity also was generated by an ongoing deterioration of those who were expected to hold the scholarly, orthodox knowledge of Islam. Mubarik Ali, the historian, outlines how when the Muslim rulers tried to establish an Islamic rule in the subcontinent they faced a serious problem. The laws of the Islamic *Shariah* had evolved in the context of a predominantly Muslim population. How were the *Shariah* rules to become relevant in an environment that was predominantly non-Muslim? To resolve some of the dilemmas, the Muslim rulers would have a few *ulama* or religious scholars in their courts. Since there is no formal religious structure, like the church, in Islam, there was no established relationship that the king needed to have with any particular religious leader or with the *ulama* in general. The *ulama* therefore had to face ups and downs with the changing rulers and had to struggle to keep their place in the court and the state structure. They would look up to kings and nobles for patronage and financial help. The kings and nobles, on the other hand needed to use the *ulama* to acquire appropriate religious fatwas (legal decrees) on various issues (Ali, 1992; p.13). It is easy, under these circumstances, for all kinds of religious *ulama* to compete to offer more and more beneficial fatwas for the rulers and the basic principles of Islam to be compromised in the process. Mohammad Habib also concludes, after a thorough examination of the texts and accounts of the Sultanate era, that the Delhi Sultans "paid lip homage to the Shariat... (and) they kept the state-controlled mullahs disciplined and satisfied" (p.11). The threat of redefinition of the basic principles of Islam to suit the whims of the rulers can lead to a level of insecurity, especially given the basic drive of the religion as described above, again could have contributed to this sense of insecurity and need to return to solid foundations within the Muslim psyche.

The environment for Indian Islam was not only predominantly non-Muslim but dominated by the Brahmanical tradition with its ever-present assimilative tendencies that were discussed earlier. Ram Singh observes: "Other religious beliefs...will always be in danger of being swallowed up by the Hindu culture." It, he continues, "is able to neutralize and assimilate any other form of cultural encounter" (Balasubramanian, 1992; p.35). Any religions or formal spiritual traditions that resisted assimilation faced the threat of complete extinction. Buddhism, for example, as it resisted assimilation into the Brahmanical system, was almost completely wiped out in India, its place of origin, while it survived in all areas towards the North, South and East of India. Thus, in relation to Islam in India, Bosworth writes: "The comparative isolation of Islam in India meant a perpetual struggle to preserve the faith from syncretism and from the characteristic absorptive influence of Hindu religion; thus Indian Muslim rulers and Ulama usually identified themselves strongly with Sunni Islam and maintenance of orthodoxy" (1976). While the remarks may seem too strong, some level of threat and insecurity in those Muslims who, as part of a minority, were trying to preserve their own religious definitions of reality and self-identity, when faced with these Brahmanical tendencies, seems to be unavoidable. Given the insecurity, one would expect them to hold on very tightly and rigidly to their fundamentals.

5

Later Indigenous Religious and Spiritual Development

In order to complete a sketch of the socio-cultural and religious context of India for an analysis of the text we must briefly touch upon a few strands of the indigenous developments in the religious and spiritual life of the subcontinent. We have already discussed the pre-Aryan indigenous spiritual patterns. But after the arrival of the Brahmins, and even when most of the local gods and goddesses and forms of spirituality were incorporated into the Sanskritized, Brahmin theology and mythology, these spiritual developments continued, though now under the umbrella of Brahmin Hinduism. They however remained more in line with the indigenous mindset and essence of spirituality, though the adherents would no longer be able to tell the difference, than with the patriarchal, Brahmin, Vedic tradition and practices. Of significance, especially in relation to the analysis of the text below, are the Bhakti tradition and the ascetic and Jogi traditions. Also significant is a very brief introduction of the relatively newer religion/tradition of Sikhism, which took form in the Punjab area and which maintained its separation from both, formal Islam and formal Hinduism.

ASCETICISM AND TANTRA

In the section on pre-Aryan spirituality and later in the discussion on the incorporation of non-Aryan gods into the Vedic fold, we have already pointed out that almost all that is included in Saiva tradition, including most probably Siva himself, are pre-Aryan or at least non-Aryan in origin. This includes Pasupati, Rudra and Shakti, the whole philosophy and practices of Tantra including peculiar sexual practices, worship of the lingam and Yoni, many of the goddesses, ascetic practices, the ascetic paths of the Sanyasis, Sramanas, Yatis and Munis and the practice of yoga (Sankhya philosophy). We will make reference to some of these gods and practices in the analysis of the text.

BHAKTI DEVELOPMENTS

In relation to Bhakti also we have shown above how a whole range of devotional traditions were incorporated into the Vedic fold by incorporating local gods as an incarnation of or having a relationship with or being an aspect of Vedic gods. Tantric forms of Shakti and Siva-Rudra were incorporated into the Katha and Svetasvatara Upanishads. The essence of the devotional poetry and lives of the Alvars was woven into the Sanskrit Bhagavata Purana. Devotion to Krishna's childhood form was brought out in Vishnu Purana.

The mainstream Sanskrit tradition, with its patriarchal drives, however would frequently involve itself in theological and philosophical arguments about Bhakti as well. In the 9th century AD, Shankara, one of the most famous Vedic philosophers, had attacked the monotheistic system of the Bhagavatas by creating the Vedanta philosophy (Grierson, 2005). One line of counter-attack from the Vedic Bhakti side was developed in Southern India by Ramanuja (1017-1137), a Brahmin by birth. He believed in Visistadvaita (qualified monism): the devotee is one with God but

separate from Him; in salvation, the individual soul, made by God from His own essence, returns to Him and remains in full communion with Him, although forever distinct from Him. Devotion to Vishnu was one of the best means to achieve this salvation (Elder, 1970). Madhva (13th century AD), also a Vaishnavite saint, totally abandoned the Upanishadic unity of Brahman and Atman and made a case for Dvaita (dualism). Vishnu was therefore entirely separate from individual souls and liberation happened through grace (Elder, 1970). Most of the later Vaishnava Bhakti theology seems to have followed this Dvaita stance in relation to the Divine. But, as Hopkins observes, the religion of the people of the subcontinent is much closer to the devotional enthusiasm of the Alvars, discussed above, than, for example, to the refined theology and the Bhakti-yoga of Ramanuja (1971; p.124), or certainly to the extremely philosophical school of Shankara.

The Alvars during the 8th century CE and earlier used Tamil instead of Sanskrit as their language. They claimed to have an intuitive knowledge of God, through a deeply personal and emotional relationship to and worship of god. "With the Alvars we have for the first time in Krisnaism the religious individual; this continues in medieval India, and a new type of literature develops, viz. Hagiography. "Lives of the Alvars" began to be written from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards (e.g. the Lives of Caitanya)..." (Friedhelm, 1983; p.558). The spirit of intense devotional fervor, so powerful with the Alvars and captured by the Bhagavata Purana, was carried on by the saints, often falling under Saivite and Vaishnavite schools, usually through poetry and songs. Their poetry and teachings, often in Tamil, could be understood, recited and sung by everyone. Songs and poems in people's own languages, with meters and measures following the folk songs and ballads that people were familiar with (Duggal, 1987; p.36), became the vehicle for spirituality

and devotion. Vernacular literature and music also flourished as a result. In addition to Bhaktas of the Saguna (object of devotion being a form or person) Bhakti (e.g. Surdas, Tulsidas, Mirabai), we see the developments in Nirguna (object of devotion remaining formless) Bhakti of Saints like Ravidas and Kabir (Nanak can be included in this line of development) (Hawley, 1995) who were often quite critical of formalized religions. Thus it was this kind of lived spirituality in the everyday lives of people of all castes and both genders that remained much more common than the shruti rituals and ceremonies and the Sanskrit Vedic scriptures (discussed by Organ, 1974).

The kind of spirituality that shows up in Heer Damodar is very much in line with the Saguna bhakti tradition. The sense of everyday lived spirituality, without the heavy Brahmanical philosophical baggage, with a deep sense of devotion to someone or something, all expressed in a poetic form, is all that one finds in the Damodar text.

SIKHISM

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 in the West Punjab. He should be included in the school of Nirguna Bhakti but he very clearly was a non-Hindu and a non-Muslim (notice I did not use ‘anti-Hindu’ or ‘anti-Muslim’). His message was very simple and clear: “There is neither Hindu, nor Mussalman; one must work and share one’s earnings; an active life is superior to contemplative life” (Duggal, 1987; p.40). He talked about loving the one god directly without any religious formalism. His message poured out in inspirational poetry that can be sung in prescribed ragas. As Sibte-ul-Hassan Zaigham, a great scholar of Punjabi today, in a private conversation said to me, Baba Nanak just took what came naturally to a Jat (or a Punjabi) and turned it into a spiritual and religious tradition so

that the Jat could live the way he was living anyway, without having to be additionally a Muslim or a Hindu.

Nanak studied Persian and Arabic in his youth. One of his last journeys was to Mecca to perform *Hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage). During *Hajj*, the pilgrims are said to have gathered around him asking who is superior, a Muslim or a Hindu. He replied: “without good deeds either is no good” (Duggal, 1987; p.28). Such was the simplicity of his teachings. After several journeys to sacred places and meetings with spiritual men he settled down by 1520 CE, back in the West Punjab, by the river Ravi. He took up farming and lived with his family and devotees in a somewhat communal setting. For him that was religion and spirituality. It is said that when he died his Muslim devotees built a mausoleum and his Hindu disciples, a *Samadhi*, on the bank of river Ravi. Soon the river changed course and the forms created by both religions were washed out by the water.

During Akbar’s era, much of the Jat peasantry seems to have been attracted to Sikhism. At that time, the Sikhs had good relations with the Mughals. Akbar in fact granted Guru Ram Das the land that came to be known as Amritsar. The conflict between Mughals and Sikhs started when Jehangir had the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjun Singh, executed for having connections with prince Khurram, his son, who had revolted against Jehangir. It was during the time of the next Guru, Har Gobind Singh, who also spent some time in Jehangir’s prison, that the character of the Sikh movement for the first time turned militant and the movement itself turned into an actual military power (Meera Singh, p.339; Majumdar, 1951, P.307). It is the earlier non-militant nature of the message preached by Nanak, focusing on everyday lived sense of the spirit that really resonates with the kind of spirituality we find in Heer Damodar.

As we briefly touch on the Gorakhnathis next, it would be of interest to note what Nanak had to say to the Nathi jogis. During one of his journeys to the east, he visited Gorakhmata, a temple devoted to Gorakhnath. There, talking to the jogis, he said:

*“Asceticism doesn’t lie in the ascetic robes, nor in the walking staff, nor in the ashes,
Asceticism doesn’t lie in the earring, nor in the shaven head, nor blowing a conch;
Asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities.
Asceticism doesn’t lie in mere words;
He an ascetic is who treats everyone alike, Asceticism doesn’t lie in visiting burial and cremation grounds.
It lies not in wandering about, nor at bathing at places of pilgrimage.
Asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities.
On meeting with the true Guru the doubts are dispelled and restlessness of mind resigned.
It drizzles nectar, a steady melody is heard and there is enlightenment within.
Asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities.
Says Nanak, asceticism lies in death in life.
The conch sounds without being blown,
And there is a feeling of fearlessness.
Asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities.”*

- (Quoted by Duggal, 1987; p.20)

The ascetics were touched by what Nanak had said to them and the temple, still a place of pilgrimage, was named Nanakmata instead of Gorakhmata.

GURU GORAKHNATH AND THE JOGIS

The Alvar tradition is very close to another form of spiritual tradition that appears strong in the indigenous mindset: that of guru-worship. In the Sanskrit tradition it was the Svetasvatara Upanisad that, as quoted above, for the first time recognized devotion to the spiritual teacher, a guru, as a form of devotion to God. A combination of the indigenous forms of asceticism and bhakti to a guru came together in the development of the spiritual tradition of the Jogis and their devotional practices to Guru Gorakhnath. Let us discuss the basics of this tradition as there are several references to it in Heer Damodar and information on it is not as readily available in general.

An individual soul has to realize its essential Sivahood or Ultimate Reality within itself, “through the systematic practice of yoga and the attainment of the perfectly illumined state of Samadhi” (Banerjea, 1962; p.309). Other than this, Gorakhnath, being a true Mahayogi, was not interested in any metaphysical controversy. He preached Shakti-Vada with Shakti being the Ultimate and Absolute Power of Siva, eternally inherent in Nature. Most of the written works ascribed to him deal with the exposition of the principles and practices of Yoga. The terminology used is common in the Saiva and Shakta Agamas and the Tantras (Banerjea, 1962; p.25).

Elements of Saiva, Shakti, Tantric, Bhakti, Sufi and Guru-worship traditions are present in the practices and theology of the *jogis*. They were clearly non-Vedic in nature. They accepted people of all castes. Caste distinctions were not observed within an order in terms of eating together etc. Some of the *jogis*, about 8 to 10% in counts quoted by Briggs from all over India, were Muslims (1938). About half of the total numbers were women. Aspects of the Nathi tradition were assimilated also within esoteric Tantric Buddhism through Siddhacharyas. The list of Buddhist Siddhacharya includes all of the Nathi sages

(Dasgupta, 1946; p.220,229). In its guru-vada nature, it had obvious similarities with Sufi and Bhakti traditions of India. The use of music, songs and poetry was also common.

The flexibility also shows up in their appearance and practices as shown by Briggs (1938). The split ears (therefore the name “Kanphata jogis”) and large earrings were the distinctive feature of these jogis. The specific material for the earrings, from bone to clay to crystal to metal to horn, varied from group to group. The Aughars would not even wear the earrings and still be considered jogis. Some would have their heads shaved while others would have unkempt or matted hair. Some would wear yellow, orange or red robes while others walked around naked or with only a rope or a loin-cloth tied around. Those on an elevated level of spirituality were considered Nathi gurus even if they were not wearing the earrings or the janoe (string). It was said that the thread and earrings are worn but are invisible in such cases.

The *jogis* would live around their gurus, serving them, or go on pilgrimages to their sacred sites. One of the most important sites of pilgrimage for them was Tilla Jogian by Jhilm, in the Punjab. This is the place, as described below, where Ranjha gets initiated into the Nathi order. Dasgupta concludes that considering the importance of Tilla as the center for the *jogis* it seems that the tradition originated in the Punjab (1946; p.451). While traveling, the *jogis* would beg for food. They were known for healing with herbal medicines and charms and spells. They could tell fortunes and perform exorcisms and were generally considered to have occult powers. In their ascetic mode, they would show aloofness from the world. rubbing ashes on their bodies and staying celibate. But there were variations even within that. Many would have families and take up jobs or trade to survive, still remaining *jogis*. Briggs mentions many of them being farmers, weavers, tailors, cowherds or even engaging in major commercial enterprises (1938; p.23).

Legends and traditions of Nathi saints appeared in popular poetry. The *jogis* would sing songs and play music in praise of their gurus. The legend of Heer and Ranjha is one of the popular ballads they (especially the Nandia, with their bullocks) would sing (Briggs, 1938; p.25). We would refer to Gorakhnathi jogis again in looking at Ranjha's relation to them.

**STORY AND ANALYSIS OF
HEER DAMODAR**

Part Two

BLANK

6

Introduction to Heer Damodar

In the Introduction above, we discussed why we were not analyzing religious texts to acquire insight into the factors that contributed to a relatively high level of tolerance in the everyday lives of people in the subcontinent till a few centuries ago. To clarify further why we are choosing to work with analysis of folklore, namely Heer Damodar, it is important to review what mythology and folklore offer us. Myths and legends of a people, have their origins deep in the psyche of the people. The more a myth is a true reflection of the deeper truths of a people, the more deeply rooted it gets in their culture and the more popular it becomes. The mythology of an area contains perhaps the deepest cultural realities which get woven into stories, mostly unconsciously. Working with a particular legend, ethnographic, cultural, historical or symbolic information could be extracted from it. Over time various approaches have been designed to work with mythology to extract such information (for a complete discussion of what mythology can offer us and ways in which it can be analyzed, see Appendix I). I mostly rely on Hermeneutics to analyze and bring out relevant patterns in Heer Damodar (for a description of Hermeneutic methodology, see Appendix II).

The story of Heer, a girl from Southern Punjab who fell in love with Ranjha of Hazara—an area in the North, is generally considered the most representative legend of the Punjab area. Heer seems to have lived in Jhang in the times of Behlol Lodhi (1450-1488 AD), before the Mughals (Khan, 1986; p.19). The historical existence of Heer and Ranjha seems to be well established. They were real characters that people would pay tribute to and visit the shrine of, according to various texts of before the time of Akbar.

The first version of the story in Punjabi was written down in poetic form by Damodar some time during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605 AD). Akbar is mentioned about seventeen times at different places in the text. There may have been some earlier Persian versions of the story but Damodar's is accepted as the first one in the indigenous Southern Punjabi language. However, the earliest mention of Heer and Ranjha was found before Damodar's text, in Maqamat-e-Daudi, which was probably written before Akbar's time. (Khan, 1986; p.19).

Over the centuries several versions of the legend have appeared, written by many poets of the area. Almost all folk and spiritual poets of the Punjab, at some point in their poetry would make references to or incorporate aspects of the Heer Ranjha legend. The Sufi poets have made particular use of the characters of the story to represent various aspects of a spiritual journey. After Aurangzeb, as the Mughal empire was disintegrating, Waris Shah wrote the longest version of the story that became most popular as it offered the most accurate depiction of life in the Punjab of the times. The text is full of anthropological information. But as described above, I am more interested in the patterns that gave form to the first Punjabi version during Akbar's reign when things were supposed to be more pluralistic and tolerant in the region.

Heer Damodar (the texts of the legend are generally referred to as “Heer...” followed by the name of the poet, like Heer Damodar or Heer Waris Shah) has a certain mythic quality. There is much unconscious and encoded material in it that can be interpreted and analyzed on an archetypal or socio-cultural level to give us insights into the theme of tolerance. The text is clearly not written with a view to elaborate on any such theme which makes its contents more useful than any religious or spiritual book that propounds a particular view or stance on the theme.

Not much is known about Damodar. There is also controversy about which area he belonged to and even about his religion. Some scholars like Bawa Ganga Singh Bedi insist that Damodar must have been a Sikh of the second or third Guru’s era because he does not start the text with the name of a god or goddess or Allah or Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) (Khan, 1986, p.11). The vocabulary used is also very common in Sikh discourses. But the apparent similarity of the style with Sikhism may have to do with the fact that both the text and Sikhism had their roots in the same soil, in the psyche of the Punjab. It has more to do with the way that religion is viewed and discussed in the Punjab and perhaps in the subcontinent in general. There will be more discussion on this in the analysis of the text.

Damodar’s version of Heer, in Gurmukhi and Punjabi text, is composed of nine hundred and sixty, four-line verses. The text has not been translated into English yet. Thus it is important that before we get into an analysis of the text, we present the story of Heer Damodar. The story is given below with some verses transcribed and translated to capture the feeling of the original text. I have also transcribed and translated particular verses referred to in the analysis where it seemed necessary.

7

Story of Heer Damodar

It is all happening during Akbar's reign. A most beautiful girl is born to a Siyyal family in Southern Punjab. The birth of Heer, after four sons, calls for major celebrations in Chuchak's family. Chuchak is a shikdar and a landlord in Jhang. As Heer grows older word of her beauty spreads in the surrounding areas.

As she turns twelve, all the Siyyals start worrying about her marriage. At this time a proposal comes from the Khehra tribe asking for Heer's hand for the son of their chief. Chuchak discusses it with the other Siyyals and accepts. The party of kammis bringing the proposal is sent off with gifts.

Festivities start as soon as the kammi's break the news to the Khehras. The ecstatic Khans start gathering in great numbers with their best horses and camels to go over to the village of the Siyyals. The engagement of Saida Khehra with Heer is an occasion for major celebrations. Musicians, singers and dancers, all join in the procession. The kammis carry gifts and riches for distribution. They all reach the Siyyals singing and dancing. During the next few days all the rites and rituals of engagement take place in the midst of celebrations and the relationship is formalized.

Once the celebrations are over, Heer, who has been quite detached from the happenings, continues her life as before. Surrounded by a large number of friends, she spends most of the day playing outside. They play in the forest or at the swings and in the evening go to bathe in the river. Everyone fears Heer's temper and stays out of her way. She walks through the forest like a lioness.

*“Jidde Kidde Chuchak hondi, dharohi hor na kai
Heerey sandi dharohi pondi, sari zameen niwai
Katak samet phirey wich jhallan, mehri zameen kambai
Kahe Damodar wah saleti, dhan Chuchak di jai (#39)*

“Wherever the daughter of Chuchak goes, no one else can do anything
And where Heer does something, the whole world bows down around her
With regal splendour she walks the forests, land trembling under her feet
What a girl! Says Damodar, the valor of the daughter of Chuchak”

Up the river in a nearby village lives Noora, a landlord of the Sumbul zat (caste). One day he decides to have a unique boat made for himself. Once the boat is complete, he sends for Luddan, the best of the boatmen from a far off village, to come and take care of his boat. While working for Noora, Luddan, one day, allows a landlord from the area who had come to look at the boat to board the boat instead of referring him to Noora. When Noora hears of this he gets furious and orders Luddan to be brought to him and gives him a beating. Luddan laments about being dishonored and insulted in this way in his old age but no one comes to his rescue.

One night, still angry and bitter about what had happened, Luddan takes off with the boat. After some time he realizes what he has done and what this will lead to. He knows that people will take him for a thief and no one will protect him from the wrath of Noora. He pulls the boat to the bank and is lost in his worries when suddenly he runs into Heer. He tells her what he has done. Hearing of the injustice to the old man Heer gets furious and tells him that he is to live under her protection. Once she sees the boat she likes it too and tells Luddan to keep the boat and that when Noora comes she will break his legs herself. Luddan asks her to call an elder, her father or perhaps her uncles, as it would not be possible for a girl to protect him when Noora comes to drag him away. Hearing this, Heer resolves to handle the matter herself. She fears not Noora, nor anyone else for that matter.

One day someone from Noora's village passes by and identifies the boat and tells Noora about it. He wonders how the Siyyals could dishonor Noora in this way. Noora, upset and ashamed, sends a messenger with a very strong message to Chuchak saying that they better tie up Luddan and turn him over along with the boat or he would be forced to take arms against them. When Chuchak gets the message he is shocked at the nerve of the man who is threatening them like this. He reacts by having the messenger beaten up and insulted.

The messenger goes back and tells Noora how the Siyyals responded to his threat and dishonored Noora by insulting his kammi. Noora feels obligated to respond. So he gets all his companions together and they set out on 300 horses to bring back Luddan and the boat. Along the way, afraid of the bloodshed, they start having second thoughts about taking on the Siyyals. They decide to go through the forest instead of the regular path and take Luddan and the boat back without engaging in a fight. As they approach the river through the

forest, Luddan, looking at the dust-cloud, realizes what was to come and asks Heer to make a compromise and at least give them back the boat. But Heer and all her friends really want the fight. Luddan again begs them to call the men and not to take on the army themselves but to no avail. All the girls go to their homes and without telling anyone get appropriately dressed and pull out swords.

By the time Noora and his companions reach the river, they are astonished to find Heer's group armed and ready to fight. Heer introduces herself as Chuchak's daughter and challenges Noora to fight. He is unable to refuse her challenge, and coming forward gets injured by Heer. Hassi, one of Heer's special friends, asks Heer to reconsider as this does not seem right. Heer tells her friends that this is the first time that they have had to fight like this and they need to show everyone what they are capable of. They draw their swords, take their shields and invoking the name of Ali (a slogan in the name of Caliph Ali, often used by Muslim armies right before they launch an attack), jump on to Noora's group. Even as the men get tired and want to withdraw, the girls would not let them. Noora finally tells his friends that this is not a good idea because if they die at the hands of girls, that would really be a dishonor. Heer, challenges Noora to come back into the fight for they have not had their fill yet. The men are quite impressed with the women of Siyyal who do not even fear death. Thus the episode ends with both Luddan and the boat remaining with Heer.

And now we go back in time to the birth of Ranjha. Far north of Jhang, in Hazara, there lives another landlord, Muazzam, who is a shikdar for his area. He is a Ranjha by zat. He has a son named Dhedo who from his early childhood has been known for his radiance and attraction. His mother dies when he is six. His elder brothers Tahir and Zahir, jealous of how people are attracted to him and afraid that if he grows up, he

would certainly take the place of the father as the shikdar, keep making plans to kill him.

Muazzam, who has an idea of how the brothers feel about Dhedo, keeps him close to himself and further decides to have a guardian for him, just in case he himself were to die. So he secretly writes a letter to his friend, Khan Yaqub Warriach, a landlord of a neighboring village and asks him for help. Yaqub Warriach calls all members of his tribe and reads them the letter asking for suggestions. They know of Dhedo and suggest that he could be married into their tribe, to Yaqub's daughter. Muazzam is overjoyed to hear of this and all kinds of celebrations follow. He decides, under the circumstances, to break the traditions and send Dhedo off to the bride's tribe after marriage. He writes to Warriach that as he is old and wants to make sure that this arrangement works out, he wants to take care of it as soon as possible. Thus the preparations for the wedding start. Dhedo looks captivating and everyone who sees him cannot help but fall in love with him. But things do not go as planned. Before the wedding, Muazzam dies.

After the death of the father, the two elder brothers take all of the wealth and again start planning to get rid of Dhedo. They wonder if it would be better to poison him or to strangle him. They wonder if it would be too obvious to kill him immediately after the father's death. Dhedo sensing that they are cheating him out of the wealth, tells them that after his father's death there is no love left for him in the family and that they can continue to distribute the land and wealth amongst themselves. Dhedo would just walk around in a loyee. People in the village, feeling bad about what was happening, start talking more openly about what Tahir and Zahir are up to. Dhedo also hears about their ultimate plan to get rid of him. Thus in the middle of a night, taking with

him his flute and his sarod (string instrument), without any money or food, he leaves his home.

Dhedo Ranjha goes into a mosque to spend the night. Early in the morning the girls, including the daughter of the sirdar (chief), come by the mosque to get water from the well. Then some Jats stop by and start asking Dhedo where he is heading. Dhedo tells them his story. The daughter of the sirdar goes straight to her home and tells her mother that she has found her mate in the mosque. They could make the arrangements for her or she was going off on her own. The mother slaps her across the face for having no shame. But she replies that she has thrown off her shyness and is already devoted to this young man. The mother goes off to see him for herself. She freezes as she lays eyes on Ranjha. Agreeing totally with her daughter's choice, she announces that they are going to give their daughter in marriage to the stranger. As Ranjha has not eaten anything, food is brought to him in the mosque at night. But Ranjha, knowing that he has no intentions of marrying the girl considers the food haram (made unlawful by Islam). Thus, in the middle of the night, despite feeling the pangs of hunger, he leaves again without telling anyone.

When the hunger gets unbearable he goes into a house and asks for something to eat. The woman spreads out a white sheet and offers him good food. When the man of the house comes in he also treats Ranjha as a blessing and asks his wife to bring more food for the guest and to arrange for his stay at night. When he has rested they asked him about his family etc. Ranjha tells them that he has no family and no home. They offer him a mule or camel to travel on or a cow and a place to live if he wants to stay. But Ranjha, having acquired support and strength from them, takes his leave, telling them that he needs to go and pay homage to some Pirs after which he would come back to stay.

After a long and difficult journey, he reaches the village of the Siyyals. Standing on the bank of the river he wonders how to

proceed. After a while he sits down and starts playing his flute. Suddenly, the Panj Pir (five Pirs) appear in a boat in the river, listening to his flute. The boat comes to the bank and the Pirs get off and join him. Thus, the six of them sit together and Ranjha tells them his whole story.

*“Tan ghin haqiqat razi hoye, Ranjhay wanjhli wahee
Lalit rag wich wahi wanjhli, peeran changi bhaee
Hik hik with diti lay sabhnan, khatir aye razaee
Aakh Damodar Heer walaihan, Ranjhay pallay payee”
(185)*

“Satisfied knowing his story, they started listening to
Ranjha’s flute
He played his flute in Rag Lalit which the peers loved
Each one pulled him to his chest, pleased with him
And as a reward they gave to him, Heer”

Then the Pirs go to Heer, in her dream, and tell her of the coming of her beloved. They also tell her not to accept anyone else but him. Before leaving, they give Ranjha milk to drink and suddenly Ranjha feels a radiance and a glow within and a new vision of everything. And thus, it was the Pirs who give Ranjha his love also.

Ranjha wakes up in the morning and swaying in a trance-like state, walks over to where Luddan is taking care of his boat. Luddan asks him where he is coming from and where he is heading. Then he asks Ranjha to play some of his music. Ranjha starts playing again and all the animals of the jungle including lions, tigers and snakes gather around him. Luddan gets intoxicated just listening to him. When Ranjha stops playing Luddan is so impressed that he offers him everything he has--his

cows and his two wives. Ranjha tells him that he has no need of anything; he could keep his cattle. Then he asks him if he could just take a little nap on the bed nearby. Upon that Luddan goes quiet. Ranjha gets very upset that a moment ago this man was offering him all his cattle and wives and now he was not even willing to let him use the bed for a while. But Luddan explains that the bed belongs to Heer and that everyone is so terrified of her that no one would dare use her bed. Ranjha lays down on it anyway. Luddan allows him to do so thinking that he himself may lose his life over this, but it would be for Ranjha.

Heer is on the swings with her friends on the other side of the river. As the swing goes up she sees someone sleeping on her bed. Without thinking she jumps into the river and swims to the other side through the rough waters. People gather around to see what is happening. Luddan seeing the gathering knows that he will be killed today. Heer, furious, asks him if he is losing his mind of old age or is it that some powerful landlord, wanting to use her bed, has made him forget his loyalties to Heer. Listening to her yelling, Ranjha takes his loyee off his face. Suddenly there is light everywhere and even the fish in the water feel the shock. Everyone is overwhelmed looking at him. He jumps off the bed and is about to leave when she asks him if he could play his flute once. He starts playing and all the wild animals start gathering around them again.

Afterwards, Heer turns to Luddan with gratitude and tells him that she has always been waiting for him. Luddan tells her that that is why he had asked him to stay and offered him her bed. Heer looks at Ranjha quietly and knows that the Pirs have brought him to her. Ranjha on the other hand, also stunned, in his heart knew that she had been given to him by the Pirs.

*“Dhedo pakr leeto ye Heeray, lay kaddi tay aaye
Trey se sath sahelian nalay, sahab khaid banayee
Kaddhi utay majlis baithay, Dhedo, Chuchak Jai*

Kai na kissay nal bolaindi, aisee halat aayee” (215)

“Heer had made a connection with Dhedo, taking him with her
Now with three hundred and sixty girls, Ranjha played
They would have a majlis together, the girls, Ranjha,
Heer
But how her inner state was changing, Heer could not share with a single one”

*“Dukh na thammay, duskeen roway, koi bujh sakkay nahin
Ronday nain karaindi zari, keen thon dukh wandain” (221)*

“Unending pain, continuous crying, no one could know why
Crying eyes continue craving, and no one to share the sorrow”

Heer’s friends start getting ideas about what to do with Ranjha. They all like him and desire him for themselves. Heer, however, still unable to talk, cannot stop the continuous flow of tears from her eyes. She feels a pain that would not end and cannot be shared. Finally upon Hassi’s insistence she tells her how in a way she regrets meeting Ranjha. She cannot imagine how she has spent her days, her life, without Ranjha. With Hassi’s support, she tells all the other girls to go away and play at the swings. Hassi, she asked to sit at a distance. Then she brings Ranjha to the bed.

*“Koi na aakho Heeray mainon, na koi aakh Saleti
Zat sanat pachhano nahi, main chakay nal chakaiti*

*Kaddon Chuchak man peo mainda, main kiddan ohnan
di baiti*

*Daman aa lagi lar tainday, jay pawan qabool jataiti
Tora trut gaya Heeray da, jo boli it bhatti
Hoi khak zameen di loka, rahi os mani na ratti
Gal wich pallu dast pairan tay, ishq machayee matti
Jeon peeran Ranjhay non ratta, teon Heer Ranjahitay
ratti” (228-229)*

“Let no one call me Heer, let no one call me Saleti
Let no one trace my caste, I am of the caste of my Chak
I have no parents, I’m no one’s daughter
I’m here at your feet, if you accept this Jatti
Heer lost her command and her pride and rule
She was dust in the ground, her grandeur gone
In love and devotion, at the feet of Ranjha
What the Pirs were to Ranjha, Ranjha was to Heer”

Heer tells her mother that she has found a new *chak* (cowherd) for them who would take very good care of their cows. Thus Ranjha gets introduced to Chuchak. All the Siyyals sitting with Chuchak ask him where he is from. Ranjha evades the question and says that he is very hungry and would appreciate some food. When asked to send some food outside, Heer tells her father that there is enough food left over inside and that he should send anyone who needs to eat inside. Once inside, Ranjha has a feast, all prepared by Heer, who stands by him as he eats, with a fan in her hand.

After the meal he goes back to Chuchak and tells him his background and why he left home and has ended up with the Siyyals. Chuchak feels delighted to be able to help Muazzam Ranjha’s son and offers cattle, land to farm on and anything else that Dhedo needs to settle down there. But Ranjha, to Chuchak’s

great surprise and disappointment, only wants to be Chuchak's chak and take care of his cows.

Ranjha tells all about the cow whose milk they were drinking. Chuchak is totally impressed with the psychic abilities of Ranjha almost as if he was a Pir or a seer. Impressed also with his great radiance, Chuchak gives him his desired job and orders a general celebration.

Ranjha takes the cows out for the first time. The *chaks* who have started feeling quite jealous of this new *chak* take his cattle and lead them into the jungle. At evening when Ranjha cannot find his cattle he just climbs a hill and starts playing his flute and again all the animals including the lions, the snakes *and* the cattle, like gopis responding to Krishna's call, gather around him. He keeps patting the lions on the head as he walks back with them along with the cattle. The Siyyals watch in amazement as the water-buffaloes go into their respective places and start giving milk, even those that are typically very difficult, without any problems. They tell Chuchak and all the others about it. But Chuchak already knows that this is a very special chak, almost like a holy man (a wali).

The *chaks*, though, have not been too happy with Ranjha. He attracts wild animals like lions, tigers and snakes and moreover they feel jealous of how everyone seems to be just falling in love with this new *chak*. So they make a plan to get rid of him. They get their swords out and go out on a dark night to finish him off. Suddenly they are attacked by armies of horsemen, all dressed in black, riding black horses, who followed and dispersed them. In fear and shock they come to Chuchak and confess what they had planned to do and tell him about what happened. But Chuchak already knows that this new *chak* is blessed (has Baraqa). Thus the *chaks* give up their quest as they realize that they cannot be

an enemy of him who is so perfect (Kamil) and a friend of everyone, including the birds and the animals.

A couple of months pass like this. Heer would make churi (corn sweet) for Ranjha and take it to the jungle where he sat. Now the villagers started gossiping about this. The friends tell Heer that she is getting too involved.

*“Asan tan kamil murshid paya, kujh lorinda nahin
Bairi peenghan tusan mubarik, asan son Ranjhan
Sayeen” (#281)*

“I have no needs, having my *kamil murshid* (perfected master)

You can have the swings and you can have the boat, for me, my Ranjha *Sayeen*”

Heer replies that they can go and have their swings and games; she needs nothing else now that she has found her perfect master. The friends are surprised at the clarity and the boldness of her answer.

The news travel all around that Chuchak’s daughter was having an affair (*ashnai*) with their *chak*. But no one dared to bring it to the parents’ attention. Finally the daughters-in-law of the family get together and talk to Kundi, Heer’s mother, complaining that Heer is spoiling her family name. The mother says that she will take poison if this is true. Next, Heer’s sisters-in-law ask Heer if she is involved with the *chak*. Heer retorts that it is really nothing and that it is not right for Khans to take part in such gossip unless they have seen something with their own eyes. Nonetheless, they warn Heer that she should keep in mind who’s daughter she is and who’s daughter-in-law she is about to become. Now Heer’s mother, embarrassed in the community, asks her about it and Heer replies that she, a virgin, would know nothing of knowing a man in that way (an *ashnai*). The mother

still insists that now that Heer is engaged to the Khehras, it is not acceptable for her to behave thus.

Finally, one day a worker asks Chuchak about what Heer has been doing. Chuchak, humiliated and shocked comes and asks Kundi about it. Kundi tells him that she has been hearing about it for some time too but that Heer denies it all. Chuchak calls his brother, Kaido, and asks if during his wanderings through the village he has heard anything. Kaido screams back that Chuchak has been totally dishonored and Kundi should have died rather than giving birth to a daughter like Heer. Chuchak asks him to go into the forest and find out what is really happening. Kaido, reluctantly, for he knows Heer's temper, accepts the task.

At lunch-time Heer comes with the *churi* for Ranjha in the jungle, while Kaido hiding behind a tree sees it all. Ranjha asks Heer for some milk and as she walks away to get it, Kaido, pretending to be a beggar, comes and asks for the *churi*. Ranjha offers it to him without hesitation.

Kaido takes the *churi* and goes straight to Chuchak. He says that while everyone else is having regular food, look what the *chak* was getting for his lunch. Kundi, seeing how this will turn into more embarrassment for everyone, covers Heer, saying that she had made the *churi* herself as an offering to be distributed among poor. When, on the other hand, Heer finds out that Kaido had been spying on her, she goes straight to his little cottage and burns it to the ground. When Kaido gets there she tells him that if he wants to stay alive, he should stay away from her.

One afternoon as Chuchak is walking through the forest he himself sees the two, Heer and Ranjha, sleeping together on the hill. He is so ashamed to see this that he could not face them and turns around. Heer gets up and sees him leaving and wakes Ranjha up. Chuchak, devastated by what he has seen, goes straight back home. When Ranjha goes to see him, he chastises

him, whips him and tells him to leave. Ranjha, crying, goes back to his quarters and in his pain starts playing his music. The other *chaks* gather around him. Then, all the wild animals, birds, snakes, even the cows, like Krishna's gopis, start gathering around him. Chuchak also could not help becoming intoxicated by that music. Finally Ranjha gets up to leave. As he walks away, all the other *chaks* and also all the cows leave with him. Chuchak, already moved by Ranjha's pain, tells him that his hitting was more like a father hitting a son and that Ranjha should come back. Thus Ranjha turns around along with all of Chuchak's cows.

Kundi and Chuchak now decide to arrange Heer's marriage to the Khehras as soon as possible. But when Kundi talks to Heer, she replies that she can no longer be with anyone else but Ranjha because:

*“Pani dul milya pani noon, baqi rahi na kai
Sun ambar! Ahe gal sachaween, keeti kain kurmai” (358)*

“Water flowed and mixed with water and there was no separation left
Listen mother! This is the truth; do not plan any other weddings”

“Kahe Damodar mail karesee, aapay sacha sayeen” (371)

“The true sayeen would himself make our union happen”

*“Sun sahab toon kamil murshid, main ajiz na azmaeen
Laggi aa main nal pairan day, chhrak na mainon jayeen
Daiween pak muhabat sachee, main koon na
bharmaeen
Aakh Damodar suni Ranjhaita! Tairay pairan haith
maraheen” (384)*

“Listen my lord, a perfect master, do not put this meek
one in a trial
Here I am stuck to your feet, do not push me away now
I beg you for your pure and true love, do not turn me away
Listen my Ranjha, my wish, to end my life in your feet”

*“zahr ki pohe mao tehnanon, jehnan kamil ishq
puchaye” (398)*

“What harm can poison do, Mother, to those who have
reached perfect devotion”

*“Aakh Damodar kaun marainda, jain sar Dhedo
sayeen” (414)*

“Who is it that can harm me, under the shadow of Dhedo
sayeen”

Khehras, she says, can go to hell! She can no longer be without her pure and sacred (pak) love. Ranjha, she says, has entered every pore of her body. And as far as she is concerned she is married to Ranjha already. She tells her mother that they have found a real Pir in Ranjha. When she cooks for him, if there is any part of the food that is not prepared or touched by her he would immediately know and would not eat it.

Her mother, cursing Ranjha, insists that the Khehras are pushing for marriage and can not be put off any longer. Also she says Heer would not be able to meet Ranjha any more as the whole village is already talking about them. She reminds Heer that even if they try to pull out of their bond with the Khehras, the Khehras are not going to back off easily and will claim her

by force. There is no way out. Heer sighs and says that the true *Sayeen* himself, then, will have to get them together. Thus the wedding is announced and the celebrations begin.

Heer and Ranjha meet once again in the jungle and while Heer shows great humility and loyalty to Ranjha, he starts questioning her intentions. He wonders how she can sit there with him while they are making preparations for her wedding with the Khehra. He reminds her that he also is the son of a landlord like Khehra and he has become a *chak* only for her.

The Khehras prepare their wedding procession with all kind of celebrations and festivity. The Siyyals also make plans for the reception. They do not let Heer out of their sight. Her brothers and Kundi's brothers stay at home with her at all times. She tells them that she will not let anyone touch her body, now that she has been touched by Ranjha. She has only one heart and that is with Ranjha. She asks what they were going to send with the Khehras.

The Siyyals next go to Ranjha and threaten him. He tells them that after Heer there would be nothing left for him in that village anyway and he, accepting his fate, is planning to go back to Hazara from whence he came.

Heer, however, is not accepting things as easily. She stops eating, saying that without her master (Murshid), she cannot touch food. The brothers and uncles, finding no other way to save their family honor, afraid of what will happen in front of the Khehras and the whole world at the wedding, actually start thinking of killing her, except for Chuchak who intervenes at the last minute.

The wedding procession reaches the village and everyone gathers around to take part in the festivities and catch a glimpse of the bridegroom. Ranjha also thinks that before leaving, he might as well see Heer's husband once. He goes close to the wedding party but due to the crowd, cannot see anything. In order to get higher he climbs on top of a bull and rides through

the crowds. When the bridegroom sees Ranjha, he asks those around him about this young man. The *chaks* tell him that he is someone who wandered here from Hazara and works for Chuchak and is now here just watching the festivities. But Ranjha, riding that bull, had a special radiance about him. Saida Khehra could clearly see that:

*“Ahe koi kamil sayyin sanda, tussan na mul likhaya
Azmat ki rushnai dissay, koi ban harifan laya
Nur inayat dissay nahayat, walliyan sanda saya
Aakho yaro! Kamil koi, apna aap chhupaya” (428)*

“He is clearly a perfected being (*Kamil Sayeen*), you have failed to identify
His greatness is evident in the radiance of his face
A shining light, like a friend of the divine
Listen friends! He’s a perfected one, hidden”

Says Heer to her family...

“Kamil murshid main parna tainda, dooji ja na kai” (433)
“My perfect master, I am your mate, where else would I turn to”

*“Asan kamil murshid paya, kujh lorinda nahin...
Hik dil aahi, so Ranjhan lita, maye dooja dil naheen
Mard paraya na chhoohay asanon, namehram hath na layeen
Aakh Damodar main Ranjhan dee, oh meray sir da sayeen” (437)*

“I have found my perfect master, who needs anything else...

“Only one heart I had, which Ranjha took, I have no
more to give
Let no other man touch my body, namehram, keep their
hands away” I belong to my Ranjha, he, my lord and my
master”

“Aap rakhai asin day hathon, asin janahan nahin” (437)

“He himself moves through my hands, I know of
nothing”

*“Payee jhat suraj rushnai, Ranjhay monh wikhaya
Uthi Heer, payee jhar paireen, tay gal wich palloo
paya” (438)*

“Ranjha showed his face, brilliant, like the radiance of
the sun
And Heer got up and fell in his feet, her honor, now his”

*“Jithay bhavi, banh tithahin, uzr beuzri da naheen
Mahin namani, kujh na janan, bajhon murshid sayeen
Athay pahr dhayan tussada, na karsan sans ajayeen
Akh Damodar was na mainday, jewn janain tewain
nachain” (439)*

“Tie me up wherever you like, I would argue not
Silly me, what do I know, except for my master, my *sayeen*
Every breath, every hour of the day, my mind focused
on you
I am not the one in control, I dance however you make me.”

“Mama, veer na mehram koi, bajhon dhedo sayeen” (443)

“Other than my Dhedo sayeen, my uncle, my brothers,
are mehrams no more”

Ranjha slowly finds a way to the back of the house. A friend of Heer tells her that Ranjha is there. Heer sneaks out and meets him. She touches his feet and hugs him. Ranjha tells her not to touch him. He tells her that she needs to go and settle down with the Khehras while he himself will return to Hazara. As for Heer, she is unaware of anything other than him. Her mind is totally focused on him every moment. She has surrendered totally to his will and will do anything, dance any way he wants her to dance. Ranjha leaves her there and going back into the forest wails and mourns in his grief.

The Brahman comes and performs rituals and ceremonies of the wedding. The mother begs Heer not to create a scene. Heer tells her that Ranjha will have her heart always and other than him no one would ever touch her body. After having her perfected master (*Kamil Murshid*), she needs nothing else in life.

Then comes the Qazi to perform the Nikkah. The brothers, the uncles and the mother all go into her room. She tells the brothers and uncles not to touch her since other than Ranjha no one is a mehram for her anymore. The Qazi asks her to nominate an attorney for herself so he can ask her, through him, if the Khehra is acceptable to her. Heer responds that she was not deaf or dumb and would therefore speak for herself. She belongs solely to Ranjha and likes only him, she says. The mother is the one who likes the Khehra. Heer is subsequently gagged and the Nikkah performed without her approval.

When Saida Khehra comes to her at night and touches her, she asks him who he is and when he tells her that he is Saida Khehra, she turns around and slaps him in the face so hard that he starts bleeding. Since he already knows of Heer's temper and her

relations with Ranjha, to save himself, he says that he has just met Ranjha and it is for him that he has come to see her. She begs his forgiveness and tells him that he is like a brother to her and asks if being a nice brother he could get her together with Ranjha, her only *mehram*. Wanting to get away from there, he tells her that he will go and try to find Ranjha right away; thus he escapes.

When it is time to send the bride off with the wedding procession, Chuchak and his family start wondering what to do. Here they can not use force for everyone including the Khehras will find out. Kaido comes up with the suggestion that as many people are being sent to carry the dowry with the procession, Ranjha should also be given something to carry and sent with them. Ranjha is told that he has to carry a drum with the procession and that if he would not go, Heer will not go either, which would be a source of great humiliation to her. He accepts right away. Heer is now told that as they have arranged for Ranjha to go along with her she should sit in the palanquin. Heer seeing Ranjha sitting by the palanquin happily agrees to sit in it. The dowry with many valuables and riches, along with copious quantities of food, is picked up by the kammi and the procession is ready to take off.

As the time of vidai (the bride leaving her father's home) approaches everyone starts crying. Hassi cries for they can no longer go back to the forest, to the boat, to the swings any more without Heer. As she laments everyone cries even more. Finally Heer speaks her parting words:

*“Sadqay keetee, main Hassi nusathon, aatan chhor sidhai
Bairi, baila te pipal, peenghan, Luddan bap te bhai
Asin jullay an ditheen juheen, phir aawan gal na kai
na ko koh, na takiya mainon, na ko bap na mai” (483)*

“I could give my life for you, my dear Hassi, I am leaving you all behind

The boat, the forest, the pipal tree, the swings, Luddan,
my father and brothers
Watch as I leave it all, for I never will return here again
I have nothing left here for me now, no father and no
mother”

As they pick up the palanquin to go and as Ranjha picks up the large drum on his head, the whole place wails and mourns with sorrow.

Along the way, they stop to rest. The father-in-law of Heer asks an old maid to take some *churi* for Heer as she has not eaten anything. The maid takes it to Heer who refuses to eat it. The maid, knowing of Ranjha, makes a plan. She eats half a plate of the *churi* and takes the rest to Ranjha saying that Heer has eaten this *churi* and has sent the other half to him. Ranjha, very hungry, almost takes a bite, when he suddenly stops and returns the plate to the maid, cursing her for almost making him break his fast, for he is not going to eat *churi* again that is not touched by Heer. This *churi* he says could not have been touched by Heer for he could not smell her in it. The maid, quite impressed with this, takes the plate of *churi* to Heer and now tells her that Ranjha has eaten some of it and has sent the other half to her. She also smells the *churi* and returns it to the maid, cursing her for lying to her, for she also is not going to eat *churi* without Ranjha ever again.

At one point, as the party stops to cross a river, the Khans take Ranjha aside and start beating him up. Ranjha cries out to them to just kill him with a sword and not to torture him so. As they do want to kill him, they start contemplating how best to do it. Saida Khehra can hardly bear to look at him for all the humiliation that he has caused them. He wants to kill Ranjha by chopping his head off with his sword. But the others decide

against killing him too obviously as he is still Chuchak's *chak* and killing him could cause further humiliation and other problems. So they decide to drown him. After beating him up some more they tell him to take the cows across the river knowing that he will die in the process.

In physical and emotional pain, Ranjha cries out and calls the Panj Pir. He tells them that they are the ones who brought him to Heer and now after raising him to such heights they have pulled the ladder from under him. As Ranjha continues to cry, all five of them appear besides him. They tell him not to worry, to go into the water and they themselves will keep him afloat. Once on the other side he plays his Sarodh and all the fish and wild animals appear by the bank to listen.

When Heer gets to the place of the Khehras, she is given a great welcome by their women. Once inside, her mother-in-law brings her some *churi* and tries to feed her with her own hands. Heer refuses to eat unless Ranjha is asked to come and sit with her. The old maid who is present explains to the mother-in-law the story of how Heer's *chak* got left behind last night and did not get any *churi*, so now Heer also will not eat until he gets some too. The mother-in-law, quite upset, tells her that the days are gone when she could feed *churi* to other men. But after a while when other women come and want to play traditional games with the bride, Heer tells them to get Ranjha or she is not going to play any games. The mother-in-law puts an end to all games and rites and rituals and tells everyone to leave.

The khehras again decide that there is no other way but to finish Ranjha off. So they plan to go to the river where Ranjha is staying that night. A girl listening to this, goes to Ranjha and tells him about their plans. That night before they come for him, Ranjha goes into the river again and by early morning reaches the other side. There he remembers Heer's palanquin that was there just a day ago and starts to roll on the ground crying in pain. He plays his flute again and girls gather around him. The

girls ask him if someone he loved has died or if he has lost something precious. Ranjha, burning up with fever, responds that while there may be light for the rest of the world, for him there is only darkness. Then, one girl recognizes him from the day before when he was carrying a big drum on his head in the wedding procession of the Khehras. They ask him to stay there by the river so they can come to him everyday and he can fall in love again. But Ranjha responds:

*“Jay koi jeevay jind day bajhon, tan main moyan jeevaeen
Kithay rahn asada theevay, jan asan vich naheen
Phirda ruh Heer day pichhay, keeh bidh janain naheen
Kuryo! Jay koi jeevay jind day bajhon, tan Heeray bajh
jeevain” (533)*

“If one could live without one’s life, then I could come
back to life
But where would I go to live now, there is no vitality
left in me
My spirit follows Heer somewhere, other than that I
know nothing
Girls! If one could live without one’s life, then I could
live without Heer”

Moving on, Ranjha comes back to the jungle where he used to bring his cattle and where he would sit together with Heer. On the hill where they would sit together, he bends down to kiss the ground. Then, in pain, he starts playing his flute. Immediately from all around, the friends of Heer gather around him, like the gopis around Krishna. They share the pain of separation with each other. The girls wonder why he had to go with the procession like a *kammi* and be humiliated. Then Ranjha tells

them all else that had happened to him and how he made his way back there. Hassi, happy to have him back, tells him that he should stay with them as he had brought color back into their lives. But for Ranjha, they are all like stars around him with no moon, his Heer, in between. He feels his every pore, every drop of his blood doing *zikh* of Heer. He can not live with the Siyyals anymore. Without Heer, Jhang is empty for Ranjha. But Hassi and the others insist that if he were not to stay there, they would also leave Jhang with him. They bring food for Ranjha and then ask him to play his music. He starts to play and while all of them are intoxicated, he quietly gets up and leaves them behind.

When Ranjha finally gets back home to Hazara, he receives a very cold welcome from his brothers. He knows that he will not stay there for long. Casually he mentions to Tahir that he is not interested in his share of the wealth. He has wandered (been a faqir) for twelve years and is now there only to visit his home for a while.

Tahir tells him how disappointed all of them are by what he had been doing during these years. They have heard of him being a *chak* of the Siyyals. They have heard of him carrying the drum on his head at Heer's wedding. He has brought dishonor to the name of his father.

The sisters-in-law then come and ask him about the one that Dhedo had given up everything for. Ranjha does not feel like talking about Heer with them. Friends and relatives come and meet him warmly and sit with him all day long. He does not feel like eating or drinking. He just wears his loyee and sits with them.

Yaqub Warriach hears that the son of Muazzam has returned to Hazara. He comes with a group to meet him and scolds him for doing all that he has done for all these years. He says that Dhedo was to be married into the Warriach family, to his daughter. Muazzam had wished to join the families so. Ranjha tells him that he has no claims to anyone and if they want the families to unite, he should marry his daughter to the elder son of Tahir who is old

enough. Tahir actually likes the idea and Yaqub Warriach also agrees. Thus the preparations for the wedding start.

When it is time to go to the wedding, people in the village start insisting that Dhedo, being a son of Muazzam, must also go along with the wedding procession. Tahir comes and also requests Dhedo to go to the wedding as it would not seem proper otherwise. Dhedo, on the other hand, really does not feel like going under the circumstances. But at the request and insistence of the elders of the family, Dhedo agrees.

When the procession reached the house of the Warriach, the girls, in colorful clothes, come out to welcome them and to see the bridegroom. But there they are struck by the presence and beauty of Dhedo Ranjha. One of Dhedo's friends tell them that this is the Ranjha who has lost his love and has come back to Hazara. The girls have heard of him. When the bride hears of him being out there, she begs the girls to bring him in.

*“Tan ro ro kuri karaydi na'ray, “mainoon aan wikhayo
Aakh saleti sadqay kiti, main arman chakayo
Day dilasa, waikhan tain, mainoon jhat puayo
Aakh Damodar cha asada, mahin virag mitayo” (583)*

“The girl then cries out and begs them, ‘show him to me once’

The girl begs them to fulfill this one wish of hers

Let me have one glimpse to bring some solace to my heart

It is my wish, just to take away the pain of loss”

Thus, when the guests sit down, the girls come to Dhedo and trick him into going inside with them. Once inside, they all encircle him and start dancing around him. Then the bride comes

and asks to see who Dhedo Ranjha is. She asks him what sin she had committed that he would leave her and go after Heer of the Siyyals. She tells him how she has cried for all these years wondering if he would ever come back to her. Ranjha, trying to come up with excuses, tells her that she will get nothing from a useless person such as himself for he has no life left in him. But she knew of all that he had been doing: of his working as a *chak* for the Siyyals just to stay close to Heer; of him humiliating himself by carrying the drum on his head and going with the procession when she married someone else. She approached him saying that if he was after what was someone else's right now, she also wanted what was rightfully hers. Ranjha pushed her back begging her to have shame and reminding her that he was not hers right now.

At this moment Tahir walks into the room and is shocked by what he sees. He reminds Dhedo that she was about to be married off and he has no business being inside the room. Dhedo, swearing that she is like a sister to him, leaves the room and gets away from the scene.

Coming back to Heer, after marriage, Saida and his parents start wondering what to do about her. If they keep her in the house, she keeps talking about Ranjha in front of people. They cannot even kill her as that again would turn into a scandal. They finally decide to send her to live with Sehti, Saida's sister who is kept in a lonely, isolated hut.

Heer is burning in separation from her beloved. She would cry out, wail, moan, then go quiet, smoldering inside, then cry out from the intensity of the pain. Over time she can see her body just rotting away. But she is totally focused on her beloved. She has surrendered her will completely. She wants to burn any way her beloved wants her to burn. The being of Ranjha has entered her through every pore of her body.

“Loon loon dakhil keeta Ranjhaitay, ohoye daro laye

Jeewain jalaye kamil murshid, teeha jaleen maye” (606)

“Ranjha entered every pore of my body, only *he* holds
my cure
I submit to burn any which way my master makes me burn”

*“Ranjha Ranjha kahnon aakhan, main aapay Ranjhan Hoye
Ranjha Heer, Tay Heer Ranjhay dee, ratti faraq na koi”
(607)*

“Ranjha, Ranjha, who do I beseech?, I am Ranjha myself!
Ranjha is Heer and Heer, Ranjha, not a trace of a
difference between them”

Heer resigns to attain peace in dying with his image in front of her eyes and his being within her being. Sehti keeps asking her about her pain but Heer sees no point in talking about it. She is so deep in it that no one can do anything about it, except for Ranjha. So she tells Sehti that only one who has gone through this pain can understand it.

It is at this point that Sehti starts telling Heer her story. She is kept here, not because she is crazy but because she had fallen in love with Brahmin Ramu. As Sehti keeps telling her story to Heer, Heer, knowing what Sehti is going through, starts taking care of her and supporting her. As Heer begins making devious plans of getting Sehti and Ramu together, she herself starts gaining consciousness and strength. It is almost like Heer of the Siyyals is waking up again.

Heer gets Ramu to start coming to the hut at night. Heer watches with envy as Ramu and Sehti continue to meet each other. Sehti feels really grateful to Heer for turning her life around. As she feels all veils lifted between Heer and herself, she

asks Heer about her pain. Heer tells her story. Sehti, regretting not knowing anything earlier, immediately calls Ramu and tells him to go to Hazara and take Heer's message to Ranjha.

Ramu asks Heer to give him a message and also to give him a sign that Ranjha will recognize. Heer tells him some details of how and where she used to meet Ranjha that will tell Ranjha that the message could only be from Heer. She asks him to tell Ranjha that she is stuck here, slowly dissolving, moving towards death, having only his name and his being, still with her. She tells Ramu to hurry.

*“Uthi Ramu! Pohonch savairay, main marvaindi aahi
Sutti ag jagai Sehti, tan mainday kon lai” (643)*

“Get up Ramu! get there as soon as you can; I'm dying here
Sehti has inflamed my whole being with the fire that I carried inside”

Walking for two days, with very few breaks, Ramu reaches Hazara. There he asks about the sons of Muazzam and people tell him about them all, including the one who left home and fell in love with Heer Siyyal and when she got married to someone else, came back to Hazara and now just lives in a small hut, like a sayeen, slightly outside of the city. Ramu goes out of the city and finds him. When the day is over, he finds a quiet time to approach Ranjha. He tells Ranjha that Heer has sent him. Ranjha, not believing him, tells him that he does not know any Heer and he is not even Ranjha. Ramu then gives him the details that Heer had given him as signs and tells him that she is slowly dying without him. Ranjha tells Ramu to go and tell her that Ranjha is coming to her. He burns his hut and leaves Hazara that night.

Ranjha decides to go up to Tilla first, the highest mountain near Jehlum with a Gorakhnathi temple on top of it. He climbs

till he “reaches the place of the Pirs”. The jogi there asks Ranjha where he is coming from. Ranjha tells the jogi that he belongs nowhere. He has come to him for initiation and blessings. The jogi tries to send him away and turn him from the jogi marg (jogi path). Ranjha starts crying and at the feet of the Pir, begs for his blessing. He knows that those who have the blessing of the jogi are successful in the world.

The jogi warns him that the path of jog is dangerous like poison and difficult to tread—begging for food, sleeping on straw. Still if he wants jog, he needs to tell the truth about himself. So Ranjha tells him everything: his background, his falling in love with Heer and now that Heer was with the Khehras, his coming to the jogi for help and blessings. The jogi goes back to his chelas (initiates; students) who advise him against initiating Ranjha into jog. But he sees authenticity in Ranjha and decides to initiate and bless him. Ranjha puts the mark of jogis on his forehead and puts the rings of Gorakhnathi jogis in his ears, looking quite different. The jogi tells Ranjha that since he has come to him, ‘she’ has been given to him. After initiation, Ranjha has even more of a radiance about him.

In another four days Ranjha reaches the Siyyals. He sees the girls around. Some of them who were unmarried are now married. Suddenly one says if only Ranjha would come this way today. Another says that she can also feel something in her heart, as if a strange happiness is around, and a slight intoxication. And she remembers having heard the peacocks in the morning. All of them start talking of him and craving his presence. The feeling is so strong that they start looking for him. But they can not find him anywhere. Suddenly they run into the jogi. They all ask him if they are going to meet today the one that they crave so much. He just sits there quietly and it is some time before Hassi recognizes him. They all hug him and they tell their stories,

share their pain, sigh together, and sit together like old times. Hassi then tells him to stay there. It is the same jungle, the same boat, the same togetherness. But it is not the same for Ranjha.

*“Sun Hassi! Main kikaar jaleen, aye dil lagda nahin
Heeray bajhon, kul hanaira, kujh dasainda nahin
Rug rug day wich Heer samani, hor na ko ashnai
Aakh Hassi, vainda han khairin, keh bhavay khassay
tain” (698)*

“Listen Hassi! This heart won’t let me stay anywhere
I see nothing in this complete darkness without my
Heer
She soaks every vein in my body, there is no other
Hassi, I am already on my way to the Khairas, you only
have an empty shell here”

But Hassi and the others have a longing and craving of their own. Hassi insists:

*“Sun Dhedo! Hik araz asadi, kit koon agay vainda?
Tun oho Ranjha tay asin oho kurian, kyun nahin gal
manainda
Bohat udeek tusadi maikoon, hun naheen rahn karainda
Aakh Damodar, nahin tan aatan nalay tairay vainda” (699)*

“Listen Dhedo! We beg you, why do you go forth?
You are the same Ranjha and we are the same girls, why
don’t you accept?
We have longed for you so long, we cannot go on
without you
If you do not stay, we all will go with you”

Ranjha keeps telling them that it is not in his control any more. Hassi also is clear that any life with him would be better than anything that they had with the Siyyals. Finally some of them bring some *churi* for him and Hassi asks him to play his music for them. He starts to play and the animals start to gather around them and the girls go into a trance as if they are totally drunk. He quietly gets up and leaves.

When he approaches the city of the Khehras, he wonders how to proceed. He finds a place to sit just outside the city, by the river. Sehti happens to see him and is struck by his radiance. She recognizes who he must be. But still she asks him what kind of *jogi* he is and where he is from. He tells her that he is nobody and from nowhere. She slowly starts asking him where his asceticism was when he almost got Luddan beaten up by the river and when he carried the drum on his head and then when he gave his *churi* to Kaido. Ranjha upset with her from the beginning, now realizes that she obviously knows Heer. She tells him who she is and tells him to go to the house where Heer is early next morning and not to talk to anyone.

The next morning he goes to the house that Sehti had pointed out. Heer, who does not know of his coming, is asleep outside. She looks emaciated and sick. As she begins to get up he can see that she has been in continuous pain. He asks her for an offering as he has been hungry for too long. She tells him that hunger is all that she has had also and that is all that she can offer. In exchange for an offering, the *jogi* claims, he can give her whatever she longs for. After talking with him for some time, Heer suddenly smells Ranjha and begins to recognize him in the *jogi*. Then the Panj Pir intervene and tell her of his identity. Ranjha at this point cuts through the pretense and they finally hold each other and cry and cry but the craving will not leave. Heer is afraid to let him go lest he may turn into a dream again. But later, afraid that someone may

find out and harm him, she tells him to go to the river bank and sit there till she talks with Sehti.

Three days later Sehti comes over to Heer. She explains that she got pregnant and therefore needed to take care of things. Then Sehti asks Heer to have a fight and to repeat the same curse words that she hears and maybe even worse. Sehti starts and Heer slowly begins to respond in fiery ways that she once knew well. After the fight, Sehti goes to her parents and tells them that Heer is almost ready to come out of her retreat and live happily with Saida. The father-in-law, very happy to hear of the developments, sends all kinds of luxuries to Heer's abode. Heer starts cooking well and also starts making and distribution *churi* again. Once Saida tries to come into the abode and Sehti intervenes and tells him strictly that he can come only when she tells him that Heer is perfectly ready.

Then Sehti and Heer think of a plan. They rub a paste of turmeric on Heer's body, take a large needle and puncture holes in her ankle and scream that she has been bitten by a Cobra. Everyone starts crying and screaming. Some run off to tell Saida and his parents. When everyone is present, Sehti mentions the *jogi* who, with his face wrapped up, has been sitting by the river for a few days. Everyone knows that if anyone has a cure for a poisonous snake, a *jogi* does. Heer's father-in-law goes to the *jogi* and asks him for help but the *jogi* does not respond. After a while he calls for Sehti who, along with other women, goes over and begs him to come and help. Finally he agrees to come and see what he can do.

When he looks at the marks on the ankle, he tells them that she has been bitten by a Cobra and it takes many days and a lot of effort to treat the bite. They beg him to care for her. Finally he agrees but with special provisions. He needs to prepare potions and cast spells, so he wants a totally isolated place with one attendant who is close to the girl. He suggests the one who had come seeking help. Thus all arrangements were made, with Sehti

as the attendant, and the *jogi* was told to take as many days as he needed to save Heer. So Sehti gets everyone out, bolts all the doors and windows and announces:

*“Hasso, khaido, maojan kareho, kami kesay di naheen
Jay main moi tan sadqay kiti, aawan kam tusaheen
Sey shukranay mainun kuriya, sikday ruh milaeen
Jeha hukm karay sayeen Ranjha, khawan soye pakaeen”*
(802)

“Laugh and play, have all the fun, we don’t need anyone
now
And if I die for this, I sacrifice my life to make things
work for you
I am grateful a hundred times dear girl, for the spirits are
united
And if *Sayeen* Ranjha would order us now, we prepare
what he wants to eat”

So finally Heer and Ranjha sit together, enjoy good food after almost three years, and enjoy each others company in these days filled with love and pleasures. Their faces begin to glow and their eyes begin to sparkle again. Heer, once again, looks as she used to when she played with Ranjha in the forest.

Things continue uninterrupted for eight days. Then people from the family come to Sehti’s house to inquire about what is happening. Sehti comes out to them and informs them that Heer is still alive but does not move; the *jogi* has been standing for all these eight days repeating mantras without sleeping or eating anything. The father-in-law tells her that they are waiting and any time there is any change in her condition, they need to know right away. Sehti comes back in

and tells them to continue. Heer and Ranjha are now like one spirit in two bodies.

In another eight days the *Khehras* come back again. Sehti again comes out and tells how Heer is slightly better now. She also tells them of all the snakes who come and visit the *jogi* while he casts his spells. It is another eight days before they all return. Sehti congratulates them this time as Heer has turned over on her own that week. She also tells them of amazing feats that the *jogi* is performing. Another week passes and the three of them start planning a strategy. The next time the *Khehras* appear Sehti tells them that Heer is much better and in a week they should come prepared to give her a bath. Everyone starts to celebrate Heer's recovery with music and offerings.

Now the couple have a week to make the next move. After five days they finally decide to run away. With much gratitude to Sehti, Heer and Ranjha leave her behind and flee the village that night. For the next two days they would hide in the forest during the day and run during the night.

On the eighth day, when the *Khehras* come prepared to welcome Heer back, no one answers the door. They break the door and wake up Sehti who is lying almost unconscious on the bed outside. She tells them that she has no knowledge of Heer and feels drugged. They all go inside the room and find a hole in the back wall. Immediately they know the *jogi* is none other than the *chak* who has come for Heer. The men climb their horses and go in all directions looking for them.

One party of the *Khehras*, including Saida, end up in the area where Heer and Ranjha are hiding during the day. The couple sees them and while wondering what to do, they see a group of *Khans* riding their horses close by. They both go to them and ask for help. First Heer introduces herself and then Ranjha, giving details of their families and letting them know that they rightfully belong to each other. The *Khans* are ready to give their lives for the daughter of Chuchak and son of

Muazzam who ask for their protection. When the party of Khehras come by and demand the couple, the Khans draw their swords and start fighting.

After many die other people passing by come to them and ask what started the fight. They hear both sides but as many people had been killed, they tell them that the Qazi of the Raja in Kot Qabula will have to decide this matter. By the time they reach Kot Qabula, Saida's father and others from the village having heard the news also arrive there. Hearing that Chuchak's daughter has come to the Qazi of Kot Qabula with her *chak*, a huge crowd gathers in the court. The hearing begins.

The Qazi sits down to settle all issues according to the *Shariat* (Islamic law). Heer's father-in-law tells the story first. The Qazi listening to the details turns to Heer telling her that Ranjha was not rightfully hers, that she had brought shame to her father and lost her honor in the world. Heer responds:

“Rab nikah dillan day baddhe, tun key bhansain Qazi”
(905)

“It is god who ties hearts together in a Nikkah; who are you, Qazi, to break them?”

But according to the Qazi, *Ishq*, love and devotion, has nothing to do with *Shariah*. He thinks that Heer should go back to the Khehras. For Heer that is leaving virtue for sin. She curses the Qazi and declares that she would never leave Ranjha's side. All that she says sounds like *kufr* to the Qazi who considers *ishq*, *haram* (unlawful). Besides, she was connecting herself with a *chak* which means going against her *zat* also. Heer is willing to accept any punishment for what she had said. But the Qazi can not understand how anyone can justify her relations with the

chak when her father had arranged her wedding with Saida and the whole village had attended the wedding. She is already dishonored but can choose to go back with the Khehras willingly or she will be forced to go. Her actions meant taking haram over halal and a disregard for god's Shariah. According to the Shariah, Ranjha is the culprit. According to Heer though, Saida had not even come close to her in the last three years and to Ranjha, she was related, even when she was an infant. The argument continues between Heer and the Qazi until he starts to wonder if she really deserves to live. Finally Heer declares:

*“Sun Qazi hik araz asadi, aye ikth kahani
Loh Qalam na arsh na kursi, na nazri aaway pani
Zamin zamana, chand na suraj, juti jot samani
Sahab di sonh sun tun Qazi, main tadon Ranjhay dast
vikani” (927)*

“Listen Qazi to what I have to say, to the real story
There were no heavens, no waters, no fates had yet been
written
No sun, no moon, no land, not even time itself existed
I swear, listen Qazi, even then I belonged to Ranjha”

*“Sun baitay samait tun Ali, main koon bohot saza
wikhainda
jain da kutta vanjay marainda, so murshid hunay
sunainda
Ke hoye, main bhulli chukki, oh apni laj palainda
Aakh Damodar tun sun Ali, tainon Ranjha nahin
chhurainda” (938)*

“Listen up all, including you Ali, torture me all you can
When a dog is dying, the master knows

Even if I falter in my devotion, *he* would protect his honor
Listen Ali! Ranjha would never let you get away with this”

Irritated with Heer, the Qazi turns to Ranjha and asks him how he took on the disguise of a *jogi* from being the *chak* of Chuchak. Ranjha explains that the story is complex and cannot be understood by those who do not understand ‘the secret’.

The Qazi orders Ranjha to be whipped. As soon as they start to hit him, Heer runs to him and hugs him, begging to be beaten instead. She is taken away and given to the Khehras. They mount their horses and drag Heer along, beating her up. She challenges them saying she welcomes these injuries and this suffering. She would gladly sacrifice her life on the path of her love. They continue to abuse and torture her. She tells them that Ranjha, her *murshid*, will not let them get away with this.

Suddenly, a fire starts in Kot Qabula. Justice has not been served there, so the city starts to burn in a way that any attempt to put out the fire only made it worse. Water turns to oil when put on the fire. People know well that this is the curse of the *jogi* because the Qazi has failed to serve justice. They all come to the *jogi* begging forgiveness. They ask him to stop the fire and they will send the army after the Khehras. Ranjha makes the fire stop so that the army could pass through. The Qazi still insists that Heer belongs to the Khehras, even if the *jogi* can put out the fire. To the people, though, it seems clear that the Qazi has brought this doom to their city. Heer and Ranjha belong together. This has happened because the *jogi* has borne torture. The army stops the Khehras and orders them to turn around quickly as the whole place is burning. Heer knows that Ranjha has shown his powers. The army brings Heer back to Kot Qabula but the fire will not let them pass. From the other side, the army tells her, the *jogi* had

let them pass through the fire. Now Heer stands in front of the fire and it makes way for the whole army to pass.

*“Tan Ali nun Qazi aakhay, kar kar shara sunaye
Jo kujh zahir ditha aaha, so ye niaon chukaye
Batin baat koi na janay, Qazi sukhan sunaye
Haq Siyyal, so ye ghin vanjo, jo koi ag bujhaye” (949)*

“The Qazi still was repeating Shara to Ali
He only could do justice with what was overt and visible
He presented his arguments but knew not that which is
inner and hidden
Heer Siyyal was rightfully his who knows how to put
the fire out”

Ranjha stands in front of the fire, joins his hands and asks the Pirs to have mercy on the city and put out the fire. The fire is put out. The army drives the Khehras out of the area. Everyone comes to the *jogi*, offering their devotion to him and begging him to stay with them. Even the Qazi joins the crowds in asking the couple to stay in the city. Now that justice has been served in the city a strange smell of roses spreads through the city and all hearts rejoice. Heer and Ranjha leave the city together.

*“Jay koh trey gai agairay, tan asi bhi nalay aahay
Panj sawar, joray sabh kalay, charh az ghaibon aaye
Hath phareenday sar dohan day, sar chuman tay
sidrahay
Innay bajhon tun sun Heeray! Roshan honday nahin
Aakh Damodar chhupay kithahin, gaye so pher na aye”
(959)*

“Some followed them for three miles, as they went away
They saw five riders, all dressed in black, appear from
the hidden

They stroked and kissed the heads of the couple
Without them, listen Heer! There is no illumination
Then they left and never came back, somewhere in the
hidden”

8

Analysis of the Legend

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS OF HEER DAMODAR

What is remarkable about the Heer-Ranjha text is an essential presence of powerful and vital elements of what we call religion and spirituality and a noticeable absence of religious and spiritual discourse. How can the text touch upon spiritual journeys, spiritual men and women, different religions and conflicts of social norms and spiritual impulses and not talk about doctrine and religion? My thesis is that the people of the subcontinent possess a deep rooted and ever-present ability to affirm more than one truth. Overtly religious and formal spiritual discourses coexist with the very elements that these discourses cannot deal with; but the subcontinent has produced cultures that can allow and contain this coexistence.

The Heer-Ranjha text first demonstrates that formal religious and formal spiritual discourse can become insignificant before the unstoppable forces of human love and devotion. What we have now, in the subcontinent in general, and Pakistan in particular, is the reverse. Human love and devotion and directness of lived experience have been made secondary to

religious and spiritual discourses. The discourses polarize and fragment society on the basis of religion. It becomes possible to interact and relate to one another only through rigid and inflexible religious identities, for example Hindus or Muslims or this kind of a Muslim or that kind of a Muslim while the authentic, deeper human connection becomes secondary, thereby giving rise to intolerance.

The text of Damodar reveals spiritual elements and connections without really addressing religious or spiritual issues overtly. The experience of devotion and compassion and empathy and the spirit of human connectedness on a heart-level that the text evokes has been used as a metaphor for spirituality by most of the Sufi poets of the Punjab since Damodar. But while what Damodar wrote has spiritual implications, it is on an unconscious level, embedded within the text. Thus Heer Damodar is not read consciously as a document on spirituality and religion. And this is the key that will return the authentic sub-continental ability to allow the coexistence of religion and spirituality and the human experience.

Today we are failing to counter religious and spiritual intolerance effectively because we keep trying to make a case for tolerance or acceptance or compassion within a religious or spiritual discourse or else a totally secular and anti-religious discourse. We start with Islam and try to counter religious intolerance within an already highly constricted discourse where the 'rights' and 'wrongs' are clearly defined. Or if we say religion is a socio-economic phenomenon meant to oppress the masses, our audience becomes a handful of urban elite, because the vast majority of people in Pakistan do have a central and deep experience of religion or spirituality. Instead of religious discourse, Heer Damodar focuses on real, immediate, authentic and deeply emotional connections between human beings. The sheer weight of that reality makes religious identity labels inapplicable. Identities become more flexible, variable and

overlapping, thereby changing the relationship with the ‘other’ who needs to be ‘tolerated’. The interaction is more on a human level, beyond most concepts, naturally leading to more compassion and interconnectedness. There are other patterns or factors that stand out in the text and will be examined.

PATTERNS IN THE TEXT

8.1. Devotional Patterns in the Path (Bhakti) of Heer

Love and devotion seem to have had a very central place in the life of the subcontinent. Many folk and spiritual traditions that have their roots in the area revolve around intense devotional experiences. Devotion to the goddess, to gods, saints and local heroes in the traditions of Bhakti, Tantra or Sufism were present everywhere and flourished everywhere in India. The experiences of Heer and Ranjha are clearly rooted in this propensity in the indigenous psyche. Compared to Ranjha, who manifests the role of the beloved, Heer’s journey into the heart of devotion and transformation can be matched to stages on a devotional spiritual path. Let us follow the unfolding of love and devotion in the life and being of Heer (in the context of spiritual development).

a) The place of Love

First, according to the text, the place that love has in life is very central and significant. It is essentially real like life and death, and more powerful than all else. When the Khehras are bringing the wedding procession to the Siyyals and Heer refuses to leave Ranjha, her mother and relatives consider poisoning her to save the family honor, Heer says:

*“zahr ki pohe mao tehnanon, jehnan kamil ishq
puchaye” (398)*

“What harm can poison do, mother, to those who have reached perfect devotion”

Poison can end life, at least overtly, in linear time. Death has to do with time. Love and devotion generate experiences that are described as outside time and therefore outside or beyond death. Mystical experiences are also generally described as outside of time, to be eternal! Eternity is experienced in an instant, outside time. According to Heer, love and devotion lead to such experiences. But let us look at her own journey now.

b) Character before the spiritual awakening

Heer had a very powerful character right from her youth. We are going to explore the strength of her character in another section below, illustrating her feminine power or Shakti, but a few examples will suffice here. When she picks a fight with Noora, someone she has never even met before, she, along with her friends, is willing to kill and die for a cause that they feel is right. When her uncle Kaido tries to spy on her and expose her relationship with Ranjha, she burns everything that belongs to him in her anger. Everyone is scared of her. She is described as walking through the jungles like a lioness. Also she is described as being proud, arrogant and egotistical with a strong sense of her entitlement. Right before Ranjha meets her for the first time, when he wants to sleep on her bed, Luddan who is responsible for guarding the bed, assumes that he will get killed for allowing it. He sees granting Ranjha his wish as equivalent to sacrificing his life for Ranjha. But when Heer sees Ranjha on her bed and requests him to play his flute for her, we suddenly see a major transformation in Heer's character.

c) Shedding of the false self

The first change we notice is the breaking down of Heer's pride and arrogance upon her relationship with Ranjha. After seeing Ranjha she refers to Luddan, who has allowed Ranjha to sleep in her bed, as chacha (uncle), and apologizes for having abused him. Heer touches his feet which is a sign of extreme humility she would never have shown to one of her servants earlier.

*“Tora trut gaya Heeray da, jo boli it bhatti
Hoi khak zameen di loka, rahi os mani na ratti
Gal wich pallu dast pairan tay, ishq machayee matti” (229)*

“Heer lost her command and her pride and rule
She was dust in the ground, her grandeur gone
In love and devotion, at the feet of Ranjha”

On the devotional paths to spiritual development, often the first thing that is attacked is the false sense of self and egotism. Though this happens through a long process, signs of humility and gratitude begin to emerge early on. Heer not only begs Luddan for forgiveness but also shows gratitude towards him for bringing Ranjha into her life (212).

d) Opening of the heart

Immediately after meeting Ranjha Heer experiences an intense emotional discharge and feels like crying a lot. This is the opening of the heart as discussed often in Sufi tradition. When Heer meets Ranjha and before she can share her feelings with him or can act on them, the text says:

*“Dukh na thamma, duskeen roway, koi bujh sakkay
nahin
Ronday nain karaindi zari, keen thon dukh wandain” (221)*

“Unending pain, continuous crying, no one could know why
Crying eyes continue craving, and no one to share the
sorrow”

There does not seem to be any overt reason for pain yet there is an intense longing or craving with a deep sense of loss in every moment spent without the beloved, sometimes with introversion and hypersensitivity. Heer has a totally new kind of an emotional opening. Later of course she wonders how she could have spent a lifetime without him (224).

She has suddenly been pulled out of her grandiose sense of self and narcissism by someone outside of her self, by the beloved. She addresses him as kamil murshid, a Sufi term for a perfected master/teacher, and says with humility and devotion:

*“Sun sahab toon kamil murshid, main ajiz na azmaeen
Laggi aa main nal pairan day, chhrak na mainon jayeen
Daiween pak muhabat sachee, main koon na
bharmeen
Aakh Damodar suni Ranjhaita! Tairay pairan haith
maraheen” (384)*

“Listen my lord, a perfect master, do not put this meek
one in a trial
Here I am stuck to your feet, do not push me away now
I beg you for your pure and true love, do not turn me away
Listen my Ranjha, my wish, to end my life in your feet”

e) Devotion

Heer interacts with Ranjha from this place of complete devotion and deep love. Her focus is undivided. When her marriage is being arranged to another, she says:

“Kamil murshid main parna tainda, dooji ja na kai” (433)

“My perfect master, I am your mate, where else would I turn to”

She tells her mother, *“sar sayeen main daindee” (360)*, meaning, “I would give my head, my life, to my master (sayeen).” This level of devotion is the hallmark of devotional spiritual traditions in the subcontinent.

Further examples of her intense devotion to Ranjha and the relationship of the lover to the beloved, follow:

*“Asan kamil murshid paya, kujh lorinda nahin...
Aakh Damodar main Ranjhan dee, oh meray sir da sayeen” (437)*

“I have found my perfect master, who needs anything else...
I belong to my Ranjha, he, my lord and my master”

*“Payee jhat suraj rushnai, Ranjhay monh wikhaya
Uthi Heer, payee jhar paireen, tay gal wich palloo paya” (438)*

“Ranjha showed his face, brilliant, like the radiance of the sun
And Heer got up and fell in his feet, her honor, now his”

The glorification of the beloved is a hallmark of devotional poetry in India. Comparing Ranjha to the sun, mentioning his

radiance, his charm and entrancing effect on people and animals, his perfection; these are things often mentioned in texts and are very typical of Bhakti and Sufi poetry.

f) Estrangement from the familiar

When people start a spiritual path or go through an initiation estrangement from familiar things and people is a common occurrence. Because of the intensity of her inner emotional life or because of her focus on the beloved, Heer starts to lose interest in and become withdrawn from the typical activities that filled her life before. So she tells her friends:

*“Asan tan kamil murshid paya, kujh lorinda nahin
bairi peenghan tusan mubarik, asan son Ranjhan
Sayeen” (#281)*

“I have no needs, having my perfected master
You can have the swings and you can have the boat, for
me, my Ranjha Sayeen”

In relation to people, there is a concept of “mehram” in Islam, which means one’s kith and kin; those that a woman does not need to observe purda (veil) with. These include her father, brothers, sons, brothers of her father and mother and once legally married, her husband. Every other man is a namehram (not a mehram) to her. Heer tells her mother:

*“Hik dil aahi, so Ranjhan lita, maye dooja dil naheen
Mard paraya na chhoohay asanon, namehram hath na
layeen” (437)*

“Only one heart I had, which Ranjha took, I have no
more to give

Let no other man touch my body, namehram, keep their hands away”

“Mama, veer na mehram koi, bajhon dhedo sayeen” (443)

“Other than my Dhedo sayeen, my uncle, my brothers, are mehrams no more”

g) Trust in the beloved

With this kind of devotion there is often, in spiritual traditions, a sense of being in the custody of the master: of trust in his protection. When members of Heer’s family want to kill her before the wedding, she says to her friend Hassi:

“Aakh Damodar kaun marainda, jain sar Dhedo sayeen” (414)

“Who is it that can harm me, under the shadow of Dhedo sayeen”

Similarly, towards the end, when the Khehras get custody of Heer from the court of the Qazi, and are torturing her as they drag her back to their village, Heer tells them:

*“Sun baitay samait tun Ali, main koon bohot saza wikhainda
jain da kutta vanjay marainda, so murshid hunay sunainda
Ke hoye, main bhulli chukki, oh apni laj palainda
Aakh Damodar tun sun Ali, tainon Ranjha nahin chhurainda” (938)*

“Listen up all, including you Ali, torture me all you can
When a dog is dying, the master knows
Even if I falter in my devotion, *he* would protect his
honor
Listen Ali! Ranjha would never let you get away with this”

Heer tells them this even though she knows that Ranjha himself is in prison being whipped. However, her trust in the “master” is so strong that, against all odds and all reason, she knows things will somehow work out. This is what devotion can do. Similarly when she is being given to Saida Khehra, she says to her mother:

“Kahe Damodar mail karesee, aapay sachha sayeen”
(371)

“The true sayeen would himself make our union happen”

Sayeen here could refer to god or to Ranjha. Ranjha is called sayeen all through the text (360;414;431;642...). As Ranjha is given the same status as god anyway, it is the same whether the word means god or Ranjha.

h) Surrender

Surrendering one’s intellect and will in favor of the beloved follows this kind of trust and devotion as an obvious and necessary next step. Heer suffers emotionally and physically for many years after her marriage with the Khehras. But she sees everything she undergoes as coming from her “master” who alone knows how much more she needs to suffer and who alone holds her cure.

*“Loon loon dakhil keeta Ranjhaitay, ohoye daro laye
Jeewain jalaye kamil murshid, teeha jaleen maye” (606)*

“Ranjha entered every pore of my body, only *he* holds
my cure
I submit to burn any which way my master makes me burn”

On the Bhakti and especially the Sufi path, suffering is very much part of the process of inner cleansing and transformation. Sufis often talk about cleansing by fire and the alchemical process of turning into gold by first being thrown into fire. The spiritual master puts initiates in situations that will push them up against their blocks: their inner conflicts and psychological knots. The process of purifying involves facing and resolving all the psychological issues that one has developed over the years. The initiate trusts that the experiences, including pain and suffering, that come after submitting to the master, have a purpose and only the master knows what that is. The initiate, like Heer, submits to and accepts the burning willingly since it comes from the beloved master.

*“Jithay bhavi, banh tithahin, uzr beuzri da naheen
Mahin namani, kujh na janan, bajhon murshid sayeen
Athay pahr dhayan tussada, na karsan sans ajayeen
Akh Damodar was na mainday, jewn janain tewain
nachain” (439)*

“Tie me up wherever you like, I would argue not
Silly me, what do I know, except for my master, my
sayeen
Every breath, every hour of the day, my mind focused on
you

I am not the one in control, I dance however you make me.”

Here Heer is talking about not only accepting what comes her way but also acting herself the way the beloved wants her to move. The Sufi idea is that you give yourself up, as a corpse in the hands of the washer, to the master once you submit to him. Then he may do with you what he feels is necessary for you. Part of my own Sufi initiation was a long ritual in which I presented my teacher with a kafn, a large piece of cotton cloth used for wrapping the corpses of Muslims before burial. This symbolizes the end of life lived by one’s own intellect and self, in favor of following what the master commands from that day on. All our actions come from the master, from the Beloved, from the Divine. Heer adds:

“Aap rakhai asin day hathon, asin janahan nahin” (437)

“He himself moves through my hands, I know of nothing”

A similar idea is found in the Chinese Taoist tradition, in the Tao Te Ching, where if one gets one’s intellect and self out of the way, the action happens *through* one very naturally. This is sometimes wrongly interpreted as the path of non-action. The idea shows up very powerfully in the context of a personalized Divine in the Bhakti traditions of the sub-continent. In the Gita, for example, the attitude towards action is that if one only stays focused on the Divine Beloved with love and devotion and offers one’s actions to Him, without being attached to the outcomes, then it is the Beloved who acts *through* one. As Heer would say, he moves through my hands. The Sufi attitude towards this matter is rooted in the Hadith-i-qudsi where Allah says: *And when I love him, I become the ear with which he hears.*

Obviously, with this level of complete submission there is much room for all kinds of abuse to take place, and we see this

often. To whom does one submit? It often happens without one's conscious decision or choice. However, there are indicators along the way confirming the right path, of the authenticity of one's relationship with the Beloved or teacher or master.

For Heer, the interventions of the Panj Pir were such indicators; indicators that validated what Ranjha meant in her life. Before she even met him, they come to her in her dream and give her the premonition of his coming.

*“tan supnay wich Panj Peer gaye, Heer nun sukhn
sunaya
jhawan kar ke bohat Heeray non, kan maror sujhaya
“Chaita kareen, na qabooleen hor koi, wich iraday aya
sun kuriye!aye gal asadi, asan tainday pallay paya” (186)*

“Then the Panj Pir, in a dream go to Heer
They get her attention and tell her clearly
‘Watch out! Be careful; don’t accept anyone else
Listen girl! To what we say, we have given him to you”

When she first meets Ranjha she goes into a period of introspection:

*“Tan chori waikhay Heer siyyalay, monhon na mool
alaye
Dharti uttay likhan khatte, aakh na mul sunaye
Ander gal handaye ninger, dil wich fikr tikaye
Jay sach janan, sir jan hara, tan peeran aye pallu paye”
(216)*

“Heer would steal glances at him, but could not really say
Drawing lines on the ground, not a word from her mouth

Playing with what had happened here, worrying in her heart

The truth finally dawned upon her, the Pirs had brought him to her”

It is the intervention from and the experience of the other levels of reality that allowed her to submit so completely in her devotion to Ranjha. Then again, when Ranjha comes back to her as a jogi, years after her marriage, with his face covered, it is the Pirs who tell her of his identity (745).

i) Acceptance of one's fate

Given the intensity of the emotional desire to commit and submit and given the support and validation from other and deeper levels of reality, the relationship with the beloved is accepted as part of one's fate. It is not uncommon in the devotional spiritual traditions to hear of how the relationship was *meant to be* or is part of one's destiny. For Heer also her devotion to Ranjha had a primary existence that transcended worldly obstacles or concerns. Thus she explains to her mother:

“Tithay Adam aidam koyee nahin, jithay hoyee kurmaee” (378)

“Adam was not even born there, where this wedding took place”

Again, towards the end, in the court of the Qazi trying to show the rightful status of her relationship to Ranjha, she says:

*“Sun Qazi hik araz asadi, aye ikth kahani
Loh Qalam na arsh na kursi, na nazri aaway pani
Zamin zamana, chand na suraj, juti jot samani
Sahab di sonh sun tun Qazi, main tadon Ranjhay dast vikani” (927)*

“Listen Qazi to what I have to say, to the real story
There were no heavens, no waters, fate had not been
written yet
No sun, no moon, no land, not even time itself existed
I swear, listen Qazi, even then, I belonged to Ranjha”

j) Burning

With the separation from the self and the intensity of the devotion and the surrender of the will in favor of the beloved, there are times when the beloved is taken away from the lover. This tears the being and causes the greatest pain the lover can experience. The burning of the separation from the Beloved is a stage that many spiritual traditions and stories talk about. Some of the most powerful poetry and art-forms can come out of this painful stage when everything seems to fall apart and fall away from the lover.

After Heer develops an intense and deep emotional connection to Ranjha and has flashes of union with him she suddenly is separated from him and everything else that she is familiar with. She has already withdrawn from her usual activities after meeting Ranjha but still her connection with her friends, especially Hassi, is a source of support for her. Also she is on her territory where people still know her and where she has a history and her identity. With her *vidai* (departure of the bride after the wedding) she loses all of that.

*“Sadqay keetee, main Hassi nusathon, aatan chhor
sidhai
Bairi, baila te pipal, peenghan, Luddan bap te bhai
Asin jullay an ditheen juheen, phir aawan gal na kai*

na ko koh, na takiya mainon, na ko bap na mai” (483)

“I’d give my life for you, dear Hassi, I leave you all
behind
Boat, forest, *Pipal* and the swings, Luddan, my father
and brothers
Watch as I leave it all my dear, for I never would return
again
There is nothing left here for me now, no father and no
mother”

But more painful than all of this is her separation from
Ranjha who has become the center of her existence. She spends
the following years burning with longing and craving for her
beloved.

*“Sik Ranjha di Heeray tayeen, jekar kacha para
Tarphey sahih nahayat machhi, galda pinda wichara
Sulgay, sulag sulag phir bujhay, monhon na bolan hara
Heer Siyyali, dehi gali, kujh na chalda chara” (605)*

“Separated from her Ranjha, Heer, trembling like
mercury
Quivering like a dying fish, her body rotting away
Burning, smoldering, then going quiet, no one to share
her sorrow
Cursing, crying, burning slowly, nothing that Heer could do”

This is the stage where everything falls away from the self,
where there is nothing to lean against, except for the craving
itself. This is when the whole being of the lover cries out with
complete purity and focus, attained through the intensity of the
pain, for a union with the Beloved. Heer’s suffering during this

period has echoed through much of spiritual poetry and literature over the centuries.

Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the 13th century Turkish (Persian) poet, who has been very popular in the subcontinent, underwent a similar period. His most intense collection of poetry, *Divan-i-Shams*, is full of powerful verses that he would recite or sing spontaneously from a state of bewilderment, separated from his beloved Shams, his master. He often uses the symbolism of burning to describe how it feels to be torn away from someone who is connected to the core of one's being. Heer's cry of submitting to the burning, quoted above (606), is very similar to the state that Rumi describes.

To quote one more example of this stage, Bulleh Shah, a popular Punjabi Sufi poet of the 17th century, wrote some of his most moving poetry during this state of being separated from his beloved teacher. His teacher, Shah Inayat, was an Arayeen (a low caste in the Punjab) while he was a Sayyid (highly respected in Indian Islam). After working together for a long time, his teacher recognized that the difference in their castes was still an issue for Bulleh Shah. So he kicked him out. Bulleh Shah wandered away suffering the separation from his teacher and watching the layers of his false self burn away. Then he came back to Shah Inayat and upon being rejected again, sat outside his house, thereby freeing himself of the last shreds of self (and composing beautiful verses telling his master of it). Shah Inayat finally came out and took him in. It is generally recognized that it was burning in this stage of separation that turned Bulleh Shah into gold.

k) Union

It is passing through the burning, this 'dark-night-of-the-soul', that prepares Heer to detach from everything and pay any

price for being one with her beloved years later. Ranjha comes back into her life as a *jogi*, three years later and they are united. The union of the lover and the beloved is the last stage that is again a part of many spiritual traditions of the area.

Heer already talks about being one with Ranjha before her marriage. She tells her mother:

“Pani dulh millya pani noon, baqi rahi na kai” (358)

“Water flowed and mixed with water and there was no separation left”

And again:

“Loon loon ander Ranjha warya, khas Kharian noon daindi” (364)

“With Ranjha in every pore of my body, an empty shell you turn over to the Khehras”

When she goes through the separation after her marriage, she uses the same imagery to describe her closeness to Ranjha:

“Loon loon dakhil keeta Ranjhaitay, ohoye daro laye” (606)

“Ranjha entered every pore of my body, only *he* holds my cure”

Towards the end of her separation phase she has focused on him so much that he becomes a part of who she is.

*“Ranjha Ranjha kahnon aakhan, main aapay Ranjhan Hoye
Ranjha Heer, Tay Heer Ranjhay dee, ratti faraq na koi” (607)*

“Ranjha, Ranjha, who do I beseech, I am Ranjha myself,
Ranjha is Heer and Heer, Ranjha, not a trace of a
difference there”

And then when he physically comes to her, they are referred to as, “*Hika roh tay do jussay*” (812) meaning “one spirit in two bodies.”

These powerful images and descriptions of the union of the lover with the Beloved are rooted in a worldview not uncommon in the subcontinent. Ranjha embodies the Divine for Heer and in his form she communes with the Divine. This is possible because she herself is part of the Divine. This kind of complete union is rooted in the worldview that ultimately all things are connected to the Divine and are one. The lover in the devotional traditions sees this oneness in his or her union with the Beloved. In Tantra, in certain schools of Bhakti, and in certain Sufi traditions the reality of the union of all things is experienced through a devotional connection with the beloved god, goddess or spiritual teacher.

In Bhakti, as described earlier, there are two extreme positions. Briefly, one says that there always remains a difference between the Divine Form and the lover and the other says that the lover is really a part of the Divine and gets to experience it through devotion. In the text we see Heer and Ranjha as different, of course, but there are verses such as the ones quoted above that are more aligned with the latter position in Bhakti. It is from this position that Grierson, quoted earlier, explains the case of Lakshmi and Vishnu as: “so entirely is she looked upon as one with Him that the textbooks are deliberately silent about her; for say they, ‘she has done all that He has done, and when we tell of Him we tell of Her’” (2005; p.542).

Within the context of Sufi developments, again as described above, this union of Heer and Ranjha is clearly in line with the ultimate 'Unity-of-Being', Wahdat-ul-Wajud, position. The most popular example of this in Sufi history was Mansur al-Hallaj's utterance 'Ana-al-Haq' meaning 'I am the Divine Truth' for which he was put to extreme torture and death. Even though he was not from South Asia, in the Sufi poetry of the region he is often referred to as the greatest of all Sufis. In the case of Heer and Ranjha, it is the power of their devotion and love that allows them to experience this essential reality where there is no difference left in them and they experience the ultimate union in being.

8.2 Ranjha and his journey

The journey of Ranjha is somewhat different from that of Heer's. Let us follow his path also and then we can compare it to Heer's and also compare their respective connections to spiritual paths.

a) The Beloved

Ranjha appears right from the beginning as the beloved, more than the lover. Even as a child, everyone falls in love with him. Describing his birth, the phrase "*azmat ki roshnai*" (108) meaning "the radiance of his greatness" is used for him which reoccurs in describing him as the story develops. He is not an ordinary child. In fact, he is so special and attracts so much attention that his own brothers want to get rid of him, out of jealousy. After the death of his parents when the brothers are distributing land and money he, knowing that they are cheating him out of his fair share, remains aloof. He is beyond worldly things. He leaves his home and brothers, who are totally caught up with name and fortune, without any money or food. His

behavior shows ascetic patterns. Even when he is offered a place to stay and means of sustenance by people along the path, he refuses saying he needs to pay homage to some Pirs (179-180).

b) Asceticism

Ascetic traits and a certain kind of aloofness and detachment show up in Ranjha's character throughout his journey. As already stated, he is not attached to his land or locale. When he meets Heer, it is she who invites him to her bed and she who arranges his job with the Siyyals. He does not ask her for anything. Chuchak is actually shocked and disappointed in him when he refuses to own land or receive other kinds of help and just wants to be a *chak*, a caretaker of water buffaloes (241). Heer falls in love with him and shows her devotion and loyalty to him. His feelings are not described as much. All of Heer's friends are also in love with him and he gets many offers to stay with them when Heer moves away. He continues attracting others while remaining somewhat detached himself.

Ranjha moreover has a very ascetic stance of accepting what is given to him or what comes to him on its own, but not going after things or putting in effort to change things. The whole relationship with Heer is given to him by Heer or fate or the Pirs. When he is caught by her father, Chuchak, and beaten he immediately announces that if that is how they are going to treat him, he will leave. And he would have, if Chuchak did not bring him back. Then when Heer is getting married, he accepts it all while she puts up all the fight. The way Heer later accepts all the suffering and pain willingly as coming from her beloved, Ranjha had always accepted whatever came his way as if it were coming from *his* Beloved or the Divine. Though it certainly seems disempowered, it is a very Sufi or devotional attitude towards life.

The ascetic streak in him continues as he leaves the Siyyals after Heer's marriage, then leaves his home in Hazara again to live like a *sayeen* in a hut outside of the city. The connection to that kind of spirituality is so strong that when Heer, after years of suffering after her marriage sends a message to him that she is dying, he goes off to get the blessings of the *jogi* at Tilla around Jehlum. It is interesting that Ramu who was bringing Heer's message is said not to have rested for long along the way, trying to get to Ranjha as quickly as possible, whereas Ranjha took several days getting back to Heer going first to Tilla (Jehlum) then back to Hazara and then to Jhang. At Tilla he actually does get formally initiated as a *jogi* and continues thereafter as a *jogi*. The initiation etc. helps out of course, but it shows an attitude and an inclination towards ascetic tendencies that is worth noticing. Even at the end, when they get to the court of the Raja, it is Heer who fights the whole case while Ranjha stands quietly accepting what the Qazi says. Of course, the fire that starts when he and Heer are being tortured pushes people to see that the two belong together. It is not due to anything that he does consciously. It comes from trust that whatever needs to happen will happen. And it does!

c) Paranormal activity

Ranjha is always shown to have much activity around him that is either paranormal or spiritual in nature. His relationship with animals and with music that we will discuss below, certainly seems to be part of this. His experiences with the Panj Pir are clearly indicative of his connection with the spiritual or psychic levels. They visit him and reward him with Heer. When the *chaks* come at night to finish him off, a whole army appears from the hidden dimension and disperses them. The episode with fire in the end is clearly an indication of his access to major psychic powers.

Association of paranormal activity with people who are seen to have attained a high spiritual station is very common practice in the subcontinent. There are stories of karamaat (paranormal feats) of almost every well-known Sufi that are lovingly told and retold by their followers. Similar stories about Jogis, other holy persons and especially those involved in left-handed Tantric practices are very typical. These are all indirect indicators revealing the spiritual state of Ranjha.

d) Spiritual master

There are terms directly used for Ranjha that are typically used for spiritual masters and teachers. These are not only used by Heer who repeats phrases such as “*Asan tan kamil murshid paya*” (#281) meaning, “I have found my perfect master” or “*Labbhaa peer charoka mayen!*” (374) meaning “I have found a great Pir, mother!” and who clearly had that kind of a devotional relationship with him, but by several others who were not lovingly devoted to him but can recognize his elevated status or potential. Terms used for Ranjha that are typically used in devotional spiritual traditions of the area include some of the following: “kamil murshid” (281, 384, 399, 408, 433, 437, 606, 640, 896) is a Sufi term with kamil meaning complete or perfect and murshid, a synonym for *Pir*, meaning a Sufi teacher; “Pir” (251, 254, 374), though a Persian term, became very common in the sub-continent; “sayeen” (156, 360, 371, 414, 428, 431, 437, 443, 584, 642, 752) is a term used in Punjabi, Saraiki and Sindhi for a highly respected person or a spiritual person and also often for god; “wali” (251, 254, 428) is an Arabic term literally meaning a friend and commonly used as a shortened form of wali-Allah or a friend of God for holy, spiritual people.

In addition to these spiritual terms, used for Ranjha, there are some symbolic connections that can be made between Ranjha and the spiritual traditions of the sub-continent. Let us explore some of these below.

e) Connection to pre-Aryan imagery; Pasupati

There are images evoked in the text that are very reminiscent of pre-Aryan imagery. The horned male god of the Indus valley civilization, seen on the seals found in Harappa, connected to asceticism and to *Pasupati*, the “Lord of animals”, sits in a cross-legged posture of the later yogis (jogis), surrounded by animals (Hopkins, 1971; Elder, 1970) and is very strongly connected to Ranjha. Let us consider some verses and themes of the text.

The first time Ranjha takes the cattle out to graze, the other *chaks*, jealous of him, take his water-buffaloes and send them off to the jungle. Ranjha can not find his cattle that evening. He sits on a hilltop and starts playing his flute.

*“Charh Dhedo wanjhli jo wahi, kaihiyan suran uthayan
Sheenh, brinday, cheetay, moni, sabhay ziarat aiyan
Azgar nag chataiyan pinda, Saihhar moni saiyan
Sun kar mahhin kan pharikay, na wat karohi paiyan
Aakh Damodar kikan dhiran, gopian krishan bulaian”
(260)*

“Sitting on top, Dhedo played his flute, playing many
notes
Lions, tigers, other wild animals, started gathering
around
Poisonous snakes, Cobras, came around to pay homage
Listening to him, the cattle came, like being pulled by
the ears
It was almost as if Krishna had called for his gopis”

Ranjha walks down the hill with all the animals around him. He pats the lions on the head and the cattle are also around. The Siyyals watch in amazement as the water-buffaloes go into their respective places and start giving milk without any problems, even those that are typically very difficult to handle.

Ranjha regularly plays his flute to call the cattle back and they respond to him (267). All kinds of other wild animals gather every time he plays his flute for any reason (191, 210, 705...). The birds and animals all seem to befriend him (268, 277). The *chaks* have a hard time with him in the beginning as he is surrounded by wild animals including poisonous snakes (265). Even the animals of the river surface when he plays his Sarod by the river bank (516).

All the animals, wild as well as domestic gather around him as he calls the water-buffaloes to hand them over to Chuchak (345) after he is told to leave the Siyyals as Chuchak had caught him sleeping with Heer. As Ranjha starts to leave the cattle follow him. Chuchak tries to turn them around but the water-buffaloes will not separate from Ranjha (347). It is only when he begs Ranjha to turn around that the cattle also return to Chuchak (348).

It is clear that Ranjha has a special relation with and an effect upon animals. In addition to this effect the particular imagery of animals, wild and domestic, settling around him is connected to the indigenous spirituality of the area. Other than the earliest traditions mentioned above, similar imagery is connected to Buddha, several *jogis* and even to the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.), in poems written for him in India (Lopez, 1995; p.171).

f) Connection to Saiva imagery

When the Khehras come to the Siyyals for Heer's wedding, Ranjha decides to investigate the celebrations. Approaching the procession, it becomes difficult to see what is happening so he gets on top of a bull. As he moves through the crowds, he begins to radiate. This is how Saida, his adversary, sees him for the first time. Impressed, he asks people around him who this young man is. The *chaks*, trying to cover up his connection with Heer, say that he is just someone from Hazara who Chuchak has helped, giving him a job and that he is there to observe the wedding procession. But Saida can see much more in Ranjha:

*“Ahe koi kamil sayyin sanda, tussan na mul likhaya
Azmat ki rushnai dissay, koi ban harifan laya
Nur inayat dissay nahayat, walliyan sanda saya
Aakho yaro! Kamil koi, apna aap chhupaya” (428)*

“He is clearly a perfected being, you have failed to identify
His greatness is evident in the radiance of his face
A shining light, like a friend of the divine
Listen friends! He's a perfected one, hidden”

References are made to Ranjha's radiance or the spirit in him and he is therefore described as someone who could be a holy man. There are no overt references to any particular spiritual lineage or personality.

It is interesting though that while Ranjha is moving through the crowds, radiant, he is also *riding a bull*. Why a bull, one wonders. Why not a water-buffalo? Bulls have not been mentioned anywhere else in the text whereas water-buffaloes are mentioned frequently. A water-buffalo seems the obvious choice, especially with Ranjha being a *chak*, if he indeed *had* to ride an animal.

The bull is traditionally connected to Saiva imagery. His bull, named Nandi, is usually seen around him. Nandia jogis especially celebrate his connection to the bull. While Damodar may not be thinking of this imagery consciously, as he has not made any conscious references to it, the connection is very strong. It comes through in the story when he really wants Ranjha, otherwise just a *chak*, to show his superiority. Saida, of course, immediately recognizes Ranjha's spirituality in this presentation.

g) Connection to Krishna imagery

At many places in the text the imagery associated with Krishna comes to mind very powerfully. This is not the Sanskritized warrior Krishna of the Gita but the lovable Krishna of the indigenous folklore who plays his flute in the jungle for the gopis. Ranjha also takes his cattle to the jungle, sits under a tree and plays his flute, enjoying the company of the girls who would gather around him and he also was really in love with only one of them: his Radha, his Heer.

An overt reference to Krishna is made only twice in the text. In verse #260, translated above, the connection made is that of the water-buffaloes gathering around Ranjha when he plays his flute, as Gopis would gather around Krishna. In two other verses, #267 and #345, the image of gopis is similarly used for the water-buffaloes and for all animals. The other place where an overt reference to Krishna is made is in verse #536 where after joining Heer's wedding procession, Ranjha comes back to the Siyyals and in his pain, sitting on his hilltop, he starts playing his flute. Heer's friends, who feel the pangs of separation also, appear around him in an instant, just as if Krishna had called for his gopis. It is a very powerful image of the lover, separated from his beloved, surrounded by those who can relate to his pain

and at the same time are themselves hopelessly in love with him. The image of Krishna increases the intensity of the emotion.

h) Dissociation

Ranjha loses everything and accepts his fate. Early in his life he leaves his brothers and lands and goes towards Jhang. He has nothing with him as he travels. He explores the world seeking new experiences and that leads him to Heer. After Heer's wedding when he returns to his brothers and again leaves them, he truly has nothing worldly left. He also loses the desire to seek worldly possessions. Outside of the city where his family still enjoys much power and reputation, he lives in a little hut like a *sayeen*. Thus while he has always been somewhat detached from things, this is the point in his life where he totally dissociates from the world around him and turns inward. After remaining in this state for some years he gets Heer's message and re-enters life, albeit from a deeper, spiritual place.

Once he gets Heer's message, he burns even the little hut where he was living outside his city and returns to Heer on a different level. He reconnects with the world through the path and stance of a *jogi*. First he goes to Tilla, the highest mountain in the Jehlum area with a temple on top of it which served as one of the major centers for jogi panths. Here jogis from all over India gathered once a year for a mela (the annual festival) (Briggs, 1938). Thus Ranjha who has always had something of the spirit moving in him, now comes to the doorstep of the somewhat formalized spirituality of the area. After describing his journey, the text first uses the phrase "*pohanča jai maqam peeran day*" meaning, "he reaches the station of the Pirs" and then ends the verse with the line:

“Aakh Damodar jithay than Peeran di, Ranjha gaya tithayeen” (669)

“Ranjha travels far enough to reach the place of the Pirs”

It seems like an unnecessary line, considering that his arrival at Tilla and meeting the *jogi* is referred to elsewhere. It seems perhaps an unconscious reference to his attaining the inner state of the Pirs. Up to this point indirect references to Ranjha’s spirituality have been made, as discussed above and his path has been shown to have been supported and facilitated by the Pirs, but this is the first time when he himself is willing to take on the garb of the somewhat formalized spirituality. Maybe that is all the difference there was between him and the station of Pirs, the formality of putting on the garb. Thus at Tilla, with his initiation into formal spirituality, he really reaches the place of the Pirs. We will discuss the implications and connections of this view later. At Tilla, Ranjha formally gets initiated as a *jogi* and continues his journey as such.

After the miracle of the fire at Kot Qabula, with Heer who is brought back to him, he wanders off into the hidden dimension, a very mythic end to an extraordinary life.

8.3 Comparison of the paths of Heer and Ranjha

Heer’s path is clearly a devotional one. Summarizing her path discussed above, she starts with a very strong, grandiose, and arrogant sense of self. Then she meets Ranjha and experiences softening emotions of humility and gratitude and an opening of the heart. Her deep love and devotion for Ranjha estrange her from things and people that used to be central to her life. Along with her devotion, and with the help of validation

from other dimensions, comes trust and surrender of her intellect and will in favor of her beloved. She starts having flashes of the beloved entering into and acting through her body and her being. And then she is totally separated from him and all things familiar and goes through the 'long dark night of the soul'. After this burning comes the final union of the lover with the beloved.

Ranjha, being the beloved from birth, provides the object of devotion for Heer. He himself, though also involved in this devotional relationship, has ascetic tendencies. He shows a certain degree of aloofness and detachment from things around him. He will not go after things but things just seem to happen, sometimes paranormally, around him and for him. At a certain point he spends some years in total retreat from the world. From the beginning he is referred to in spiritual terms and in the end he joins a somewhat formal, left-handed spiritual tradition of *jogis*. As a *jogi* he travels to Heer and moves away with her.

Whether the path is a devotional, Bhakti one for Heer or an Ascetic, Jogi one for Ranjha, they are both more in line with the indigenous spirituality as discussed above. In the indigenous spirit, there was no need perhaps to identify or outline these paths as spiritual or to philosophize about them.

It is interesting that while Ranjha is the one who has some direct or indirect connections with spirituality, and Heer's journey does not allude to any spiritual connections, it is Heer who becomes the voice of the Sufi and devotional poets in the subsequent centuries. Most of the spiritual poets in Punjabi continue to use Heer as a symbol for following a devotional path to the Divine. They can all relate to her path. The sense of spirit and inner unfoldment that Heer goes through remains more relevant over time. We will come back to this theme later on.

It should be clear though that, while the characters have in subsequent centuries been used extensively as spiritual symbols, the text does not make any overt spiritual connections. Heer's path as already noted is never referred to as spiritual. Ranjha's

connection to spiritual symbols is also not overtly mentioned except for the few references to Krishna. Even there, other than one reference, if Ranjha's calling his water buffaloes is connected to Krishna calling his gopis, it does not give the text an obvious spiritual coloring. In fact it only goes to show that the poet is not consciously trying to keep any overt spiritual connections out. Spiritual terms or references show up in the text the way any other aspect of society, economic or social hierarchy or political structures would show up in the folklore of that era. There are also many references to Akbar as the ruler, or to interaction between various castes and their attitudes towards each other that could be analyzed as well and that show up just as naturally in the text. The point being that while the text and its characters took on spiritual significance, it was not meant to be an overtly spiritual text. We will pick up this thread a little later.

8.4 The Feminine

Let us now explore the theme of the feminine in the text. This is what in Jungian terms would be called the anima in the male psyche, or in our context in a patriarchal society, and perhaps in Taoist terms it would be called *yin*. It is generally recognized that both men and women have both the "masculine" and the "feminine" parts to them but as is apparent from the terms used for these attributes, historically and socially across most cultures, the softer, emotional, intuitive, relational, nurturing, artistic side is associated with the nature of women and the opposite attributes are associated with the male gender. It is interesting that in the paths outlined above, Heer becomes the carrier of the feminine and devotional side. Ranjha, though also very much in love with Heer, quite apparent in certain places like in the moving verses when he meets with Heer's friends on the

way from Tilla to Heer, remains somewhat aloof and not as clear an embodiment of this particular side of the human psyche as Heer. The fact that out of the two, it is Heer, the woman, who ends up embodying this side is very much related to the gender construction in the socio-cultural context that we are still struggling with. This is also why in relation to Heer, and also, in much of the devotional poetry of the subcontinent, especially in Sufi poetry, when the male poet wants to show his total devotion and submission to the Beloved, he uses the female voice for himself.

If we look at the dynamics of the text in the context of the neo-Jungian psychology, whether we are focusing on Heer's path or Ranjha, the main theme of the story revolves around love and devotion and therefore around the Lover archetype (archetypes are structures or pattern in the deep collective psyche that channel energies and influence behavior and ideas in individuals). Heer and Ranjha in their union become the perfect embodiment of the psychic energies of the Lover. This is the archetype that knows the anima, that knows intense emotions of love, devotion and submission. It also knows the interconnectedness between people and between human beings and animals and nature. Interestingly, it is this particular archetypal energy according to the neo-Jungians that is crucial in most mystical traditions especially the devotional paths. It knows the union of the one with the other, beyond all boundaries. In relation to our main theme, it is the Lover who gives us the ability to empathize and relate with the "other" in a way that allows for much more than tolerance; it allows for compassion and acceptance of the "other". When one is under the influence of the Lover archetype, it is the inner emotions that dictate appropriate behavior and priorities, as we see very clearly in what Heer and Ranjha exemplify. This is why the Lover energy threatens religions and societies in which social norms and moral codes are narrowly and rigidly defined.

Since the text unfolds in Muslim families, let us take the example of Islam to make this tension between the Lover and formal religions clearer. Orthodox Islam, like most formal religions, defines in great clarity the righteous life that one should lead according to clearly defined moral codes. The goods and bads, the rights and wrongs are clearly laid out. On the basis of these codes and definitions one tries to make appropriate choices. On the basis of these codes and definitions the society knows what is acceptable behavior and what must be disallowed. In many places the Quran or Shariah would tell them how to punish those who break the codes and rules. In the light of these codes and these punitive actions for those who deviate from them, Muslim communities develop systems of justice that keep people's general behavior reasonably under control and predictable. This is a system where people live their personal and social lives *outside in*. This usually translates into rules and codes that tell people how they should and should not feel, what they should and should not do etc. In most Islamic societies and communities the emphasis on order and control and harmony and justice according to existing social norms is very central. However, the more strongly these things are pursued, the more their shadow or opposite tendencies also show up in the system. But in general, the trend is towards controlled and predictable personal and social behavior.

Not fully in line with this predominant trend of the orthodox Islam, is the Sufi or the mystical developments within Islam that emphasize life lived *inside out*. Appropriate outer acts are still important but they become secondary to the intention behind the act. This view is also rooted in Islam where the prophet (p.b.u.h.) said that "Acts are dependent on the intentions behind them." Sufis work with intentions. They work with how a person feels about what they do. Their work revolves around feelings and

inner states. They talk of loving the Divine while the others may focus more on the fear of Allah. It is the purity of intentions and *where* in one's being they are originating from that defines whether an act is wholesome or not. But it is very hard to judge people's outer behavior on the basis of this kind of a criteria. It creates lack of clarity and order, unpredictability and complexity making those attached with religious law and orthodoxy feel very uncomfortable and insecure. So historically there has been a struggle between the mystical and the orthodox sides of Islam. Sufism, especially in its more popular heterodox forms, is rooted in the Lover archetype and orthodox Islam would like to keep this energy controlled in the individual and in the society, if not totally repressed or eliminated.

According to the rules of the orthodox Islam there is an obvious problem with Ranjha running away with another person's wife. Even if we accept Heer's plea that she did not give her consent for the marriage and it was never really consummated so she was not really Saida's wife, it still does not make her relations with Ranjha legal or rightful. And that is exactly what the Qazi told her when in the end he sat in judgment of their case.

The Qazi starts by asking what issue of *Shariah* people had brought to him (900). *Shariah* is what the Qazi relies on to decide what is just and permissible behavior in the society. After Heer's father-in-law describes what has happened the Qazi does not even ask for anything else. As far as he is concerned the matter is quite clear. So without listening to the other side he tells Heer that in going after Ranjha, who was not rightfully hers, she has dishonored her father, lost the respect of her brothers and made a mockery of things in the world (904). She was given to the Khehras in marriage in front of witnesses. *Shariah*, explained the Qazi, is not concerned with love (906)

Heer, for whom love is paramount, declares that when hearts are tied together, it is God himself who performs the Nikkah (the

formalization of marriage). Who is a Qazi to break it (905)? She further challenges his ability to do justice on the basis of *Shariah* alone if he has not been touched by love and devotion. She curses and orders him to give up this discourse of *halal* and *haram* (lawful and unlawful) (907).

The Qazi of course threatens her with punishment for her love which is clearly *haram* according to all rules of orthodox Islam. She, on the other hand, is ready to go into her grave alive for this love which she knows deep down inside is more *halal* than anything else.

It is precisely this challenge of Heer that most formal, patriarchal religions are threatened by. They fear the power of the Anima. In India the two major formal religions, Islam and Brahmanism are both very patriarchal in their orthodox forms and tied to religious and social codes, morality, structures and order. Both of these religions struggled with the strong devotional tendencies and with the Lover archetype in the indigenous psyche of the subcontinent. The Brahmanical tradition made some necessary compromises by allowing some changes in its very rigidly defined social codes and rules of spirituality where women and these devotional trends were concerned. But for the most part, both religions had a hard time creating room for emotional complexity and the feminine in their otherwise well-structured, moralistic, formal, patriarchal religious orders.

Both of these traditions had to struggle hard because in this region the feminine spirit flows particularly strong. The spirit, of what we are calling feminine, was there in most devotional and other imminent spiritual traditions (e.g. Tantra), whether they were talking of male or female gods. But more overtly, the presence of the goddess in her many forms was particularly strong in the area.

The archetype of an absolutely powerful feminine / woman was very much an active part of the local psyche.

We see the Shakti flowing in the character of Heer very clearly. For Luddan, she is willing to draw her sword and ready to give and take life (94). Her family got her married, without her consent, to Saida, but when he comes to her and touches her, she beats him so badly that he never dares to touch her again (447). When her uncle spies on her she sets everything he has on fire (328). Her power is not just expressed physically but she has strength of emotions and resolve too. She makes it clear to the Khehras right from the beginning that if she is pushed she will totally dishonor them in public and that is what keeps Saida away from her. When she and Ranjha run away, she initiates the plea for help from the Khans (858). Throughout, whenever there is confrontation, she takes a strong stand. In the end, at the court, she is the one who fights the whole case and finally when the Qazi does not see her point, powerfully chastises. Ranjha does not say anything at all. Then there are other characters like Sehti who are also very empowered in the story. Overall, there is a very strong female presence in the whole story.

Up to the present day, in the middle of the patriarchy, one can see the existence of the strong female in the region. The psyche still accepts a female figure as the head of state. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, all have had female heads of state; something that is still unthinkable in many other parts of the world. But it is also important to notice that while on the one hand this possibility exists in the psyche of the region, the general trend of the organized systems is just as strong to keep women out of power. That is why I have a hard time giving a short reply whenever I am asked in the Western world why women are so oppressed in my country. The picture is paradoxical on many levels and not that easy to understand without enough background. The status of women in general has always been an issue where legal, economic, social or religious

rights and privileges of women are concerned. In Brahmanism, before it had to make some compromises, it was not even possible for women to attain moksha. Much of the social abuse of women is rooted in their degraded spiritual status. Indian Muslims gave women the name “aurat” which is the standard Urdu word for women. The word literally means “a place to hide” in Arabic. It refers in Islamic discourse to the parts of the body that men and women need to be ashamed of and therefore cover. Women were to be covered up or kept behind the veil in the society. The feminine needed to be covered up. The Lover archetype needed to be kept under cover.

But when the feminine is repressed in the society, it is not only the females who suffer. As we have noted above, both men and women have both masculine and feminine sides to them. Men, as a result of the socialization process of gender formation, start dissociating with all the traits that are seen as feminine, very early on. If this side is being repressed and covered up in the society, men feel an even stronger need to disown and detach from it. Unfortunately, repressed parts of our psyche shows up inappropriately in some form in our being, individually and collectively. Over time, in the subcontinent, men have developed a particularly complicated and somewhat unhealthy relationship with the feminine within, with the anima. In neo-Jungian terms they do not have access to healthy Lover energy. The result of this is apparent in a wide range of individual and collective male (social) behavior. Problems range from inability to connect with, deal with and express intense emotions, fear of the power of women and therefore inability to have intimate and nurturing relationships with them, inability to have nurturing and supportive relationship networks with other men, a sense of separation, detachment and isolation, a need to overplay their masculine traits, overemphasis on structure, rationality, clarity,

justice, and control, leading to unhealthy, passionate outbursts of the opposite traits including intolerance and violence. This is what repressing the Anima can do to men in a society. This is what it has done to the collective psyche of men in the subcontinent.

The tension between the patriarchal, religion-based, outer social morality and the feminine, emotion-based inner ethics shows up throughout the text. But as discussed above, it surfaces most clearly in the end in Heer's dialogue with the Qazi. They both represent the perfect embodiments of the two extremes. The Qazi relying on the religious texts and traditions for laws, proper codes and behavior and justice and Heer relying on what she *felt* right, based on the clarity of her inner emotions and devotional experiences.

So Heer tells the Qazi that if he knew the real God, and if he did not want to commit an act of *kufr* (non-belief), he would recognize, what everyone knows, that Heer belongs with Ranjha (911). But the Qazi is stuck on the outer laws of *Shariah* so Heer has to shift to a totally different level of reality. She tells him that she belonged to Ranjha even when she was in the cradle (921) and even before that:

*“Sun Qazi hik araz asadi, aye ikth kahani
Loh Qalam na arsh na kursi, na nazri aaway pani
Zamin zamana, chand na suraj, juti jot samani
Sahab di sonh sun tun Qazi, main tadon Ranjhay dast
vikani” (927)*

“Listen Qazi to what I have to say, to the real story
There were no heavens, no waters, no fates had yet been
written
No sun, no moon, no land, not even time itself existed
I swear, listen Qazi, even then I belonged to Ranjha”

But the Qazi, as Heer observes earlier, is untouched by experiences of love and devotion and cannot understand this kind of an explanation. He has to do justice and so he turns Heer over to the Khehras and sends Ranjha to be whipped for what he had done. But this is not justice on the deeper level of reality where Heer and Ranjha are connected to each other. Thus started a fire in Kot Qabula that would not end no matter what was done. It is interesting that people immediately realize what had happened. They go to Ranjha and beg his forgiveness.

*“Sabha hath jo banh khaloti, jogi kol chal ayee
Ayeh gunah toon bakhsh asanoon, aakhay sabh lokayee”
(942)*

“Everyone put there hands together and came over to the jogi
‘We’ve committed a sin and beg your forgiveness’,
implored everybody”

People recognize the deeper justice in this situation. They know that the fire is a result of the injustice. And surely enough, once Ranjha forgives them, and once Heer is brought back together with him, the fire is put out. The text therefore clearly shows what is more primary and real between the two extremes embodied by Heer and the Qazi. According to it, the ordinary people can recognize what is right in this case. It is the religious scholar who has the problem.

*“Tan Ali nun Qazi aakhay, kar kar shara sunaye
Jo kujh zahir ditha aaha, so ye niaon chukaye
Batin baat koi na janay, Qazi sukhan sunaye
Haq Siyyal, so ye ghin vanjo, jo koi ag bujhaye” (949)*

“The Qazi still was repeating shara to Ali
He only could do justice with what was overt and
visible
He presented his arguments but knew not that which is
inner and hidden
Heer Siyyal was rightfully his who knows how to put the
fire out”

It is the Lover who can put out the fire of separation and fragmentation. And according to the text, people are in touch with this power of the heart. It is the religious scholar who is stuck on a level that leads to breaking things apart, to disharmony and to fire.

As a corollary to this section, let me mention here that in recent years the highest number of religious riots and religion-based violence in any single city in Pakistan has occurred in Jhang, the city that once before was set on fire for listening to the Qazi as opposed to the Lover. ‘But it is the doom of men that they forget’.

8.5 Complexity of reality

What Heer is pointing out to the Qazi is that there are many levels of reality and things that do not seem justified or right on one level can make perfect sense on another level. This complexity of reality is apparent to the general population who could make the connection of the fire to the separation and torture of Heer and Ranjha. Interestingly, this connection is not clear to the Qazi, who, even when people are asking for Heer to be returned to the jogi so that the fire would be put off, keeps saying that even if Ranjha knows tricks such as putting out fire, he does not have the right to Heer. The Qazi cannot, as he admits later, free himself from the surface level of reality. But people,

by experience or understanding, can relate to Heer's explanation of her connection to Ranjha as being more primary than time itself. They know that there can always be more to reality than is apparent and therefore they can not ever judge another's behavior or state in absolute terms.

Heer says to the Qazi:

*“Mehr zuban kari, sun Qazi, aukhi aye kahani
Aakh Damodar gungay di sharat, gunga ho so jani”
(929)*

“Have some compassion, Qazi, for this is a complex story
Only one who is silent, who cannot talk, can know the signs of the dumb”

It is the recognition of the complexity of reality and the limits of our understanding that give rise to a constructive doubt in one's mind. And it is this doubt that keeps one from righteousness, intolerance and tyranny. To consider an out-of-the-context example, one is certain that parallel lines never cross in three dimensions. Yet once one know that on another level of reality, in four dimensions, they can cross each other, one takes the rule of parallel lines never crossing each other lightly. Once one knows that other levels of reality exist, one can take the conventional norms and rules of the usual three dimensional life less rigidly.

There are many things that give one a sense of the complexity of reality and the existence of other levels that interact with our usual overt reality. Before the showdown at the end, the text well establishes the existence of, and people's faith in, these other hidden levels. It shows up in quite a few places;

for example, in the interventions of the Panj Pir, the role of music, Ranjha's interaction with animals etc. Let us look at a few of these examples.

The Panj Pir appear in a boat in the river as Ranjha begins to play his music. They come over to him and in a long session listen to what he is going through and then listen to his music (184). Now we can assume Ranjha, being in an altered state of consciousness, accesses the Pirs, or the Pirs make an appearance from another level of reality. In any case it confirms the existence of the other level. Their connecting him to Heer, giving him milk to drink and his enlightening experience as a result, add to how these other levels can facilitate our lives. Both Heer and Ranjha know all along that they have found each other through the blessings of the Pirs (216-217). When things are not going well for Ranjha, he calls upon them and demands help since they are the ones who had brought them together in the first place. And the Pirs do show up when called upon or when help is needed. When Ranjha is being attacked by the *chaks*, they show up and disperse the *chaks* (271). When the Khehras want to drown him in the river, they tell him to go into the river and they themselves hold him up (528). That, the story tell us, is what being connected to other levels of reality can do.

Whether Ranjha meets the Pirs through an altered state of consciousness while playing his music or not, there are many other occasions where music would induces an altered state in people. Twice when he is visiting Heer's friends, once on his way back from Heer's wedding and again, years later, on his way back to Heer, after becoming a *jogi*, they ask him to stay with them or take them with him (550,705). As they would not let him go otherwise, both times he starts playing his music and while they are in a state of intoxication, he quietly moves on. His music has a powerful effect on people. When he meets Luddan for the first time by the river, Luddan listens to his music and is so intoxicated and moved by it that he offers his cattle and his

two wives to Ranjha in loving devotion. At other places his music has a transforming effect in which strong negative emotions are pacified by it. When Chuchak caught him sleeping with Heer on the hill and beat him and told him to leave. Ranjha, in depression plays his music and Chuchak is so moved by his painful notes that he loses his anger and begs Ranjha to stay (348). On a symbolic or literal level, his music could tame the wildest of animals, as discussed above. The power of music and its ability to access deeper levels of a person or reality, is clearly recognized in the text.

There are other places where people are able to sense things. Ranjha and Heer in several places know if the other has touched their food or not (376, 500, 502, etc.). When Ranjha returns after becoming a *jogi*, Heer's friends could strongly sense his presence, as discussed above. It is a picture of reality in which music influences people and animals, people influence animals and in which people are touched by and connected to people past and present in ways that are not overtly obvious. In short, it is a very complex reality in which many things can happen on different levels, where things impossible or inappropriate on one level can be perfectly obvious and natural on another; where many truths can coexist.

8.6 Conflicting realities

As discussed above, at the end of the text, people who otherwise believe in the sanctity of marriage can appreciate that lovers like Heer and Ranjha belong together, beyond all moral codes. Their case transcends the usual notions of morality and permissible social conduct that goes totally against them. So the laws and codes that are applicable and true on one level may be totally irrelevant on another. This is the case where plural truth-

claims can be made and can coexist within the same system. Once this exists in a system, tolerance and even acceptance and respect for the other is only a natural outcome.

The text involves Muslim families. Yet we find that for rites and rituals of the wedding a Brahman is called (11, 435). For the Nikkah, though, they go back to the *mullah*. It seems that all of these seemingly conflicting systems could exist intertwined in a way that is almost unimaginable today.

Ranjha seems perfectly devoted and submits to the Panj Pir, the five Muslim mystics, who he calls on for help and who guide and protect him all the way to the end. But before going back to Heer from Hazara, he goes to Tilla and totally submits to the *jogi* there, saying, “I have no other to turn to so I submit to you” (675). The seeming contradiction is not addressed in the text at all. It is only I, the reader, for whom this contradiction stands out or even exists. How a Muslim from Hazara, well connected to Muslim mystics, can go to a somewhat left-handed Saiva tradition of Gorakhnathi *jogis* and offer not even an inkling of justification or an acknowledgment that there is an inherent contradiction in the two realities that he is moving in, seems totally ridiculous today.

The truth-claims of Sufism and Gorakhnathi traditions could clearly exist side-by-side, not in a way that one would *tolerate* the other but in a way that an individual could go from one to the other without noticing the difference. This we know from outside of the text also that there was a large number of Muslims who were Gorakhnathi *jogis* as well, as discussed above. Things get even more intertwined. When Ranjha reaches Tilla, he is described as having reached the station of the Pirs, not the *jogis* (669). The terms “Pir” and “*jogi*” are used interchangeably throughout the text. It seems clear that the contradiction that stands out for us and that would be an impossibility today was not even an issue at the time. This is a level where people live

with plural truth-claims in a way that is unimaginable today. This is a level much higher than mere tolerance of the other.

It is interesting to note that both of the major formal religions in the subcontinent that are not indigenous to the area do not entertain plural truth-claims. They tried to enforce their systems unilaterally. Orthodox Islam is very clear about the issue: one absolute God, one absolute book, one absolute prophet and absolutely one reality. There is very little tolerance of pluralism or coexistence with the acceptance of other truths in the way orthodox Islam exists in the subcontinent today. Brahmanism, the other patriarchal religion in India has its own strict social and moral codes that it tried to overlay on the indigenous psyche. The concept of Dharma and the strict social hierarchy woven into it was enforced by incorporating ideas of Karma and punarjanama. It caused extreme exploitation and abuse of the indigenous population in the region. Even when it became necessary to compromise on some principles for the sake of maintaining control of the masses, those principles were changed, as long as the sanctity of the Dharma could be maintained. Thus, while it seems that Brahmanism was open to pluralism, its openness was limited to a few areas. It ensured the retention of the purity of the Brahmans and their social and religious supremacy. That was their crucial truth which was kept absolute and never compromised on.

The indigenous mind-set on the other hand seems to have been quite open to absorbing plural truth-claims. Many traditions flourished in the South of India, where the invasion of Islam and Brahmanism was not as complete, and in the indigenous darker varnas of the North. There was no attempt from these traditions to come up with one all-encompassing, coherent picture of truth and reality. They were open to co-existing with each other and

with any foreign systems of belief. We see a reflection of this mind-set in Heer Damodar, in the living folklore of the area.

The picture of religion that shows up in the text is one which does not introduce into life an all-inclusive, absolute reality. It is important to note that while the text is written in the context of Muslim families, there is not even a single mention of the one Islamic God by his standard name, Allah; not even in an expression. Terms used for the divine, like Sayeen or Rab were used by other traditions as well (like Sikhism), in the area. The value system that is validated in the end is also not one that could have been encompassed by the orthodox Islamic system. The understanding, in line with the pluralistic indigenous mind-set, seems to be clear that there was always more to reality and life than any one religious, social or moral system could encompass. There was always room for conflicting systems to coexist.

8.7 No overt spiritual / religious focus

As mentioned above there is no mention of words that are really limited to any one religion like Allah or Muhammad (pbuh.) in the text. Spiritual terms used are those common in the area and used by any religious or spiritual tradition there. Only two traditions seem to be referred to (or affirmed) in the text. One of them, Bhakti or the devotional path, exemplified in Heer's journey is not termed anywhere. It is, moreover, not even overtly discussed as a spiritual journey. The other path, the ascetic one of Ranjha, is hardly a spiritual one but there is a strong general sense of spirit moving in his life. Even his contact with the jogi, the whole thing is referred to in very pluralistic terms. The only appearance made by the Qazi, who represents orthodox Islam, is dismissed quickly. He functions only on the level of overt legal discourse and cannot appreciate the level of reality on which the story unfolds. His level is not interesting enough to hold one's attention in light of all else that is

happening, because his legalistic, conceptual, religious arguments cannot compete with the sheer intensity of the immediate emotional drama that is unfolding in the text.

Instead of outlining the spiritual paths or focusing on spiritual or legal discourse, the text stays close to the actual experiences of the characters. The story focuses on very simple human pleasures and pains that touch us so deeply and so directly that abstract or conceptual religious constructs are extraneous. While the elements of what is unfolding may be seen in spiritual terms, spirituality is either not overtly mentioned or mentioned in a way that makes its terms almost irrelevant to the actual emotional and experiential components of the story. It is not important whether Ranjha regards the holy man living in the temple on Tilla as a *jogi* or a Pir. What matters is the state in which he approaches the man and the way he submits to him and how he receives blessings from him.

The text also keeps us in the fullness of the moment, the reality of the here-and-now experience, by staying focused on immediate sensory experiences such as food, festivities, colors and music, instead of concepts. Whenever there is a happy occasion, its time for celebrations, and celebrations are not just mentioned lightly but described in great detail. From the beginning when the Khehras find out that Chuchak has accepted their proposal for Heer, they start the celebrations and the description continues for twenty-four lines. Then, all prepared, they reach the Siyyals, and the description of festivities continues for several more verses. Included in the descriptions are the kinds of musicians and singers and dancers that are present, what kinds of horses are gathered for the wedding procession, how well-dressed everyone is and of course what they eat. Food and the pleasures of eating are always fully described. A glass of cool milk and *churi* from Heer's own

hands, is a fantasy that anyone working in the hot fields of Punjab can relate to immediately. Every time Heer and Ranjha meet, she prepares *churi* for him and the process is described in some detail. In the end, when Ranjha comes after Heer at Sehti's place, they meet each other after many years and when they are finally reunited the first thing they do is eat *churi* together. Thus starts the celebration of their union that continues for several weeks. Even during these weeks, special attention is paid to how much they enjoy food together and what kinds of food they eat. Similarly, there are other places where physical and sensory experiences are detailed that keep the proceedings very real and non-conceptual, for example the way Heer's body deteriorates as she goes through years of separation after her marriage, how Ranjha's flute sounds when he plays in pain etc.

While it is easy to see how staying close to the experience can keep one free of religious concepts and discourse, it is not obvious how it keeps us out of spiritual discourse since that often revolves around experiential matters. Let us focus on Heer's path here as we have made a correspondence of her journey to Bhakti which is largely based on emotions and experiences. The difference is that while the stages that Heer goes through can be corresponded to any devotional path, Bhakti, Sufi or any other, it is not overtly about spirituality. Most spiritual discourse uses emotions for spiritual ends. Sufism is often described as the path *through* the heart. Heer's experience is closer to Vivekananda's quotation above, describing Bhakti as its own fruition and not a path towards a goal. Most devotional spiritual traditions became margas (paths) that do something for us and in that become significant. Heer goes through all the stages of transformation but it is not for transformation that she does it. She is simply devoted to her beloved and undergoes whatever comes her way in that state.

If the essence of Bhakti is what Vivekananda describes and what we read in the text, then how does it become a marga or a

yoga that can be used just like Raja yoga or Kundalini yoga? For this the text may not provide us with clear answers, but in the light of what it puts forth one could play with the question. It seems one needs to look at the historical context within which Bhakti yoga developed. Perhaps what Damodar describes is the kind of devotion that the sub-continent mindset is familiar with. It is a sense of the spirit, a sense of an inner transformation that is not formalized as a definite tradition. However, in a context dominated by formalized religions, for people to continue what they had been doing for thousands of years, some felt a need to create a formal tradition thereby justifying popular sentiment and sense of the spirit. Perhaps Ramanuja's efforts can be seen in this light. For the intellectuals and theologians who had made a specialized field of religion, outside of the everyday lived experiences of the indigenous people of India, these developments were and remain quite significant. The ordinary person perhaps felt at least a slight shift or a shock as his or her experience was now related to and made a part of an all-encompassing reality that now determined his or her status and options in life in great detail. They were now part of a somewhat formalized religious tradition. Formal religion does not align with most of the sentiments of the indigenous people of the subcontinent. Thus Bhakti yoga seems to be an indigenous response to outside pressure from formalized religions, to define their own living sense of the spirit.

In this manner, if we look at traditions such as those developed by Nanak and Kabir, we see that they too may have been created only in reaction to pressure from formalized religions to create a place for or give some weight to popular informal sentiment. As Zaigham's comments above show Nanak only turned everything that a Jat was already doing into a religion. Kabir panthis, who were, if not anti-religious, at least

non-religious, got into justifying and making explicit their position using poetic discourse and in the process developed another tradition. Nanak, though, did not seem to have started as formal a religion as Sikhism turned out to be. Sikhism turned into a formal, organized religion in response to religious, political and social pressure from the formal religion of Islam or at least from Muslim kings. Left on their own, Punjabis may have just preferred to sit together in the evening and sing Heer instead of belonging to and having to fit into the pigeon-hole of any religious or even spiritual tradition.

Considering Ranjha's journey, we see that he is also never really interested in joining a formal religious tradition. He naturally leans towards ascetic tendencies, as discussed above. When he sits by his hut outside of the city of Hazara for all those years after the marriage of Heer, it may fit a certain spiritual picture in our minds but the text never describes it in any spiritual terms. This is just what he feels like doing after losing everything in life. When he goes to the *jogi* at Tilla, it is just because he knows that the blessings of the *jogi* can make things easier for people and he is going to his Heer against difficult odds. His initiation is not mentioned to have started him on a path towards enlightenment or *moksha* or towards anything at all. It is not really a path that he embarks on but rather as if he gently puts on a garb that conveniently fills a slot and gives him an identity that people recognize. The tradition of being one of the wandering holy men or of going to a holy man for blessings seems to be deeply rooted in the sub-continent. Only sometimes a tradition would develop around such holy men or women but even then, those who left behind their poetry etc. do not seem to be interested in starting formalized spiritual traditions. They would rather, it often seems, have left behind, if anything, a story such as Ranjha, that does not create a formal tradition but gives people a paradigm by which to give meaning to their experiences.

Thus the text gives us a paradigm for not overt but a lived sense of spirituality that stays very much focused on an experience of the basic, essential elements of spirituality at a very human level, beyond all religious discourse. Since the focus remains on the basic elements, even when spirituality is mentioned in passing, the terms are used very lightly, and the sense of the experience remains more important. Any label suffices as long as it captures the essence of the reality. Moreover, labels are used in an interchangeable way, undermining any possible religious discourse that may have originated from it. As Zaigham tells me: ‘A Jat has no religion. They tell him god is called Allah, he says, ‘fine its Allah’. The others say he is Ram, he says ‘all right, I’ll call him Ram’. Its all the same to him. That is the sense one gets from the text. It is the human experience that matters, not labels. Regarding religious tolerance, such a scenario makes it hard to define just who the “other” is who needs to be tolerated.

Conclusion

The psyche of the subcontinent, it appears, is familiar with a level of existence that is much more immediate and closer to our basic humanness than anything that can be captured in religious or spiritual discourse. It is recognized on this level that there can be many truth-claims in reality and the reality of life is always more than any one truth or any one religious or social or moral system can encompass. The pluralism of this mind-set is rooted in the recognition of this complexity and comfort in accepting conflict in addition to being grounded in the essential elements of what we now call spirituality.

What developed in this context must originally have been a very immediate, 'lived' sense of spirituality that went beyond any labels or dogmas. With a general focus on very immediate, sensory, intensely emotional, non-linear experiences in the fullness of the moment, an amazing range of spiritual traditions developed and survived in the subcontinent, pointing to the indigenous tendency to accept the simultaneous existence of multiple truths.

The indigenous tendencies were found in purer forms in the South of India, which remained free of the Brahmanical influence and the Muslim invaders for quite a long time, and in the darker *varnas* in the North. The subcontinent has seen invasions of many

different kinds. The two major formal religions that are rooted in people who migrated from outside India, the Brahmanical tradition and Islam, are both patriarchal in nature and tried to enforce totalitarian regimes in their orthodox forms on religious and social levels. They needed to establish their social and political hold on the indigenous population, so they enforced their all-encompassing truths, defined by *them*. Islam focused more on political hold whereas the Brahmanical tradition established and maintained its social hold. Because they were both trying to introduce *one absolute reality*, that was more transcendental in nature, they had to struggle against the very feminine, emotion-based and phenomenal-reality-based, pluralistic sense of spirituality in the subcontinent. The complexity of pluralistic life was so deeply rooted here that anyone trying to impose an absolutely all-inclusive reality faced a challenge. The Brahmanical tradition ended up incorporating these traditions within a rigid grid and, at least on a social level, abusing the indigenous population. On the other hand, the Muslims in India, out of their insecurity, turned to more rigidity and fundamentalism.

While both the Brahmanical tradition and orthodox Islam were quite uncompromising in their basic truths, Islam concerned with its religious purity, and the Brahmanical tradition having more to do with its social purity, the indigenous traditions lent themselves easily to be incorporated into other systems. So we have the development of Sanskritized Bhakti and Tantric (Saiva) traditions and other developments like the Chishtiya Sufis. The local mind-set that was quite comfortable with all the elements of a devotional tradition without any of the formalism, as we have seen in the case of Heer's journey, had to take on the garb of a somewhat formalized tradition, as in Ranjha's case, (on a discursive level at least,) in an atmosphere dominated by formalized religions that were defining the social and political

way of life and everyone's place in it, on the basis of their labels. Ranjha created a convenient slot that he could fit himself into (putting on the garb of a *jogi*) without changing much else about how he was living his life. That Nanak developed a somewhat formalized slot for the Punjabi life-style as it existed (Zaigham's thesis) can be understood in the same vein. This allowed some Punjabis, at least in the beginning of Sikhism, to escape having to become part of one or the other more formalized (totalitarian) religions sweeping the area. Other trends in the local psyche found other kinds of somewhat formal slots to fit into. Bhakti had to develop almost as a formal path and a formal tradition. One could say that in an atmosphere created by the likes of Shankara, a Ramanuja had to respond, even if the Bhakti philosophical discourse may be totally secondary to the emotional part that the common people are more in touch with.

While the indigenous mind-set allowed the patriarchal, formal religions to become part of the overall picture, their presence over time has led to a fragmentation of the society where everyone is making more and more formalized slots for themselves; slots within slots; labels upon labels. Today, we find the pluralism and interchangeableness of labels of older times, apparent in the text, quite baffling. From the formalized and even the devotional camps today, people are willing to give and take life in the name of their respective, beloved gods. The lover archetype that opens us up to the interconnectedness of things has himself been pushed into a pigeonhole somewhere. The fight over Ram Mandir in Ayodhya that reached its bloody end in 1992 all over the sub-continent was a painful indicator of how far things have deteriorated. The screams of a burning child can no longer break us free of labels that we used to wear so lightly just a few lifetimes ago.

The power of the Heer legend is that it hits us with its intensely emotional, devotional, immediate, sensory experiences that touch us with an eternal presence in the moment and are therefore much more primary than intellectual or cognitive

religious constructs. At the same time, it opens us up to levels of reality that are much deeper and much more complex than formal religious discourse. In connecting us to our basic humanness and putting things in a pluralistic perspective, it gives us a measure of reality that continually challenges the totalitarianism of religious and spiritual fundamentalism and discourses.

Listening to the story of Heer (it was traditionally sung), one cannot help but be moved through all kinds of intense human emotions that one can thereafter empathize with in a deeper way. It opens the heart in a way that allows us to feel a connectedness with others on a very primary level. It moreover creates a paradigm in our psyche for how things could happen. It creates a possibility in our unconscious understanding of an alternative value system or level of connection. without any conscious discourse. It resonates with and moves the deeper truths and realities in the psyche of the subcontinent and something within us changes, making us more open to an emotional connection with all others.

The purpose of this study, of my search for insights in this area, was to find better interventions into the growing intolerance in the region. Considering the present state of the subcontinent, it seems clear to me that we need to move away from predominantly formal discourses, including what religions and spirituality may say about 'tolerance'. We have to invoke and focus on the essential elements of spirituality and human-connectedness, as the text does, without any formal discourse. This may allow a return to the subcontinental ability for coexistence of religion / spirituality with a deep sense of humanness that gives us the ability of not only tolerating the "other" but accepting, respecting and integrating the "other".

Epilogue

Thoughts On Possible Social Interventions Into Intolerance

The study provides us with a few insights into what kind of social interventions into intolerance may prove effective given the psyche of the subcontinent. An intervention can be designed on many levels. There are general areas that can be intervened into to increase the level of tolerance in the society. Within each of these areas there need to be strategies worked out and for each strategy activities planned to achieve the objectives. On the most concrete, activity level, there can be many options as long as the objectives are clear. We will focus more on strategies and less on the concrete, activity level.

First, in relation to what we discussed more in the Background chapter, for the Brahmanical tradition in India and for the Muslims of Pakistan, there is the task of dealing with the burden of historical wrongs and injustices. The historical injustices and abuses of power that have been committed in the subcontinent need to be at least acknowledged and perhaps even apologized for, in order to achieve an atmosphere that is tolerant and respectful of all. In India, one essential task remains to generate a broad-based movement to expose the roots of the oppression of the darker indigenous people of the subcontinent through the Sanskrit tradition. It is not enough to ask for equal or

more rights for the ‘lower’ castes. Its not just a matter of affirmative action. It is not enough for great leader to be *mahan* and eat and live with these lower castes. The roots of this hierarchy are so deep within the psyche of the people and so well internalized that the basis and existence of this racist social order, made sacred over time, has to be challenged, exposed and broken down in its entirety!

The civil society and the Government of India could check the recreation of history by some of the Brahmin circles and ethnocentric historians. They are strategically covering up the very bases of these historical injustices and abuses and not just in scholarly discussions but attempting to do so even in textbooks, so as to limit the chances of any future generations challenging the religion-based power structures. The task needs to be taken on in the mainstream society and not be limited to limited initiatives like the *dalit* movement. However, as already pointed out at the end of the section on Hinduism, given the thousands of years old tendencies of the Brahmanical tradition, the level of denial and acceptance in the general population and the very deep disempowerment of the ‘lowest’, darkest varnas there is very little chance that any such challenges will actually materialize.

In relation to Pakistan, or more generally for the Muslims of the subcontinent, whether they live in India or Pakistan, one primary challenge remains to dissociate with the Muslim invaders of the subcontinent. In Pakistan the history books often start with “when we came to the subcontinent...” It is important to recognize that the forefathers of most of the Muslim population of the subcontinent have been living in the subcontinent for thousands of years and did not come along with any invading army and did not migrate here from Arabia. They converted to Islam for whatever reasons. Most of the Muslim

rulers would not differentiate much between Indian Hindu or Indian Muslim subjects and certainly would not share the rule with them. The Mughal rule was not the rule of the Indian Muslims over the subcontinent. Claiming that would be as absurd as the Christian communities of the subcontinent referring to the British rule over India as a time when *they* ruled India. This strategy to encourage the Indian Muslims to identify with the Turk or Persian or Arab rulers and to talk about “when *we* ruled India...” may have been useful during the British rule, when it was felt that the Muslims needed an ego boost. Allama Iqbal, the Indian Muslim visionary, played a key role in this by connecting their identity to the whole Muslim Ummah and to *their* ‘glorious’ past in the subcontinent. One wonders if the short-term needs that motivated him at that time outweigh the long-term patterns that he helped put in place and reinforce. When gaining property and land and titles through the use of force is justified and even glorified, humiliating and killing people in the process, killing and imprisoning even one’s own immediate family members, this pattern of abuse of power on every level continues to be repeated, down to the present day.

In 1992 when the Babri mosque was destroyed in Ayodhya and it led to major sectarian violence and bloodshed across India, there were several reactions to it. One common debate centered around whether there was actually a Ram Mandir in place of which Babur had constructed that mosque. But when looking at the general pattern of invaders who used Islam from time to time, it seems clear that the pattern of breaking temples and sometimes replacing them with mosques was not uncommon. The act of breaking of the temples and primary idols has in fact not only been accepted but even glorified in the literature of Indian Muslims, including the poetry of Sir Allama Iqbal. Thus one can question that if the Hindus today replace one mosque with a temple, it hardly begins to balance the historical wrongs. A much stronger argument however was that even if Babur had

destroyed the Ram Mandir and replaced it with a mosque, Babur and those in his army are now long gone and Hindus and Muslims now need to find ways to live together in peace and harmony. This is certainly true on some level. *But* if the Muslims of the subcontinent now identify themselves with those invaders and own and even gloat over the very acts that were so humiliating to the Hindus, then the Hindus can also justifiably identify with the hurt and trauma of what had happened and react towards anyone who owns and celebrates these acts. There are several other examples in Pakistan where the names of invaders like Ghauri and Ghaznavi, with all that they did to the people of this land, continue to be glorified.

Whatever the short-term motivations of people like Iqbal, the Muslims of the subcontinent now need to dissociate themselves with invaders who had a religion common with them but hardly associated themselves with Indian Muslims and raped and pillaged the towns irrespective of the religion of the inhabitants. They would use religion and go on a Jihad when they were fighting a Rana Sanga but not when they were fighting Ibrahim Lodhi or use it when they were pillaging India for the 17th time in the winter but not when they were invading, for the same reason, the Muslims in Central Asia in summers. Muslims of the subcontinent need to ground themselves in the sense of humanity and ask for basic rights as empowered human beings and not as Muslims with a glorious past who deserve a special status just because they are Muslims. Their sense of self need not be dependent on their association with these invaders. Even if they are identifying themselves strongly with Islam and not just with being human, they still would have to dissociate with most of these Muslim rulers. Muslim standards were very different where as a norm, even in the middle of a fight as a Muslim warrior was about to kill someone and the person spat on his

face, he would back off as now suddenly there was a slight personal motivation in this killing and that made it a murder and not jihad. These invaders of India, however, fought for their own glory and their kingdoms and for the fortunes that subcontinent offered them. Those in the subcontinent who insist on solely defining themselves as Muslim, would still need to either stick to the norms and standards set by Islam or associate themselves with the invaders but not both at the same time as there is a huge conflict between the two. If they identify that strongly with the principles of Quran and Allah, they cannot identify with Babur with his wine and women and violence, all for self-glorification and gratification.

The pattern of abuse of the people of the subcontinent by the Muslim invaders is an accepted fact. Perhaps at some point the Muslims can acknowledge the injustice and perhaps even offer an apology to the other religions of the subcontinent. The acknowledgement at least would be very useful for them in their own development towards an empowered and just society. The apology is probably unrealistic but also unnecessary if they stop associating themselves with these Arab, Turkish and Persian invaders.

As far as general strategies to increase tolerance, as concluded above, it seems clear that in the long-run we can achieve much more if we stay away from overt religious and even spiritual discourse. When I started this study I thought we would only be able to counter the formal religions and their intolerant attitudes through the more tolerant and inclusive spiritual traditions of the area. After the study, though, I want to move away from arguments for tolerance based not only on formal religions but also on formal spiritual traditions. No matter how good an argument we come up with on that level, first, it stays on an intellectual level and second, it holds us in and reinforces formal religion and spirituality. The indigenous mind of the subcontinent knows a level of spirituality that may be

deeper and more primary than the formalized spiritual traditions, perhaps without even the mindfulness of spirituality. It knows how to relate to all the elements of spirituality without ever bringing up the formal categories or overt concepts. It is this level that we will have to access for effective long-term interventions into the growing intolerance in the region.

If we do use spirituality, since we do have a rich pool of pantheistic traditions and heart-opening poetry that we are deeply rooted in, it needs to be done in a very indirect way. We see in the case of Ranjha, many essentially spiritual connections made to spiritual figures or to spiritual attributes without involving overt religiosity. From where we stand today, even the most broad-based symbols of love and devotion, like Ram, when directly invoked, can be used to generate fragmentation, hatred and violence. We cannot afford to reinforce these symbols. Even if we are only using these religious symbols in their most spiritual sense, someone else can abuse the passion they invoke to bring about more polarization and fragmentation in the region. And we know that there are many groups, the military, the religious fanatics and at times the politicians, to name a few, that may want to retain and deepen this fragmentation.

Using heterodox spirituality to counter fundamentalism, while it seems to make obvious sense on the surface, has other dangers as well. In the analysis of the text we outlined the spiritual necessity in most Sufi traditions, if not in most spirituality in general, to surrender one intellect and personal will in favour of the teacher or tradition. There are horrible forms of sexual and other forms of abuse that go on around some of the spiritual gurus and schools. In addition, there is also an acceptance of fate and things pre-ordained that can lead to or deepen a level of disempowerment in people. Thus any use of formal spirituality to counter intolerance has to be handled with

extreme care and inner knowledge of what the path is about and in using it what is being accomplished on psychological and social levels.

In the text we see how people in South Asia were used to having multiple identities that they easily moved in and out of. Today we see a rigidity in their religious identities which were more flexible earlier. Could an area of indirect intervention be to reinforce identities that compete with the more rigid religious ones. For example, most people in Pakistan identify themselves as ‘Muslims’ as opposed to ‘Hindus’ who are therefore the “other”. There are competing identities though, that are non-Muslim or pre-Islamic, that can be strengthened, such as our roots in the several thousand year old Indus Valley civilization or the Gandhara arts and culture. On a concrete level this could translate into starting an institute in Taxila, for example, where regional languages and history and culture are taught with a sense of ownership (there was once a plan to actually do this). Eventually maybe we can start talking about our regional, South Asian identity as well.

The general idea is to move people out of inflexible and rigid identities that keep them locked up in all-encompassing religious or philosophical systems; out of their ‘single vision’ and open them up to the complexity of real life around them. As observed in the text, people in the region were used to living in complex and conflicting realities and value systems. We now need to start gently challenging their strongly held, “objective” and “taken-for-granted” historical and cultural beliefs and value systems without making them unnecessarily insecure. Broader and conflicting perspectives have to be introduced on all levels. Healthy chaos and doubt needs to be introduced in the system. As Khalil Gibran says “life, and all that lives, is conceived in the mist and not in the crystal; and who knows but a crystal is mist in decay” (Gibran, 1923). Broader perspectives and healthy

doubt along with an ability for critical thinking can lead to psychosocial growth and pluralism.

But perhaps above all, though it can be a very long process, we need to move beyond specific identities and truths and to reinforce the activities and attitudes that connect us to the basic human level beyond all labels and concepts. That is probably the most important lesson that one can learn from the text. We have discussed this point in the conclusion above. What are the modes of connecting, of celebrating, of living life that push us into the deeper human level, beyond religious identities. Does a student volunteering in an orphanage know or even care whether a child is of Hindu or Muslim parents? Within a few weeks there is a bond with the children that touches a part within one that is much more primary and real. Can a volunteer working with a rape survivor think for long about what the religion of the woman is? The heart opens us up to an essentially human ability to empathize and to a deeper level of inter-connectedness.

It is an opening of the heart that the whole text is about. That is also the effect of listening to it. The opening of the heart through love pulls us out of our narrow worlds and connects us to a much larger and deeper reality. It reveals the language of the heart. It elicits the power of music and poetry and a connection with nature and with intuitive knowledge. This is the realm of the Lover archetype. A healthy access to the energies of this archetype, when integrated in a balanced way to other mental archetypes, brings empathy, connectedness and compassion to the world view and life. When however these powerful energies are blocked or repressed, they show up in their shadow forms, for example in passionate outburst of collective violence.

Opening up to the heart is closely related to the connection of the collective psyche to the feminine or yin elements. The section on the feminine in the analysis of the text points to many

levels of possible interventions. In general the position and value of the feminine in the individual and collective psyche has to be raised to a level equal to the male attributes. This ideally should relate to the struggle for gender equality a given system. Gender work is not about women only but changing the position of everything that gets associated with women and the feminine and devalued in the society and collective psyche of a people. If emotions are at the heart of the yin dimensions of the psyche, music, art, dance, poetry become the language of this dimension. In Pakistan, at least, we have not been able to sustain our musical and artistic heritage. Reviving these modalities, reconnecting with the anima, valuing the feminine within, are an indirect intervention into the growing dryness, rigidity and intolerance in the collective psyche of the area.

I am talking about these interventions in a very objective and clinical manner. But all the while I know that being a part of the system, I carry within myself the seeds of all the growing problems that I see in the psyche of the subcontinent, including the dryness, the rigidity, the fragmentation of the spirit. I notice this dryness and fragmentation even as I reread parts of what I have written above. Any mechanical intervention from where I stand right now is likely to fail. The journey starts with or at least goes in step with our own inner healing. However, the strengths of the collective psyche, the spirit of Heer-Ranjha, also lie, even if dormant, deep within our psyche. It is on an individual and collective level that we, without necessarily using their forms, need to invoke the powers of these archetypes. Only from a place of integration and deeper connectedness can healing flow.

On an individual and collective level, as we loosen our rigid identities and as we deepen our connection to the essentially human level, we may, without feeling insecure, be able to acknowledge, disown and perhaps even apologize in some form, for the historical wrongs that have been committed against certain classes and groups of people in the subcontinent. The

Brahmans still enjoy, or at least feel comfortable with their social and religious supremacy and the Muslims still gloat over and identify with their “glorious” political past. It may be a long time before we get connected firmly enough to the basic human level to acknowledge and heal the wounds that have tortured and hardened our souls for centuries. If we continue with the groundwork, someday we may be ready to heal the collective psyche of the subcontinent.

Appendix-I

Why Use Folklore

It is generally agreed upon that mythology contains valuable ethnographic, cultural, historical or symbolic information about a people. There are many schools of Anthropology and psychology that view mythology and its origins in slightly different ways though and they describe the process and benefit of its analysis differently as well. Let us outline a few of these approaches below.

According to Jung, mythology is a place where archetypes appear. In the collective psychic substratum of humanity that Jung calls the collective unconscious, there are ever-recurring patterns of psychic functioning, the psychological manifestations of which he calls archetypes. In addition to these psychological manifestations which guide our behavior unconsciously, these patterns can show up in cultural and artistic motifs. Archetypes, being a part of the collective unconscious are really pre-cultural but in every culture they find suitable manifestations that many times take the form of mythic characters and symbols (Jung and Kerenyi, 1949). Myths, legends and folk-tales can thus be analyzed on the basis of the archetypal patterns that emerge in them to reveal the deep unconscious psychic movement that such folklore is either an expression of or opens us up to. The

movement comes through mostly unconsciously, in an encoded form, in various aspects of the story.

Jung would consider our choice of the Heer Damodar text, for extracting information on the theme of religious tolerance in the society at that time, an appropriate one. This is because the legend does not overtly talk about the theme and the writer does not seem to be consciously aware of addressing the issue. Yet if we consider the text of the legend as "classic visionary literature", according to Jung, it would have archetypal material that can be analyzed by a psychologist. In such works of art, Jung would say "the collective unconscious becomes a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age" (Jung, 1933; p.166). Moreover as the text is not consciously written on the topic of tolerance, extracting information on the theme could be useful. Jung explains: "such a tale is built upon a groundwork of implicit psychological assumptions, and, in the measure that the author is unconscious of them, they reveal themselves, pure and unalloyed, to the critical discernment" (1933; p.154). Interestingly, a later text of Heer, written by Waris Shah, that became really popular in the area, more perhaps because of its lyrical style(?) and because of the anthropological details in it, I would not consider 'classical visionary literature' in relation to religion since the author was overtly conscious of this connection. He spells it out in the end of the book, which really reduces the value of the text as mythology, in my eyes, losing the power of a myth, which usually arises from the unconscious and certainly leaves its impact on the unconscious minds of the readers. In analyzing Heer Damodar, however, some of the Jungian ideas may be useful in our understanding of the psyche of those times. We could explore, for example, how the Lover archetype would look at the religious or social realities of those times.

According to one methodological approach a myth is seen side by side with the cultural history of the people and parallels are drawn and meaning is sought (Numazawa in Dundes, 1984; p.192). Applying this methodology to the Heer Ranjha legend, we can see some cultural patterns that may tally with the cultural historical realities of the Punjab. The legend, for example, may tell us of the respect that people at that time had for those on a spiritual path; that they would allow these mystics to transcend the rigid constraints that they themselves had to follow in their religious and socio-cultural lives. Ranjha, once it was clear that he was on a devotional spiritual path, was allowed by the court of the local Raja to run away with his beloved even though she was married to someone else. Could it be that the usual moral codes were suspended, to some extent, for those on a devotional path? One could ask such questions reading the legend as a documentation of cultural history.

The example above, of Ranjha's excesses could be looked at in a different way. "The function of a myth", writes Malinowski, a spokesperson for the functionalist school, "is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events" (Dundes, 1984; p.194). While the Heer Ranjha legend is not really a myth that describes "initial events", it could have a possible function "to strengthen tradition". Taking the example of the later text of Heer, by Waris Shah, could it be that one of the purposes of his gigantic undertaking in producing the longest poetic version of the Heer Ranjha legend, during the rule of Aurangzeb, was because he felt that in the face of increasing social and religious rigidity, it was important to go back to the roots of what was underlying the spirit of tolerance in the diverse society of the Punjab. Maybe the recognition of the power of love and compassion and its transcendence over all kinds of social or religious fragmentation was a mystical and popular cultural value that, looking at history again, may have been

threatened at the time. When communal riots broke, much later in 1947 in the subcontinent, Amrita Singh's famous verses, calling another Waris Shah to rise and start another page of the book of love to counter the fires that threatened to burn away the very fabric of society, are totally in line with this function of a myth—to reintroduce and reinforce certain cultural values.

The functionalists were basically a group of anthropologists who preferred the literal, non-symbolic treatment of myths. Other than telling us about the functions of myths, this school used the study of myths to extract ethnographic information about the culture from which these myths emerged. They took a myth as a direct expression of the lives of the people and their traditions. Thus these tales could tell us about the social organization, the social and moral codes, all the way down to the activities of the everyday lives of a people.

In Heer Damodar, for example, the way people lived, their norms, traditions, values, modes of interaction and various ethnic variations in all of these things, are preserved. It is exactly the kind of information that an ethnographer would collect. The legend can therefore serve as “a kind of autobiographical ethnography” as Boas might put it (Dundes, 1984; p.193). Thus, if we are interested in getting to the sense of the "lived religion" in the lives of those people, in the tradition of Nandy's work, a legend like Heer Ranjha, according to the functionalists, could prove to be a vital source of relevant information.

Mircea Eliade, who is considered an authority on mythology, talks about the paradigmatic nature of myths where the cultural heroes teach us what to do in various circumstances and basically how we should live our lives. The legend of Heer Ranjha, for example, may tell us something about the place of love and devotion in life and about when to take a stand against societal constraints and how spirituality may play a part in doing this.

Adding to the *psychological* analyses of myths, Freud's analyses of mythology remain significant. Freudian analysts go back into a person's early childhood and repressed material to look for the roots of his neurosis. Freud wrote in one of his letters to Oppenheimer, "I have long been haunted by the idea that our studies on the contents of the neuroses might be destined to solve the riddle of the formation of myths" (quoted on p.272; Dundes, 1984). According to Freud, it is the initial conditions of infancy, the experiences of early childhood, that an adult projects onto the world outside, through projection systems, including the creation of myths and folklore (P.270, Dundes). To the extent that certain aspects of human life, experienced or witnessed by children are universal (like weaning, pregnancy of mother, defecating etc.), their projection in some symbolic form in every culture is to be expected. In addition, the aspects of life that are not acceptable in a particular society, or are considered dirty or evil, are repressed in the unconscious and seek expression in symbolic forms. One could look at Heer Ranjha therefore to uncover repressed material of that time and place, including for example their attitudes towards sexuality and racism.

Structural Anthropologists like Levi-Strauss, criticizes the attempts of psychologists to interpret myths symbolically, saying: "a naive attempt was made to reduce them (myths) to inarticulate emotional drives, which resulted only in hampering our studies" (1963; p.203). He similarly criticizes other methodologies which he concludes are responsible for making the field of mythology "chaotic." He wishes through the field of Structural Anthropology to do a precise "scientific study" of myths (1963; p.201), moving away from subjective interpretations. Claiming that "myth is language" (Levi-Strauss, 1963) and using the rules of linguistic analyses, structural anthropologists attempt to understand myths by breaking them down into their components and analyzing their structure.

To me, however, the attempt of the structural anthropologists, to take the subjective out of the origins and impact of mythology and to assert to be able to analyze it 'objectively' is futile. For example, they would break down a myth into the shortest possible sentences and write them on index cards. They would then group the cards together by putting them under columns representing a particular theme on a chart. One could then see how the particular theme is repeated in a myth and also by comparing a theme column from one myth to that of another, one could compare various aspects of different themes. While this is an interesting tool, one wonders if, knowing what theme a particular sentence or index card falls under or in the choice of what columns to have, one would not have to do some subjective interpretation. Besides the structure of fixing columns and finding sentences to fit under them may keep us from discovering hidden relations that may not fit our preconceptions.

In hermeneutic analysis of a myth, on the surface, we see something similar to the methods of the structural anthropologists. How a particular theme or a pattern is repeated on various levels of meaning in the "whole" is given special attention to. But instead of the rigidity of the structure (looking only at sentences or phrases for example), one could pick something up from, for example, the overall attitude towards something or the tone of the story. Thus, in the present study, instead of analyzing and breaking the legend down, I preferred, in the spirit of hermeneutics, to let the whole of the text reveal its messages and relationships to us (for a discussion on the hermeneutic methodology used, see Appendix II) .

Appendix-II

Hermeneutic Methodology

The present study used a hermeneutic analysis of the first Punjabi text of the Heer Ranjha legend, written by Damodar, to gain insights into religious tolerance in the subcontinent. Even though the study is not presented in the methodological details and sequence, I present here the steps followed by me for analysis and for reaching the conclusions.

Given the lack of any well-developed theories on the roots of tolerance in the region, it was important to start the exploration as broadly as possible. There was no initial thesis that needed to be proved or disproved. There was only an area that needed to be explored and better understood, through an analysis of the given text. I wanted to get to the heart of the essence of the phenomenon of tolerance. The search needed to develop and deepen and it was not clear which factors would become significant or which relationships would be crucial or where the exploration would lead to.

While hermeneutics has more to do with maintaining a certain attitude towards the text, following certain steps and process help the inquiry. According to Ihde, "hermeneutics in its broadest sense means interpretations, and rules give shape to an interpretation" (Ihde, 1986; p.32). First we read the texts directly, putting aside our usual assumptions and preconceptions and let the structures and patterns in the text emerge. We do this with an open mind so the text could reveal itself and open up its world to us.

Next we notice any repeated patterns or structures that stand out in relation to the main theme of inquiry. At this point some sub-themes may have emerged that are indirectly related to the theme (issue of tolerance, in the present study) or that may serve as prerequisites for the study of the topic (tolerance, here). Moreover, the main theme may undergo some deepening or transformation in this process.

Then we go down to the essential or invariant features that lie under the patterns and structures related to the theme (tolerance) and the sub-themes. For this we use as many examples of variations in which the same theme or structure appears as we can, to reach to the essential features. This means developing a sense of vision that separates the surface manifestations of the theme from their deeper, essential nature, that should be common to all the variations or examples.

At this point, we put the text in the historical context that it was written in. We allow the socio-cultural realities of the era to deepen the phenomenon as it appears in the text. In their historical context, we may be able to get a deeper insight into why things appear as they do and maybe also add to how the essential meaning appears in the particular situation. History has its place, as Tracy puts it: "it is morally irresponsible not to care what occasioned what, what actually happened, and what consequences ensued in all the classic events that formed our culture" (Tracy, 1987; p.36).

As stated earlier, my purpose was to seek understanding and to come up with some insights into what can be done about growing intolerance in society today. Within hermeneutic schools, I was therefore attracted to the theories of Habermas, who adds an element of social change and the responsibility to bring about this change to the task of understanding and interpreting. There are structures of domination, fragmentation

and prejudices that are internalized by everyone in a system. Staying strictly within the texts could mean being restricted by the cultural distortions and the social attitudes that were internalized by people (specifically the writers) of that time. Putting a text against its historical context is therefore one of the important ways to deal with this problem.

Habermas also points out that psychoanalytic tools could be used to bring out attitudes and motives that are socially unacceptable and therefore repressed within the text (see Howard, 1982; P.111; Bleicher, 1980; p.156). Against the developmental history of a social system, this repressed material can be analyzed and extracted. Which feelings would get repressed is in itself an important piece of information, maybe even more important than the conscious contents of the text.

I followed the hermeneutic circle, or spiral, going into the deeper essence of the phenomenon of tolerance. In the end, out of the place where the meaning of the text sinks into the being of the interpreter and both are transformed in the alchemical process, something emerged, that hopefully can contribute to the efforts of increased tolerance in the subcontinent.

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