

Keep My Share of Rice in the Cupboard

Ethnographic Reflections on Practices of Gender and
Agency among Dalit Women in the Central Himalayas



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von

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For Sulu

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Note on Transliteration

I have used Anglicised spellings according to the simplified conventional system of transliteration for all Garhwali, Hindi, and Sanskrit words. All of these words are italicized. The Pronunciations follows the following logic:

- “c” is used for the Hindi “ca,”
- “ch” for the aspirated cha
- “s” is used for the Hindi “sa”
- “sh” is used for the apirated “ša” and “śa”
- “d” stands for the Hindi letter “da”

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this work I seek to understand how gender is constructed, to explain the practices that constitute a gendered habitus, and to shed light on female agency in terms of performances of gender amongst low-caste women in Garhwal. Based on my research in the villages of Chamoli, a high altitude district in the Central Himalayas of North India, I examine women's songs, ordinary conversations, my ethnographic observations and especially the stories women told me about themselves, in order to understand what shapes their lives and how female agency – that is, their ability to shape their lives – is constituted through habitus, gender performativity, and performances of gender. Gender identities are constituted in people's daily work, speech, and songs. They pervade all aspects of life: for example in the way Chamoli persons bring up their children, handle old age and death, or in the way they solve family problems and other conflicts. I seek to present the people of Chamoli, male and female, children and adults, as agents, constantly shaping and reshaping their own lives and those of others. To many people in India, agency is not restricted to humans (see also Inden 1992; Sax 2000, 2003a), and in Chamoli, spiritual beings play major roles as agents in people's daily lives. How people relate to them highly depends on gender and age. At the same time, human agency is never unconstrained, it always exists in a social field that regulates human society. Recognizing the mutual influences of persons, places, spirits, and deities in Chamoli, I want to formulate a view of agency and femininity that acknowledges Chamoli women as active agents while not denying the power relations at play.

1.1 Habitus, Performativity, and Gender

My ethnographic analysis is informed by a number of theoretical interests. At the most general level, I wish to position my arguments about gender in the Central Himalayas to comment on current understandings of agency and resistance within anthropology. I am especially interested in gender studies insofar as it has been concerned with the deconstruction of the concept of “woman”, and in subaltern studies, insofar as it is concerned with recovering the voices of those whose subjectivity and agency are commonly concealed by earlier historical and anthropological writing. Both disciplines offer useful theoretical perspectives on the interpretation of power and subaltern subjectivity.

I wish to investigate whether Chamoli women can be said to engage in what James Scott (1985) calls “everyday forms of resistance” or to be involved in “women’s moral discourse and everyday resistance” as identified by Raheja and Gold (1994: 1). I ask whether Chamoli women can be considered to form a group and whether this group of women can be understood as muted and subordinate to hegemonic structures more than men. In this way, I wish to understand how female identity is constructed in Chamoli, and whether an important part of female agency centres around individual females or groups of females resisting hegemonic structures. I am also interested in the practices of Chamoli society that perpetuate gender differences and hegemonic powers. To examine personhood and agency in this light, I draw heavily on Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus and practical mastery and on Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is useful because it replaces the notion of a transcendent rule with the idea of embodied practices that govern the social world, ideas, and identities and out of which apparent “rules” for societies develop. In the 1970s, when Bourdieu first developed his ideas on habitus, social field, and practice, structuralist ideas were still dominant in social sciences. The structuralist view on society assumed uniformly imposed and fixed rules to govern social life. In contrast to that, Bourdieu understands the social life of people to be governed by generative structures formed in dynamic relations with social fields. As such, “culture” neither consists of a fixed set of rules, nor is it a state of mind and a set of beliefs. It is rather, an embodied way of being, a state of

the body. According to Bourdieu, embodied dispositions that are learned through practices in social fields constitute a person's habitus and lead to the practical mastery of social persons that in turn enable them to act in socially acceptable and strategic ways. However, Bourdieu's concept lacks a serious analysis of gendered identities and practices, and therefore I complement it with Judith Butler's notions of the gendering of the subject as an effect of discourses. Like Bourdieu, Butler is not interested in individual experience, but in the analysis of processes that construct persons and their positions as subjects in the social world. To Butler, identity is constructed through language and discourse. Consequently, she argues, gender is a process, not an essence, and it is constructed through practices of gender performativity. To Butler, gender performativity constructs social subjects. Without the processes of gender performativity there is, so Butler, no subject and therefore no consciousness. All social beings therefore embody dispositions that are part of the discourses played out through gender performativity. And that is the reason why so many gendered dispositions and the way we view bodies are naturalized, as for example, what Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix", the norm that marginalises people of different sexual orientations than those directed towards reproduction. Both Butler and Bourdieu assume that most of these processes are unconscious to the extent that they constitute subjects. I wish to combine these parts of Butler's theory with Bourdieu's idea of the habitus and social fields to investigate how gender is constructed in Chamoli and how the embodied practices in Chamoli produce gendered persons. I will not discuss the discourses that construct gendered identities in Chamoli in depth because these are issues of local psychoanalysis, but use my ethnographic data to show practices of gender performativity, gendered habitus and performances of gender. While doing so, I will constantly ask how gender, gender performativity and embodied practices are connected to agency. According to the theories of Bourdieu and Butler, people's actions emerge from discourses (Butler) or habitus (Bourdieu). Bourdieu and Butler are useful for the analysis of my ethnographic data because they emphasise practice over structure. They argue that most of people's actions, the way social persons move, speak, and relate to each other emerge from embodied practices instead of grammar or structure. But both have been criticised for denying agency. Bourdieu assumes that the habitus is to a great

extend unconscious. In France, for example, people assumed that people's taste and artistic preferences was characterised by freedom of choice. Bourdieu, shows that they strongly correlate with people positions in social space. Bourdieu defined the habitus as a system of dispositions and as the product of social conditioning that links behaviour to class structure. Butler understands social subjects as effects of gender performativity. She goes even further than Bourdieu in the her claim that without performativity conscious subjects would not exist. All subjects are therefore products of the discourses of previous generations. The way we move, speak and feel are constructed by these discourses in Butler's theory.

In presenting my ethnographic data through a combination of a Bourdieuan and Butlerian reading, I will not only identify gendered performative practices in Chamoli, but also ask whether the theories of Bourdieu and Butler leave room for strategic action and agency. In doing that, I will also ask whether gender performativity and gendered practices – what I will call gendered performative practices – are always unconscious or whether gendered performative practices can also lead to performances of gender that combine strategic agency with practical mastery.

In his discussion of orientalist discourse on India in general, Inden claims that “[...] the agency of Indians, the capacity of Indians to make their world, has been displaced [...] on to other agents, [...] on to one or more ‘essences’[...]” (1992:5). The essences imagined are, for example, caste, the Indian mind, or divine kingship. I argue that the agency of Hindu females in India has similarly been displaced by scholars concerned with personhood, psychology, and feminist issues. Essences, such as “femaleness” and “caste” were – and have been– considered to restrict the agency of females in South Asia. In focusing on female agency, I therefore want to question stereotypes of Indian women as passive patients of male domination and investigate how and when they exercise agency in their own worlds. I follow a definition of agency postulated by Sax (2002b: 2) for whom it is “more than just ‘free will’ or ‘resistance’”. It is “the ability to transform the world” on whatever scale this might occur. This transformation of the world, as Merz (2002: 2-4) points out, happens not only in relation to other persons, but also in a context of mutual understanding with others. Or, as Inden put it, “all agents are relatively complex and shifting. They make and remake one another through a dialectic process in chang-

ing situations” (1992: 2). This understanding of agency is based on the assumption that all human beings are active participants in their world, constantly creating and recreating themselves and their social fields.

In contrast to that, women in Hindu South Asia have generally been described as having no or very little agency. Being regarded as both destructive and threatening sexual beings as well as beneficent, procreative, and positive protectors of the family (see e.g. Kakar 1981; Leslie 1989; Mani 1985, 1989; O’Hanlon 1991; Spivak 1985; Sax 1991; Michaels 1996), it is considered necessary that they are controlled by men, and therefore they are often described as suffering from oppression and subordination. Especially colonial and postcolonial descriptions of Indian women, but also indigenous texts concerned with tradition and women’s roles (see e.g. Leslie 1989; Chakravarti 1991) have tended to infantilize women and stressed their unquestioning obedience to the dictates of religion and tradition (see e.g. Mani 1985, 1989; Yang 1989). During the struggle for independence Indian nationalism promoted women as the guardians and preservers of tradition and deployed female virtues of purity, humility and silent suffering for the nationalistic cause (see e.g. Chatterjee 1989; Katrak 1992). During my time in the Himalayas, I asked myself whether Chamoli women saw themselves as subordinate to men and whether females formed a marginalised group in the sense that they had no or only little agency and therefore no part in creating the social world they lived in. Throughout this work, I will investigate this question of female agency in combination with a discussion of gendered performative practices and performances of gender in Chamoli. I wish to question western feminist assumptions which still often accept the nationalistic or colonial descriptions of females in India and present Indian women as victims of fixed oppressive and patriarchal structures (see also Mohanty 1984).

Placing myself in new developments of anthropological writing, I hope to present my ethnographic data in a way that remains true to the lives and practices of Chamoli people without falling into the orientalist trap of claiming that I have to represent the women of Chamoli because they are not able to represent themselves (Said 1979; Spivak 1985). Instead, this work is a result of my conviction that Garhwali women can represent themselves very well. They did that in their casual conversations with me, they do it in their songs and through their daily work. I will

show how Garhwali practices produce specific fields, each with its corresponding habitus, and how this constellation of fields leads to a different understanding of femininity and masculinity than that of Western Europe. In short, I want to look at the gendered aspects of habitus and gender performativity in the context of Chamoli society rather than in the context of Western feminism. The questions that drive me throughout this work are: How is a woman constructed in Chamoli? Is the relationship between male and female in Chamoli a binary relationship where “male” always dominates “female”? Is “female” always the same throughout a person’s life, and does it automatically lead to subordination? Are women in India mute and powerless? Is female agency restricted to, or at least concentrated in resistance, as the work of, for example, Raheja and Gold (1994), suggests?

With this search for agency through gendered performative practices, I follow recent developments in anthropology that argue for the recognition of a multiplicity of voices within a single community (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Bardhan 1990; DeCerteau 1984, 1997; Das 1989; Dube 1988; Lamb 2000; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Raheja and Gold 1994; Rosaldo 1989; Sax 2002a). Neither can we understand people purely on the basis of linguistic or symbolic analysis, nor is it possible to base an understanding of a community purely on expert opinion. DeCerteau (1984, 1997), for example, argues that everyday practices are heterogeneous and that the understanding of practices within one society always depends on a particular point of view. He attempts to explain the plurality of meaning-constitutive practices against the official practice of historiography and sociological analysis to highlight the irreducible multiplicity of human social and cultural forms. Bourdieu (1977, 1986a) argues most strongly for a view of culture not as a set of models, but of practices. With such a view of society, we can start to recognise differentiated and sometimes opposing views and practices of members within a community without having to interpret these different voices and understandings as “resistance” to a dominant structure. We are rather enabled to see the different forms of agency and patiency in the community we study.

In their work on songs and other oral performances among the women of Rajasthan, Raheja and Gold (1994) took a great step forward in the study of female agency in India by representing Indian women and their heterogeneity in a way

that denied the representation of Indian women as muted and voiceless. They succeeded in creating a different account of the women whose songs were introduced in their book. Others tried to follow their lead and counter the passive-victim stereotype of South Asian women by emphasising women's resistance (see Vanita 1999; Dava 1999; Das 1996; Green 1998). However, most of these scholars have equated "agency" with "resistance" and have disregarded the possibility that female agency can include much more than just resistance. I will ask in which way female agency is constituted in Chamoli and whether women's practices are creating a subculture of resistance to the world of male domination.

The question I will address throughout this work in many different ways is: How does agency manifest itself in Chamoli? It does so in many ways and in ways that are different for males and females. The clearest manifestation of agency among Chamoli people, however, is work and honour¹ (*izzat*). Honour is a concept that is highly gendered and heavily depends on the age and the status of a person. It is, for example, different for young unmarried girls and young unmarried boys, and the concept of honour again changes for a young woman once she gets married. Honour is not an abstract principle that can be constructed through linguistic analysis or through experts' explanations. It is rather, as Bourdieu puts it, a

sense of honour, a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by call to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interest (Bourdieu 1977: 14–15).

¹Honour and Shame are concepts that are often used to explain public discourses in the Mediterranean (see for example Abu-Lughod 1986; Bourdieu 1966; Gilmore 1987; Peristiany 1966; Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992). The concepts of honour and shame described in those works show interesting parallels to public discourses of male and family honour in India, as well, because they are both centred around women's modesty, chastity and sexual control as a means to protect and accumulate family honour. The discussion of honour and shame in the Mediterranean, for example, mirrors the discussion on the importance of the control over female sexuality for the honour of caste, village, and family in Sri Lanka by Yalman (1963). In this work, however I am more concerned with female understandings, performativities and performances of honour, which differ significantly from male understandings of honour as will become clear throughout this work.

In South Asia, honour is often connected to the confinement and sexual control of women (see e.g. Patel 1982, 1987). As such, it extends to modesty, silence and obedience (see e.g. Narayan 2004). In the most literal sense, Chamoli women understand honour as preserving the purity of their village, caste, and marital family by remaining sexually pure and faithful to their husbands. An honourable married woman should have sexual relations only with her husband, an honourable girl should not even think about letting any male touch her in a sexual way, and a widow should not look at men lustfully. In this way, they follow the dominant discourses of honour that are shared by high caste people throughout the region. The honour of a household is closely tied to its women. However, Chamoli people have an understanding of honour that goes much further than that. In the course of this book, I will show that honour is very important to females in Chamoli. In female understanding, honour is linked to a woman's ability to work and feed her family. Many Chamoli women's actions can therefore be understood as being oriented towards the acquisition and retention of honour. During childhood, they learn the sense of honour, their marriage adds to the honour of their parents and siblings, their work adds to their own honour as well as that of their parents and their marital family. Honour enables women to become powerful mothers-in-law, and honour plays a great role in the way old people are treated.

The "sense of honour" is deeply embedded in people's bodies. Ways of standing, speaking, and moving are all connected to different aspects of honour. In Garhwal, the sense of honour as embodied practice is highly gendered in the sense that honourable practices are different for males and females. The "rules of society" are here not to be understood as a set of ideas and structures that shape society, but rather as the effect of practices embodied in gendered performative practices, such as work for women of a certain age, or the public representation of the family for the oldest man and sometimes in performances of gender such as weeping or shouting. Honour becomes an embodied sense through embodied practices and gender performativity. This embodied and gendered sense of honour will be elaborated on in the following chapters, especially chapters four and five.

The sense of honour becomes part of a Chamoli person's habitus. He or she literally grows into this sense of honour. A Chamoli person knows, for example,

in what situation weeping is honourable or shameful, and can act accordingly. As such, the habitus of Chamoli people is closely linked to the acquisition of “a capital of honour”, following the concept of capital put forward by Bourdieu (1977, 1986a). To Bourdieu, all social action is strategic in the sense that it is directed towards “profit”, or rather, the accumulation and exchange of different forms of “capital”. He expands economic behaviour so that it goes much further than “the truth” of the capitalist market that rules “economism” and extends the term “capital” to more than economic or material goods. In *The Forms of Capital* Pierre Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. Economic capital is the command over economic resources, social capital are resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support, and cultural capital are forms of knowledge, to which belong embodied forms of knowledge such as ways of moving or subtleties of language such as accent, grammar, spelling and style. This basic definition of different forms of capital can be differentiated further to include educational capital as a form of cultural capital or symbolic capital as a form of social capital. To Bourdieu, the economic understanding of the social world needs to be expanded to include symbolic interests as more than just “the irrationality of feeling or passion” (Bourdieu 1977: 177). He expands traditional economic theories to include material and symbolic goods “that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after” (Bourdieu 1977: 178). Our understanding of capital should not be restricted to mere economic capital, but expanded to social, cultural, and symbolic capital. All of these forms of capital are interconvertible. That means that cultural capital can be converted into economic capital, for example through employment. In the same logic symbolic capital be converted into cultural capital through marriage alliances and the sharing of knowledge. In certain societies, social and symbolic capital are more important than economic capital, and as such invested time, smiles, symbolic labour, and friendship can become as valuable as material goods. In Chamoli, honour plays a major role in successfully gaining social and symbolic capital, and female honour is important for their marriages, their position within the marital family, their village, their children’s position, and the creation of practical kinship networks. Honour is not a state of mind, but something that manifests itself through embodied practices as

simple as agricultural work. In this sense, honour is different from prestige or status, although it can help to accumulate them, because economic or cultural capital are not central to its achievement. Even the poorest and most uneducated person can cultivate honour. It can, for example, be more honourable for a father to marry his daughter to a good family with a good reputation in a small one-day wedding than to have a big celebration that brings a lot of prestige because he spends a lot of money, but marries his daughter to people who have a less honourable reputation. Therefore, “honour” is especially important to poor people because it is possible to develop a “capital of honour” without the exhaustion of economic resources. At the same time, as Bourdieu clarifies, a capital of honour may be converted into economic or cultural capital. A young woman from a poor, but honourable family has a good chance in Chamoli to find a husband from a rich family. An honourable man can combine his “capital of honour” and his “social capital” to find paid employment.

If we assume that honour is not an abstract concept to be understood in terms of its “symbolic” representation or in terms of meanings or cosmological beliefs, but rather a form of capital that is generated through practices, then – to understand honour in the context of the construction of gender in Chamoli – the question remains: How do we understand the cultivation of honour by people in Chamoli? And how is honour connected to female agency? In answering these questions, I am guided, above all, by Bourdieu’s understanding of practice and embodied dispositions. Bourdieu understands persons as constantly engaged in practical action. This action is always embodied and not necessarily conscious, and the social world is always incorporated in its subjects. Bourdieu argues against the structuralism of Saussure and Levi-Strauss that was dominant in the 1960s and 1970s and which saw the social as structured by external laws, or by a set of rules or representations that are learned and then blindly followed. Bourdieu was not satisfied with theories that reduced actors to epiphenomena of structure. The pitfall of structuralist anthropology, for Bourdieu,

lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of rules, the language of grammar, morality, and law, to express a social practice that in fact obeys quite different principles. The explanation agents may provide of their own practice, thanks to a

quasi theoretical reflection on their practice, conceals, even from their own eyes, the true nature of their practical mastery, i.e. that is learned ignorance, a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles (Bourdieu 1977: 19).

He advances a theory that sees actors as eminently active and capable of practical deeds (Bourdieu 1985: 8). He speaks of his theory as a dispositional philosophy of action. The ‘subjects’ are performing and knowing agents who have a sense of practical reason. This sense of practical reason is constituted through learned dispositions, incorporated structures and schemes of action, rather than by transcendent “structures” understood as rules to be followed. Action in a particular situation is then guided by these dispositions. The habitus is that practical mastery that tells a social person what to do in a certain situation (Bourdieu 1985: 41). Bourdieu often uses the metaphor of games to explain the relation of habitus to the social field. The social field is to Bourdieu a place into which a person is born. He relates mainly to social classes in France where the world of the upper classes constitute their own social fields. Only those who were born into these social fields have practical mastery. He likes to compare the social field with a game, and the habitus is the “sense of the game” (the field). To have a sense for the game means to have the game in the blood, to know what will happen next, to have a sense for the history of the game (Bourdieu 1985: 145). Actors who know the game inside out do not need to strategically think about what they will do next because they will simply do what they have to do, according to the rules of the game, which are incorporated in their bodies, not as formal “rules” that are understood or experienced as such, but rather as embodied practice. According to Bourdieu, the habitus

is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’. That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself the product (Bourdieu 1977: 79).

The practices of a particular social field produce a particular habitus, which consists

of

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures pre-disposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated' and regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1977: 72).

Practice is therefore not a mechanical reaction, which is oriented on models and roles. Instead, practice itself produces and creates rules and norms. That does not mean that all action is directed by creative free will of an individual actor. Rather, Bourdieu argues that each action is the result of a confrontation of an actor with the social world. Praxis is, according to Bourdieu, not the mental goal of an individual person, but something that is given by the presence of the game. The presence of the game induces actions in the players (Bourdieu 1985: 144). The rules of the game are learned through imitation of action, through mimesis, a process that starts in childhood and which produces a "bodily hexis", as Bourdieu puts it.

In all societies, children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult – a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech, and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience (Bourdieu 1977: 87).

Further, verbal productions, "proverbs, sayings, maxims, songs, riddles, or games," objects, "such as tools, the house, or the village" and practices, "such as contests of honour, gift exchanges, rites" help children to grasp the rationality of their own society and give them information of how to move within it (Bourdieu 1977: 88). But this does not mean that in Bourdieu's logic there is no room for change or agency.

On the contrary, for Bourdieu, practices are liable to be rejected once the field changes. The actor for whom the field has changed and whose habitus is therefore no longer appropriate to it, suffers from what Bourdieu calls the “hysteresis”, so that he or she possesses or manifests a habitus that is embarrassing, inappropriate, or “scandalous”.

This is why generation-conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa (Bourdieu 1977: 78).

Therefore, while the habitus “produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle” (Bourdieu 1977: 78), it is also in constant flux. Any external force – a change in environmental conditions, or new media, television, and tourism, for example – will also change the external regularities contributing to the production of the habitus and will thus change the habitus itself. Moreover, every person changes the habitus on his or her small scale, and once the habitus – for example of a generation – has changed drastically, the social field will adjust, and vice versa. The agents’ bodies and the structure of the fields are mutually implicated. Habitus, field, and capital are deeply entangled with each other. The habitus is the mode of being of a socialised body. It is a body that incorporates the immanent structures of a world or a certain sector of the world, and the habitus structures the perception of and the action in this world. Therefore, the habitus is differentiated like the positions of which it is a product, but it is also differentiating. Habitus are different and they produce differences. What a person eats, how he or she moves, dresses, what he or she likes or dislikes, all depends on the habitus, and the differences of the habitus of different groups differentiates the people of these groups (see Bourdieu 1986a).

In his analysis of practical reason, Bourdieu emphasises the differentiation of

groups and the formation of social classes. In his early work, he was never explicitly interested in gender or rather feminist theory. He explored gender relations throughout his work in terms of a structured sexual division of labour that generates a sexually differentiated perspective on the world (Bourdieu 1977, 1990), or the gendering of taste (Bourdieu 1986a), or power relations, based on sexual difference (Bourdieu 2001). But he was always much more interested in class relations, and gender issues were not central in his work (see also Moi 1991; Bourdieu 2001). Even in his later work, Bourdieu never understood gender as anything other than sexual difference (see e.g. Bourdieu 2001: vii), based on the sexual division of labour that becomes objectified in the institutionalisation of “caring femininity”. He analysed the mutual implications of gender and class in “Masculine Domination” (Bourdieu 2001). Here, Bourdieu talks about the persistence and durability of the gendering of thought, subjectivity, and the social world. For Bourdieu, the deepest structures of a fundamentally gendered binarism are inscribed on bodies and in minds and are continually reproduced in ways difficult either to recognize or to contest. Here, he focuses on how gendered domination becomes an embodied and seemingly natural thing.

Whereas the idea that the social definition of the body, and especially of the sexual organs, is the product of a social labour of construction has become quite banal through having been advocated by the whole anthropological tradition, the mechanism of the inversion of cause and effect that I am trying to describe here, through which the naturalization of that construction takes place, has not, it seems to me, been fully described (Bourdieu 2001: 22).

Bourdieu’s main aim is to denaturalize the naturalized mechanism of the construction of gender. This mechanism achieves a “somatization of the social relations of domination” (Bourdieu 2001: 23). Bodies are imprinted by a collective history – a history which, embodied in this way, vanishes under the sign of nature. To Bourdieu, this mechanism has already gendered the knowledge that constructs the very notion of “biological bodies” (Bourdieu 2001: 3). This work has been discussed widely in feminist studies (see Adkins 2004; Butler and Salih 2002), and Bourdieu has been

widely criticised for this study on masculine domination because he limits himself to a level of analysis that understands women as occupants of positions among the dominated in social space and as bearers of a feminine habitus that signifies subjection (Bourdieu 2001). This account of gender is rather useless for the contemporary anthropology of gender, because of its tendency to return to the universal category of the subordinated “woman” – a concept that has been rejected since the late 1970s. It is his theory of practice, postulated in his early work *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice* that I find useful for an exploration of gender and femininity with a focus on agency.

Recently, feminists have started seeing aspects of Bourdieu’s work as useful in the sense that it provides tools for feminist theory (see e.g. Butler 1997b, 1999; Fowler 2003; Kraus 1993; Lawler 2000; Lovell 2000, 2003; McNay 1999, 2000; Moi 1991; Reay 1998; Skeggs 1997; Wolff 1999; Adkins and Skeggs 2004). Bourdieu’s thinking has been considered relevant for the theorizing of social agency, social movements and social change, cultural authorization, the theorization of technological forms of embodiment and feminist materialism. However, feminists like Moi (1991) warn against placing feminist subjects into the Bourdieuan theory. Gender, sexual difference, sexuality, or the sexed body should not be seen as social fields, nor should gender be seen as a habitus, or masculinity and femininity as forms of capital. Gender, so Moi, should not be understood as an autonomous social field of action, but rather as part of all fields (see also Adkins 2004: 6). Gender is relational and can therefore not be understood as a field on its own, she argues, but is part of many fields. Thus, gender is dispersed across the social field, influencing all categories and fields. I fully agree with Moi that gender should not be seen as an autonomous social field, but as part of all fields. I do not think that Bourdieu’s theory necessarily wants to see gender as an autonomous social field. To Bourdieu, social fields, though they may be interpreted differently according to gender, are social settings, such as a class, a workplace, a club, the family, a company, a ballroom. To him, habitus is specific to the combination of social fields in which a person is socialised and moves. The habitus is gender specific, but gender cannot be the habitus or a social field, exactly because gender is inherent in all social fields. There is much to criticize in Bourdieu’s writings on gender and on women, but I consider

his theory of practice and the way he thinks about the social world as very useful to understand how and why people do what they do in certain situations, as players in a game that is different in every part of the world.

I do, however, disagree with Bourdieu regarding female agency. In *A Theory of Practice*, for example, he postulates that it is impossible for women to accumulate symbolic capital. He claims that this is so, because “competition for official power can be set up only between men,” while women can only compete “for a power which is by definition condemned to remain unofficial or even clandestine and occult” (Bourdieu 1977: 41). But in the late 1970s he was not alone with this view of females as restricted in their access to power. Feminist theory itself postulated these ideas (see Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974). This view on females only changed in the 1990s with the poststructuralist and postmodern change in anthropological theory and the turn to cultural relativism. In this work, I am not concerned with criticising Bourdieu in the light of anthropological theory today, nor in the light of feminists’ writings. Instead, I will use his ideas on how societies work to find a theoretical access to gendered practices that leaves room for agency. It is at this point that I find the ideas of Judith Butler on gender as a process, on gender as a “becoming”, very useful. Bourdieuan theory sees the subject as not simply engaged with the world, but in the world. This is a break with idealist tendencies in feminist structuralist thinking, where gender or sexual difference always tends to end up being a product of the mind or of consciousness (see e.g. Adkins 2004: 10). A combination of Bourdieu’s theory of practice with Butler’s ideas of gender performativity enables us to see gender as a lived social relation (see also McNay 2004) based on relational practices.

Butler calls into question the category “woman” itself. To her, “woman” is always the other of “man”. She turns against feminist theory that, up to the mid-1990s, understood “woman” as a universal category and ignored ideas of differences among women (differences of race, class, or sexuality, for example). This notion of “woman” referred to an essence, a fact, and a biological given. Butler is much more radical in her criticism of objectivism, or essences, as she prefers to call it. She questions the idea that a person is male or female, masculine or feminine in the sense that this constitutes something like the core of a person. Butler goes

much further than the simple argument that gender is a social construct. To her, gender is an embodied set of signs; it is practiced, attained, and created through performativity and is not a pre-existing essence that constitutes a person. In a critique of psychoanalytic theory based on Freud and Lacan, who set up “woman” as an eternal, abstract universal category, Butler argues that the category “woman” must be rethought as multiple and discontinuous, not as a category with “ontological integrity” (Butler 1990: 326-327). The challenge for her is to think about “woman” as fragmentations and about feminism without a single unitary concept of “woman”. She wants to understand gendered subjectivity

as a history of identifications, parts of which can be brought into play in given contexts and which, precisely because they encode the contingencies of personal history, do not always point back to an internal coherence of any kind (Butler 1990: 331).

Gender, and the identification with one sex, is thus a fantasy enacted by embodied ways of moving and acting in the world, a set of internalized images, and not a set of properties governed by the body and its organ configuration. Gender is rather a set of signs internalized, psychically imposed on the body and on one’s sense of identity. Gender, Butler concludes, is not a primary category, but an attribute, a set of secondary narrative effects. Central to Butler’s thought is the notion of “gender performativity”.

Based on the Foucauldian premise that power works in part through discourse and in part to produce and destabilise subjects, she argues that discourse produces gender. She understands gender performativity in the context of performative speech as something that brings into being that which it names. She argues that

the paternal law produces versions of bodily integrity; the name, which installs gender and kinship, works as a politically invested and investing performative. To be named is thus to be inculcated into that law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law (Butler 1993: 72).

Performativity, therefore, should be understood as that aspect of discourse that has

the capacity to produce what it names. Through a Derridean rewriting of Austin², she suggests that this production happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. To her, performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established.

Generally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it declares. As a discursive practice (performative ‘acts’ must be repeated to become efficacious), performatives constitute a locus of discursive production. No ‘act’ apart from a regularized and sanctioned practice can wield the power to produce that which it declares. Indeed, a performative act apart from a reiterated and, hence, sanctioned set of conventions can appear only as a vain effort to produce effects that it cannot possibly produce (Butler 1993: 107).

Performativity is the discursive mode through which ontological effects are installed. For Butler sexual identity is constructed. But, as for Bourdieu, construction and constraint have nothing to do with free will or choice. Rather, Butler emphasises the “constructed character of sexuality” to argue against those theories that naturalize and objectify sexuality and therefore naturalize what she calls the frameworks for “compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler 1993: 93). In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler emphasises repeatedly that constructivism is not a matter of choice. She rather argues that societies and their discourse produce constraints that become natural for the people in that society. And everybody is constrained not only by what is difficult to imagine, but what remains radically unthinkable. To Butler, “the ‘performative’ dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms” (Butler 1993: 94). Therefore, gender performativity

is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that

²Austin (1962) formulated the Speech Act Theory, according to which he understands certain forms of saying as doing. To him, speech can become performative in expressions such as “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” In these expressions, the action that the sentence describes (nominating, sentencing, promising) is performed by the sentence itself: the speech is the act it effects.

which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity (Butler 1993: 95).

What differentiates Butler's thinking from Bourdieu in this respect, is that Butler understands the construction of gender above all as a product of discourse. To her, a girl becomes a girl through a speech act,

the naming of the 'girl' is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. [...] Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no 'one' who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a 'one', to become viable as a 'one', where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms (Butler 1993: 232).

Whereas Bourdieu understands social norms as being continually produced and reproduced through embodied practices, Butler places the emphasis on discourses that then lead to embodied practice. To Bourdieu, performative and efficacious utterances are only possible for a subject that has already been authorized by social power. But according to Butler,

of interest here is the equivalence posited between "being authorized to speak" and "speaking with authority", for it is clearly possible to speak with authority without being authorized to speak (Butler 1999: 123).

To her, "the performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated" (Butler 1999: 125). For Butler, performativity is not an efficacious expression of human will in language, but rather "a specific modality of power as discourse" (1993: 187). Discourse, according to Butler, is constituted as complex and convergent chains in which 'effects' are

vectors of power. In this sense, what is constituted in discourse is not fixed in or by discourse, but becomes the condition and occasion for further action (Butler 1993: 187).

To Butler, the power of discourse is so great that it does not only constitute its effects, but does so in a way that the effect, for example femininity, is naturalized and therefore considered to be outside of discourse. Therefore, performativity has to be understood not as conscious choice, but as a norm, embedded in the “historicity of discourse”, and it is this historicity of norms that constitutes “the power of discourse to enact what it names” (Butler 1993: 187).

The fact that social life is based on unconscious or misrecognized practices and performativities that are “naturalized” or “objectified” is of interest for both Butler and Bourdieu. Bourdieu, however, prefers to analyse practices that include language, whereas Butler concentrates mainly on language and literature in her investigation. Consequently, Bourdieu (2001) developed a model of the reproduction of gender relations that differs from Butler’s model of the performative in claiming that the “work of symbolic construction is far more than a strictly performative operation of naming”. Instead, he emphasises the “formidable collective labour of diffuse and continuous socialization” as the context within which a process of “practical construction” of minds and bodies takes place (Bourdieu 2001: 23). In her highly abstract analysis of power and discourse, Butler often turns to her reinterpretation of Austin’s speech acts and has often been misread as arguing about social phenomena such as gender or embodiment and social significance in purely linguistic terms. And, indeed, Butler argues that the body is constituted by speech acts, but she also understands that the body goes further than speech. Butler’s analysis remains highly philosophical and is based upon a rather abstract view of language separated from its particular cultural instantiations (see also Lorey 1993). This is unsatisfactory to me because as an anthropologist interested in understanding people’s and especially women’s everyday life, my focus lies primarily on practices and not on texts. This is why I consider Bourdieu’s practical approach to understand social life through practices useful. However, Bourdieu remains unsatisfying in his theories on gender.

I want to use parts of Bourdieu’s and Butler’s thinking to reflect about what Metz-Göckel and Roloff (2002) have called “Genderkompetenz”, the knowledge that

enables men and women to recognize situations, and social expectations that are connected to these situations, along with the ability to act upon them in a way that opens new possibilities for change and development (Metz-Göckel and Roloff 2002: 8). I will not be concerned with the issue of what we understand to be gender, but how and when this becomes meaningful for people in particular situations. To do that, I will focus on Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus and combine this with Butler's understanding of gender performativity. This is useful because Butler, unlike Bourdieu, helps us reflect on the social construction of bodies and sexual difference. This is important in the anthropological context, because only when we are aware that our own view of sexual and gendered bodies is based on a certain discourse, we are able to start appreciating how a different society, like that of Chamoli, may have a different history of discourse and therefore not only understand bodies in a different way, but also have a different view of sexual difference. Bourdieu is important because he emphasises practices in their social context in which power and speech enclose their social impact. To Bourdieu, it is not only important what speech does, but also who talks, when, and under what circumstances.

Both Butler and Bourdieu believe that gender, as a social category and construct, limits people's choices partly by shaping their preferences. One of the major critiques of both Butler and Bourdieu has been that they deny agency, particularly female agency. However, I think that a close examination of their arguments reveals that there is much room for agency in both theories. For Bourdieu, an individual's range of possible actions is largely determined by the habitus. If habitus and field are aligned, then what a person considers as necessary action will correspond to the expectations of the field in which the action takes place. It is true that Bourdieu argues that persons are unlikely to be aware of, or strategically and consciously consider, their actions and dispositions. To him, individuals are very strongly influenced by their habitus and the social fields in which they live (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 136). In this way their habitus is reinforced. And other critics (e.g. Chambers 2005) say that the social structures that influence an individual's habitus will be strengthened over time as individuals act in ways which are suggested by, and serve to reinforce, those structures. In other words, if there is no discord between habitus and field, systems are unlikely to change. In this view, the disadvantaged have little

chance to alter the system. However, Bourdieu was aware of this problem and did not see the system of habitus and field as rigidly as his critics. To him, it was not so much habitus and field that determined practice, but more that practices shape the habitus and the social field. In fact, since habitus and social field mutually influence each other, and since social fields always leave room for a variety of actions in a particular situation, both habitus and social field are, for Bourdieu, in constant flux. If we assume that agency is not necessarily resistance, an action that is consciously done in opposition to a system of oppression, but is inherent in the system itself – in a similar way as the construction of a “self” always also includes the construction of “the other” – then the range of possibilities for individual as well as collective agency, the ability to shape the world increases. Bourdieu never said that the interplay of social field and habitus determines human action in an absolute sense. On the contrary, there are always numerous possibilities for action. Therefore, no two individuals will act in the same way in a certain situation, even though they may act in a similar manner – they share a similar habitus. Choices made and actions taken may to a great extent be “misrecognized” (that is, agents may be unaware of effects and causes of their actions), and they may be strongly effected by the dispositions of the actor because of the relevant social field, but does this mean that persons are deprived of agency?

Like Bourdieu, Butler has been criticised for denying agency, especially by those feminists who stand for a universal moral order (Benhabib et al. 1995; Benhabib 1999; Nagl-Docekal 2000: see e.g.). They argue that it is necessary to think of human beings as acting subjects who can consciously react to their circumstances. However, I believe that this criticism misunderstands Butler’s aim completely. Butler is concerned with the discourses that have led to the social significance of genitals and has resulted not only in gender hierarchy but, above all, in the heterosexual matrix of western societies. She is not concerned with individual agency to the same degree as her critics are. To Butler, all agency is determined by underlying discourses that produce subjects. Even acts of disobedience take place within the system, the matrix that perpetuates all action and all subjectivity. But, so Butler, that does not mean that agency does not exist. To her, human agents need not accept every subject position. Only in this way is it possible for people to, for example, act

against the heterosexual matrix and live “queer”. A person who opposes processes of construction is still subject to previous constructions that constituted him or her as a subject. Therefore opposition is included in the very power structures it seeks to oppose (see Butler 1993: 122-123). Butler develops her concept of gender performativity that is an unconscious embodiment of the “heterosexual matrix”, which forces us to act in a certain way. The heterosexual matrix, Butler argues, is based on the assumption that biological functions – which to her are effects of discourse – have led to a view of the world that not only disadvantages female bodies, but also and more importantly places persons who do not fit the dominant matrix on the border, or even the outside of the framework of discourse. The “Other”, whether it is “the female” or “the queer”, is always necessary to produce a subject. This discourse produces norms that necessarily oppress and marginalise the “Other” in a way that is presented as a naturalized way of living. This does not deny agency, but it shows how strongly naturalized and objectified norms influence people’s lives. A valid critique is, however, that Butler never actually uses ethnographic data to underline her arguments. She leaves her analysis at the theoretical level. Restricting herself to studies of European philosophy and literature, she never considers people’s everyday practices in her work.

The concepts of gender performativity and habitus are useful to understand people’s practices. I combine both theories broaden them to postulate a view on social subjects that does not produce a single and binary understanding of gender and personhood. Further, my understanding of gender as practice is not entirely restricted to the unconscious or based on misrecognized practice. Gender performativity, as I understand it, is part of people’s habitus, as gendered performative practices. It is the effect of discourses that produces social bodies and in this way provides embodied practical knowledge for a person of a certain sex within the wider field of the habitus. What is needed is an understanding of individual and collective agency, strategies, and fields within this framework. While gender can never be thought of as standing alone, separate from socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, and historical location, it would be a mistake to think that somehow those larger classificatory systems produced a thoroughly limited, finite and unified field in which, therefore, all male subjectivity and female subjectivity would be the same

and mutually exclusive. It therefore makes sense to combine both theories to reach an understanding of a gendered habitus, a set of bodily dispositions ordered along gendered lines that enables people to perform their gender in strategic ways. The gendered body is a prime example of one ordered by norms or discipline: women and men hold and use their bodies differently in ways that cannot be explained by biological differences alone. Bourdieu and Butler both argue that the categories of gender are constructed and not necessary (Bourdieu 2001; Butler 1991, 1997a: 11-12, 15). Gender differences start with the socially constructed and thus contingent division of people into two kinds according to their bodies, and specifically their genitals. But, for both Bourdieu and Butler, it is not this “biological” or “natural” fact that determines sex, gender, and the gendered habitus, but rather social significance. Butler, for example, raises the question why reproduction or the capability of impregnation has become central to the sexing of the body. To her, there are many females, such as female infants and children or ordinary adult women, who cannot be impregnated. The centrality of the reproductive abilities of female bodies is, to Butler, not based on biological facts, but on social norms. That does not mean that she completely denies certain kinds of biological differences. But she asks under what conditions, under what discursive and institutional conditions, certain biological differences become the salient characteristics of sex. Helliwell (2000) gives a convincing example of how social significance can determine gender classifications. In her study among the Gerai of Southwest Kalimantan, it is not genitals that are seen as significant determinants of gender, but differences in practices such as cultivation, cooking and earning money. There is a correlation between genitals and genders for the Gerai, but this correlation is contingent and not necessary (Helliwell 2000: 805-6). In Germany, on the other hand, it is the genitals that determine a person’s gender. Gerai people understood Helliwell to be a man after some time, even though they knew that she had female genitals. “As someone said to me [...], ‘Yes, I saw that you had a vulva, but I thought that Western men might be different’” (2000: 806). Genital and biological differences are, however, naturalized in many societies, and it is this naturalisation or objectification that is socially significant. Social signification thus determines identity. For Bourdieu, this is the reason why masculine domination persists, and for Butler this is the reason why the heterosexual

matrix persists.

In the following chapters, I wish to show how Chamoli persons become gendered through processes of gender performativity (following Butler) and everyday practices (following Bourdieu). I will then extend Bourdieu's and Butler's ideas in the sense that I see agency as most visible in the moments when people become aware of their gender, status and position, and consciously and strategically "perform" it. Whereas gender performativity does not assume an acting subject behind the deed of constructing the subject, the performance of gender clearly does. I interpret performances of gender in the everyday life of Chamoli people as those moments when parts of performativity and habitus become conscious and thus become available as "tools" for action and agency. Throughout this work, I will use practice following Bourdieu and combine this with Butler's ideas of gender performativity. These "gendered performative practices" are misrecognized, unconscious and construct social and gendered subjects. When I assume that Chamoli people consciously perform their gender in connection to their age, social status and position within the family, I will talk about performances of gender.

The connection between these concepts and agency will be explored in different ways throughout this work. In Chapter two, I am concerned with childhood, as the time when the habitus is acquired through gendered performative practices but also practiced in a way particular to childhood. I will explore how masculinity and femininity lead not only to a different treatment of male and female children, but also to different expectations in terms of their education, dress, movements, and work. The concept of honour becomes important for the female performativity of gender in early childhood, when girls are incorporated in the agricultural workforce of the family. Chapter two will also deal to a great extent with societal changes induced by an increasing level of education in male and female children and adolescents. Chapter three deals with marriage arrangements in a similar sense. In the last decades, the Garhwali wedding traditions have changed drastically due to the influence of the North Indian Plains and the rising level of education. These changes have led to important changes in gendered performative practices and concepts of female honour. I will also deal with specific examples of performances of gender in the roles that are played by males and females in the arrangement of marriages

and in the behaviour of the young brides during the wedding. There are agentive ways to influence, for example, the decision for a suitable spouse for one's daughter for a mother, but they are specifically female. At the same time, the marriage arrangements are a good example of collective agency.³ At the most dramatic level, gender is performed by the bride at the time of the wedding. I will show how the brides of Chamoli perform the transformation from daughter to daughter-in-law at the time they leave the village. Chapter four then deals with female agency in terms of work and honour and the creation and utilisation of practical kinship networks to strengthen units of collective agency. This chapter introduces the lives of young brides in the patrilocal society of Chamoli, where sons live with their wives and children in their father's house, and explores conflicted relationships between the new daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. I will explore how Chamoli society has produced gendered performative practices that enable every new bride to gain a status in her new family that will consolidate her position within a family unit and enable her to be part in the collective agency of that unit. Sexuality, place, movement between places, kinship, the home deities, and the connection between work and honour will be explored in terms of embodied practices that ultimately add to women's honour. Women's songs and interviews, together with my own ethnographic description lead me to an understanding of how this honour, once gained, then leads to the joint agency of a young couple and eventually to the collective agency of a new family unit. I will, however, also look at failed attempts of gaining honour and status and how this leads to the exclusion of any agentive unit. This will then lead me to chapter five in which I will explore the most powerful time in the life of a Dalit Chamoli woman and one that is marked by very different performative practices. The honour gained through hard work in the earlier years now enables a Dalit woman in Chamoli to lead a honourable and, to a certain extent, comfortable

³I use the term collective agency, as a response to Inden's understanding of agency as complex. Inden (1992) not only postulated the idea that deities are treated as agents in India, but also that within complex agency power is unequally and hierarchically distributed. I do not want to take over this view of collective agency as hierarchically organised, especially not with the oldest man on top of the hierarchy. Instead, I want to explore whether shared agency in Chamoli is hierarchically organised or not. Therefore, I will use the term collective agency, borrowed from Sax (2000), throughout the thesis.

life. I will then juxtapose the powerful position of these post-reproductive women with the position of aging people in Chamoli society and end with reflections about the interplay of gender, age, and agency.

1.2 Chamoli

The research which this thesis is based upon was mostly done in the district of Chamoli in the North Indian state of Uttarakhand in the Central Himalayas. The districts of Uttarakhand were formerly known as Uttarakhand or Kedarkhand, belonged to Uttar Pradesh, and became an independent state only in November 2000. Chamoli belongs to the upper Garhwal region, which is bordered by Tibet in the North, the former kingdom of Kumaon in the east, the plains of North India in the South, and the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh in the West (see Berreman 1963; Sanwal 1976; Campbell 1976; Joshi 1984; Lall 1942). Politically and economically quite marginalised, Garhwal is important to Hindus because it contains the famous pilgrimage temples of Badarinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Jannotri, visited by thousands of pilgrims every year. Apart from the pilgrims, Garhwal was, until recently, economically and socially little influenced by external forces, due to its harsh landscape and scarcity of natural resources. It has therefore maintained social and cultural practices that changed more drastically in other parts of North India, for example due to Muslim rule. The so-called “*paharis*”, or mountain people, in the area including the Indian state Himachal Pradesh and eastern Nepal, share many common and distinct cultural, linguistic, and social traditions. Unlike in the neighbouring hill-regions, the population in Garhwal is rather homogenous. Formerly semi-nomadic tribal groups, the so-called Bhotiyas⁴ (Marccha, Tolccha, Jad, Johari, and Shauka), with a distinct language and religious tradition, traditionally occupy the higher parts of the region near the Tibetan border. However, most of Garhwal’s population, including the tribal groups, considers itself to be Hindu and shares a common dialect, called Garhwali, although the sub-dialects of Garhwali

⁴The term Bhotiya is considered politically incorrect today. It stems from the word Bodh- an ancient word for Tibet and is thus refers to the tribals who are the traditional traders between Tibet and India (see e.g. Saklani 1998: 58-63).

vary dramatically.

For the understanding of this thesis, it is important to know that the caste system in Uttaranchal is rather simple in comparison with caste systems elsewhere in South Asia. There are various Brahman and Rajput *jatis*, who constitute roughly seventy to eighty percent of the population, very few Vaishyas, and numerous low caste *jatis*, who make up the rest of the population. It is difficult to talk about the caste distribution in exact numbers because there are no statistics available about caste distribution in Garhwal and Chamoli. It is important to note that the proportion of low castes is relatively low in comparison to other parts of India. Previously, the lower castes were split into two sections. On the one hand, the higher-status Tamotas, Lohars, Mistaris, and Rudhijas marrying each other, and on the other hand the Das and Chamars. However, these divisions within the broader community seem to be slowly breaking down. Post-independence land reforms and reservations in favour of scheduled and backward castes have given the members of the lower castes access to small landholdings, whereas most low caste *jatis* in the plains are landless labourers (see also Berreman 1963: 206, 208; Polit 2005; Sanwal 1976: 38-39). While many lower caste persons of today are educated and some even hold jobs in government offices, caste prejudice and isolation is still very prominent in Garhwal. For example, people of low caste should not enter a high-caste house, sit on the same mat with a higher-caste person, or sit on a mat at all in the presence of high-caste people. It is considered an offence if a low caste person offers water or food to someone of a higher caste, and sexual contacts between low caste men and high caste women are forbidden. In rural Garhwal, most families depend on agriculture. Agricultural products are, however, barely enough for subsistence, especially for people of the lower castes who traditionally own less land than higher caste people. But only a few educated people have government jobs, and unemployment is very high in the region.

During my fieldwork I have mostly worked with people from the low castes of Tamota, Lohar, Mistari, and Rudhyia in Chamoli district in the heart of Uttaranchal, at the border of Garhwal and Kumaon. High caste people label all of these groups as “Harijans”. However, due to growing political awareness, my low caste informants preferred to call themselves “Dalits” (lit. the downtrodden, the

oppressed), a term that is nowadays used by activists fighting for the emancipation of the lower castes all over India. In the course of this work, I will follow their lead and use the term “Dalit” to refer to lower caste people in the area.

I will not be explicitly concerned with the suffering of the lowest castes in this work. That does not mean that it does not exist at many levels. The Dalits in Garhwal have similar problems as marginal groups elsewhere in India, such as exploitation, discrimination, and poverty. Of course, the issue of untouchability raises important questions of power and agency. The low status of Dalits in India, as Deliége states, derives from a mixture of occupation, low ritual status and poverty. He writes,

socioeconomic dependence, material poverty, social deprivation and lack of political power [combined] with ritual pollution [...] make Untouchables a social category clearly set apart from the rest of the society (Deliége 1999: 8).

However, oppression and marginalization do not mean that Dalits are not part of Indian society. As Deliége puts it,

this is not to say that Untouchables are completely cut off from the rest of society; nor are they marginalized [...]. Untouchables are marginalized only up to a certain point; while for many aspects of life, they are an integral part of Indian society (Deliége 1999: 8).

There is much to be said about the Dalits of Chamoli, but I choose to concentrate on the Dalit women of Chamoli district. I explore Dalit women’s everyday life, the construction of gender through gendered performative practices, and the everyday agency of these Dalit women. In a way, they are a good example of the ambivalence of the Dalits’ position within Hindu society. The Dalit women of Chamoli share many aspects of daily life with the women of the higher castes, yet their lives are different because there are so many things that are distinct and not shared with higher caste people. The Dalit women of Chamoli see themselves, above all, as Garhwali women, identifying with all the other women in the region and not necessarily as Dalits. As everywhere persons in Chamoli have multiple identities

in the sense that they sometimes identify as “Dalits”, sometimes as “women” and sometimes as “Garhwalis”, depending on the context (see Sax 2002a: 3-15). Yet, the fact that they belong to the low castes of the region means that they are subject to different practices and norms and that they have a correspondingly different habitus. There are many similarities with the lives of high caste females, and I will note them when I find it appropriate. For the most part, however, this is an ethnography of Dalits. The Dalits of Chamoli were my hosts. I lived with them and learned from them. And even though I met many people from the higher castes, and made friends with many of them, my relationship with them never became as close as the relationship I had with the Dalit people of the villages I lived in. The Dalit people accepted me into their villages, invited me to learn from them, to eat with them, to celebrate their marriages, their births, the feasts for the dead and their spectacles for the deities. Therefore, whatever I say in this work, I can only speak with confidence about the Dalits of Chamoli.

The village that finally chose me as its anthropologist was exceptional for the region in the sense that it was a single caste, low caste village. Unlike other villages in Garhwal where one usually finds a majority of Rajput families living in one village together with a minority of low caste families, sometimes including Brahman families, or with a Brahman village near by, this village contained only families of low caste *jatis*. That meant that I could not observe any ongoing caste-conflicts within this particular village. But it had many advantages for me, as I could freely interact with the low caste women without the fear of provoking a caste dispute within the village. I learned from them how to cook, how to tend to the animals, cut grass for fodder, weed and sow the fields, wash my clothes, and how I was expected to move, dress, talk, and behave in different situations. This might not have been possible in a typical mixed-caste village. However, after about a year, I decided to leave this first village to move to a multi-caste village in order to observe the difference in lifestyle and caste-typical behaviour between high and low castes. By that time, I had become a problem for the higher caste people, anyway, because the fact that I lived and ate with the low caste people practically made me a Dalit woman myself. Therefore, I did not have to fear that the higher caste people would insist on me staying in their houses or working with them. The new village was a typical Chamoli

village in the sense that Rajput and low caste people formed the core of that village with a smaller, but powerful Brahman hamlet close by. Nevertheless, it was still exceptional because the low caste villagers were highly educated as compared to most other low caste people in Chamoli, and they had developed a Dalit activist awareness among the low caste men and women over the last generation.

Moving from one village to another had a great advantage for my research. I moved from my main informant's marital home (*sauryas*) to her natal home (*mait*). That enabled me to see her life from a different angle and to widen my perspective on females. I understood then that femaleness was at no stage a static concept or expectation. It changed not only with age and status, but also in relation to the people and the place where it was being manifested or "performed". Being female in the natal home was utterly different from being female in the marital home, and these performativities of femaleness also differed according to age, marital status, and the number of children. The relationship of a young woman between her *mait* and her *sauryas*, her movement between the two places, and the way femaleness is performed in them have become a major focus during my research. More than any other relation, the relationship between the *mait* and the *sauryas* made it clear to me that female performativity and the performances of gender as a form of practical mastery is a key factor for understanding Chamoli society.

Chapter 2

Growing up to become a Garhwali Person

Experiences of childhood shape the rest of our lives in terms of how people make sense of the world around them. I therefore consider it important to begin my ethnography with an brief analysis of childhood, although admittedly I had not originally intended to write about this and therefore my data has limitations. I assume that social discourses producing norms and social frameworks must be culturally specific and they not only have social but very clearly also physical effects in people. It is important to see how and when differences between boys and girls are constructed and put into practice and when and why children are required to show different behaviours in particular contexts, according to their gender, as it can help us to understand how people of all ages in Chamoli consciously and unconsciously employ their gendered habitus to exercise agency.

2.1 Childhood and Gender

The possibilities people have to actively shape their own lives are not only culturally specific, but also change over time. As Lamb (2000) persuasively argues in her book about aging in a Bengali village, we should not focus only on one life segment when we want to understand what it means to be a man or a woman in any given society because gendered identity is not essential and fixed. This is true for

all societies although it seems to be more obvious in some than in others. Marilyn Strathern (1988), for example, shows that people in the highlands of New Guinea have a very similar conception of gender to that postulated for people in India by Marriott (1976) as well as Inden and Nicholas (1977). People in New Guinea and India conceive gender as unfixed and fluid. In her account on the Hagen people of the Highlands in Papua New Guinea, Strathern shows that persons are constructed much more through relationships than in Western society. She understands Mount Hagen persons as “frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm” and therefore incorporates dual as well as singular sociality (1988: 13). People constantly move from one social position to another and this interconnection is not restricted to people. It also includes places, crops, and the soil. In the most striking way the constant move between the stages is conceptualized in gender. In most circumstances, persons in Mount Hagen are never entirely male or female. Being ‘male’ or being ‘female’ is a unitary state, emerging under particular circumstances. In some circumstances, “each male or female form may be regarded as containing within it a suppressed composite identity; it is activated as androgyny transformed” (Strathern 1988: 15). Male or female is seen as a singular state only in relation to a counterpart individual. “An internal duality is externalised or elicited in the presence of a partner: what was ‘half’ a person becomes ‘one’ of a pair” (Strathern 1988: 15). Indian persons are not conceptualised in the same fluid state, but are similarly considered to be fluid and composed as persons by their relationships. Marriott (1976) and Inden (Marriott and Inden 1977) point to everyday Indian practices reflecting the assumption that persons have more or less open boundaries and may therefore affect each other’s natures through transactions of food, services, words, bodily substances, and the like. They describe the Indian social and cultural world as one of fluid substances. Therefore, they argue, Indians regard persons as composite and dividual. Sarah Lamb (2000: 14) similarly shows how people in Bengal see their own body or parts of it existing in other people’s bodies, in the places they have lived and in the objects they owned and handled. Bodies and persons in Bengal are seen as open, composite and “dividual” (see also Marriott 1976).

In the following chapters I will show that Garhwali people have a similar understanding of bodies, gender, personhood, and place that allows a person to be in constant exchange of substances with people, place and deities. Persons are considered to be in constant flux and gendered identity is persistently changing. Gender in Chamoli, as everywhere, according to Butler (1990), is a development, not a fixed state. This understanding of bodily existence has consequences for gendered identity, a gendered habitus and gender performativity. Expectations regarding, for example, dress, behaviour and movement of males and females are deeply interwoven with this understanding of relationships. This is especially true for children and young women. For example, Garhwali children are often referred to as being *kacca*, open, in transformation, not yet solid and therefore more vulnerable to outside influences than *pakka*, solid and firm persons. The same is true to a certain extent for females. Whereas males are said to become *pakka*, solid, rather early in their adult life, it takes much longer for Garhwali females to become *pakka*. Being a *kacca* person means to be more vulnerable to supernatural afflictions, than a *pakka* person, but it also means that the body of a *kacca* person is more open to all other influences. A *kacca* person is much more influenced by relationships with places and other people than a *pakka* person. Thus, while a male child establishes most of his physical relationships with relatives and the place he dwells in during his childhood, a Garhwali female establishes physical relationships with her natal home and the people of her natal village during childhood and undergoes dramatic physical changes again after marriage and change of residence in the patrilocal system, hence she is considered *kacca*. In addition, the relationship to places is established differently for boys and for girls. Especially the girls and women, have a lived intimacy with the land; drawing water from the streams, tending the food that grows in the terraced fields, walking the paths into the forest so often that they know every tree and rock on the way. This is not the sentimental intimacy of romance. The land is the source of life, and is itself felt to be alive, benevolent at times, dangerous and uncanny at others. The land does not only share substances with the people who move over it and work on it, but it is also the dwelling place of many deities and other spiritual beings, some benevolent, some violent and dangerous. The girls, who are in intimate contact with the land, are thought of as more vulnerable to

the attacks of the malevolent beings as well as more open to the blessing of the benevolent deities. The relationship with place, people and deities is thus different for males and females, children and adults, because people of different age and gender are thought of as having different qualities. This has important consequences for expectations of behaviour and understandings of childrearing. Adults want to protect their children. Therefore, they are restricted in their movements and this restriction is age and gender specific. The relationship between norms and practice is thus learned through embodied behaviour. The following chapter will explore how the performativity of a gendered habitus is learned and practiced, how and when gender becomes important for children and the people who relate to them and how the gendered habitus is different for children and for adults.

2.2 Theories of Childhood

In the 1960s and 1970s critical accounts in anthropological theory saw earlier ethnographies and anthropological writings as ignorant of female persons (see Ortner 1978). They were especially excluded from any accounts that dealt with the production of culture. Women and females, so Ardener (1978) were sometimes mentioned, but if they were mentioned they were presented rather like the cows on the grass; the scientist saw them and described them, but he or she never talked to them. The people who were thought to be involved in actively shaping the cultural world were exclusively male adults. Women and women's role in society have since received a lot of attention in anthropology. However, children and aging people have been similarly ignored. Especially accounts on gender tend to focus on adult women during their reproductive years and easily ignore those who are older or younger. However, children and old people not only deserve more attention in anthropological writing for moral reasons but also, and more importantly, should be included in any anthropological account that seriously tries to understand any aspect of a society, because it is childhood that gives us information on how people acquire their gendered habitus in practice and aging illuminates the way gender and the gendered habitus are in constant flux.

2.2.1 The Social Construction of Childhood

Children are not only passive subjects in an adult world but they also take actively part in the construction of their own social lives and the lives of those around them. As James and Prout (1997) show, in England and most of the “Western world” the child is the centre of many legal, welfare, medical, and educational institutions. Much academic work in the disciplines of psychology, medicine, and public health has been “devoted to understand the particular qualities of children” (James and Prout 1997: 1). However, as James and Prout also made clear, “despite this rhetoric any complacency about children and their place in society is misplaced, for the very concept of childhood has become problematic” (1997: 1). In line with anthropological understandings of cultural relativity and variation, the institution of childhood was re-interpreted in the sense that social scientists such as Jenks (1982), Stainton-Rogers et al. (1989), or James and Prout (1990) started seeing childhood as being socially constructed. In the most basic terms and in the spirit of Butler, I see the very notion of childhood and the category “child” as one of the effects of modern discourse. This means that the immaturity of children is conceived and articulated in particular societies in culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices, which combine to define the “nature of childhood”. The institution of childhood provides an interpretive frame for understanding the early years of human life.

James and Prout define the nature of the social institution of childhood as an “actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted” (1997: 7). As a socially constructed category childhood, like gender, can never entirely be separated from other variables such as caste, class, and ethnicity. Most societies make a distinction between children and adults, but the particular forms of childhood are historically and culturally specific (see e.g. the early studies in personality by Mead (1928) or the comparative work on perceptions of childhood among the Zuni, Dobu, and Kwakiutl by Benedict (1935)). My main interest in this chapter lies in the processes through which childhood is constructed in Garhwal and I will explore how particular Garhwali families with children of different ages ‘decide’ what it means to be a child, and especially what it means to be

a male or a female child in their family. Obviously, this is not a matter that families decide independently, since family life itself is structured by the many material and cultural forces which define the general features of childhood in contemporary Garhwal. As Alex (2004) pointed out, we cannot assume that being a child in a Garhwali village (or communities in Tamil Nadu in Alex's case) is the same as being a child in Delhi, a small German town, or elsewhere in the world. The same is true for people's understanding of children's age, gender and sexuality, children's bodies and personhood. For an ethnographic analysis of agency and gender performativity, it is therefore crucial to understand what it means to be a child in Garhwal.

The term for child in Hindi, *bacca* is used widely in Chamoli. *bacca* is a very general term. In the most literal sense it refers to a male child. However, people use *bacca* to refer to babies, infants, teenagers, and sometimes even adolescents without regard to sex. In this general sense, *bacca* should be translated as offspring rather than child. In a more specific sense, *bacca* is used to refer to small children and toddlers. Sometimes the word *chota* (small) is prefixed to indicate the youth of the child. *bacca*, however, also indicates relationships to the adult world in the sense that *bacca* is used for persons who are not yet responsible for their deeds. Responsible adults see *bacche* (children) as free in the sense that they can do things adults can no longer do. Young boys and girls race around the village, scaring the goats up the hill on one day and hide near the place where people defecate the next morning to laugh about the people who come. When they do that people say, "children are children, they play all day and they do a lot of nonsense." Children, so people say, are like this and there is not much difference between boys and girls in the sense that they are free. Boys and girls play together and nobody would think about separating them, while they are still *bacce*. But when children grow older, when they start to understand the restrictions and rules of their society, about the time when they leave primary school and enter high school, people start referring to them as *ladaka* and *ladaki*, or in the regional dialects *nauna* and *nauni*, or *lauda* and *laudi*¹, boy and

¹*Lauda* and *lauri* are used in the local dialect of Chamoli to refer to boys and girls. Literally, *laura* is translated in the Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary (McGregor 1993) as "penis", this is similar to the Hindi words *laumda*, boy or servant, and *laumdi*, girl or servant. *Laura* and *lauri* are used interchangeable with *nauna* and *nauni*, in Garhwal. The low caste people in Chamoli prefer *laura* and *lauri*, whereas high caste people usually use *nauna* and *nauni*

girl. It is clear that what is happening here is exactly what Judith Butler pointed out as naming. The naming initiates a process of change in the children's life, and the naming's

symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity [or masculinity] that never fully approximates the norm. Femininity [or masculinity] is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment (Butler 1993: 232).

The change does not only happen through the performative act of naming, but also through a change in practice on the body of the child in terms of dress, duties, restrictions and freedom of movement, speech and so forth. Practice and speech act cannot be separated and it is impossible to claim that one occurs before the other. As many other things this change, this gendering of the child, is a process that happens gradually as children grow older.

In the context of North Indian villages, aging itself is not as structured as it is in Western Societies. Most parents in Chamoli can't remember the age of their children and most people, including children, do not know their exact age. Especially uneducated mothers do not count the years of their children, rather, they judge the age by the abilities their children have. What is more important in Garhwal, is the stage of development of the child or adolescent. This understanding of aging is paralleled in the classical theory of the successive stages of life (*ashramas*) for a Hindu man who moves from student to householder then, when his children are married becomes a forest dweller and finally a renouncer. The classic ashramas formulated by Manu are based on abilities, deeds and relationships and not on chronological age (see e.g. Olivelle 1993). For instance, a man can become a forest dweller, or go into retirement, only when he sees the son of his son. Similarly, chronological age is not as important as relations and achievements in judging the stages of maturity in a child. The body plays a crucial role in judging the stages of childhood, but more important than bodily functions is the social role ascribed to the children that determines a person's stage and as such provides the framework in which a person is allowed to operate and the amount of power a person can exercise or

is subject to. Chronological age is, however, becoming more and more important and is now more widely recognized by most people than previously. Today most people, including young women, are educated up to class eight or beyond. With increasing access to telecommunications, electricity, newspapers and so on, conceptions of time have also changed and become more “globalised”. During my interviews, people not only spoke in Hindi, instead of their own vernacular Garhwali, but they also used chronological age as a sign of their education. However, it is still common for parents to forget the chronological age of their children. In my interviews, people often used chronological age to perform their own modernity and education. However, often these were guessings and when an old woman, for example, said that she was married at the age of nine, she wanted to clarify that she had been married before she started menstruating. When a woman said that she was thirty-five, and her daughter twenty, that did not necessarily mean that she was talking in absolute numbers as we would understand it. This is a statement that says: “I am still young enough to work, but I will not bear children any more. My daughter is in now in childbearing age.” As stated before, people’s social relations and bodily capacities are more important than their absolute (chronological) age. Parents and children, for instance, put more emphasis on the order of birth among siblings. Sibling hierarchy plays a major role in schooling, housework, care of younger children in the household and so on. The most important effect of sibling hierarchy is the order of marriages. A younger sister should usually not get married before her older sister and the same is true for boys. Similarly, the wives of brothers have the same hierarchical relationship to each other as their husbands. What is important here is the husbands’ order of birth and not the wives’ chronological age.

Aging is conceptualized differently in Chamoli from the strict chronological understandings of child development in the West. But Chamoli people still recognize childhood as a distinct phase in life that is based on immaturity. Children are, for example, seen as persons who are not yet sexually mature. Similarly, children’s bodies are seen as not yet fully developed in the sense that they are physically able to do the same physical work adults do and adults distinguish themselves from children in terms of responsibility. Most Garhwali adults remember the time of their childhood as a time of joy and sorrowless freedom. When I started collecting life

stories of Garhwali people, I realized that none of them talked about the time before their marriage. When I began to ask people for accounts of their childhood most became rather irritated because I asked them about the happiest, but at the same time most insignificant time of their lives. For most people in Chamoli district and especially for the women, childhood was a happy time. But the fact that they had no important responsibilities during childhood also meant that it was insignificant for their adult lives. As Manori, a 50 year-old Dalit woman and mother of several adult children said,

There are a lot of problems here (in her marital home). I did not have any worries in my mait (natal home). I had my mother and my father, what problems should I have had? In the sauryas (marital home), the work load is much higher. That did cause problems.

Only when people assumed responsibility for themselves and others, did they consider the significant part of their lives to start. The most important aspects in women's personal history are suffering and responsibility. During childhood, so my informants, the parents are still there to take care of everything, children do not have to do serious work, and they have no responsibilities, they cannot gain or lose honour. This has to be seen in contrast to adult life. It does not mean that children, especially girls, do not work in their parent's house, but rather that there is no strong compulsion to work, and that the responsibility of work lies overwhelmingly with their parents. In addition, children and children's bodies are often seen as being part of their mother's body. Before they are married, children and adolescents are not considered to be full persons, therefore they are also not fully responsible for their actions, so my informants. Married life, so they said, requires man and women to act, not only in responsible, but also in honourable ways. The understandings of honour are closely connected to gender performativity, which shows most importantly through work and responsibility. Men act honourably if they manage to feed their family, acquire enough money for the household, and honour their parents. An honourable woman is a hardworking woman, who is chaste and cares for her husband and children. These understandings of adult honourable behaviour are im-

portant for children in the sense that they are expected to learn these gendered ways of acting honourably during their childhood. But there are practices and forms of gendered performativity that are specific to childhood. Garhwali children do not consider themselves to be free and happy. They feel that they have responsibilities and know that they are under many restrictions. Children, and especially female children, start to work alongside their mothers very early in their lives and every female child in a household has a responsibility, like cleaning the house in the mornings, or washing the clothes. But up to a certain age, children cannot actively gain or lose family honour, and therefore, they are considerably “free” in their actions.

In this chapter, I give a brief ethnographic description on the lives of children. I will discuss how Garhwali children become gendered persons and how their possibilities for agency vary from context to context. This is in no sense a full ethnography of children in the Himalayas, but rather a first step toward my discussion of agency, honour and gender performativity in Garhwal. Older anthropological views of culture as monolithic and shared have long been rejected, and anthropologists now know that culture and society are emergent, contested and constantly changing (see e.g. Ortner 1996; Marcus and Fischer 1986). As anthropologists it is important for us to remember that we usually deal with multivocal societies, and that we should not ignore minorities or those with less power. I believe that children have been neglected in anthropological writings until today and I know of no anthropological book or article about the children of Garhwal. However, they are in no sense muted in the way Hardman (1973) suggests. He claims that children are a muted group in “Western” societies in the sense that they are not heard, asked or given a voice in the literature about them, and that they are regarded as people not contributing to society and as such excluded from certain public events. Garhwali children have definitely been neglected in ethnographic accounts of India so far. But in Garhwali society, children are far from muted. They play a crucial role in the social lives of adults, their parents, and other relatives. Children are very much part of social events and rituals, and are allowed into the spheres of men as well as those of women, as long as the rituals or the places are not considered dangerous for children.

But children have their own way to relate to the world, their habitus and gender performativity is different than that of the adult world. This is explicit in the way

children relate to each other and adult persons. The way children move amongst each other, in school, while playing or working together on the fields without the adults is very different from the way they speak, move and behave towards adults. In addition children's practices and gender performativity develop and are therefore constantly changing.

Some games are particularly popular with young children of primary school age. These games are never played by adolescents or grown ups. They are not restricted to girls or to boys, but some games are played more by boys than girls and vice-versa. For example, boys like to play with a wheel that they roll along the village path with a long stiff wire. Girls prefer to play a game with stones that is similar to hopscotch. In primary school, all children are taught Hindi and Garhwali songs and the accompanying dance. Singing and dancing in public is a crucial marker of gender differences. Boys and men of all ages can dance and sing in public whenever they like. But for girls singing and dancing is a privilege that ends with puberty. The innocence ascribed to young children makes it possible for young girls to do many things that will later be a cause of shame (*sharam*). A female child can laugh loudly, joke, dance, and sing in public. All these activities are later connected with aggressive sexuality and such behaviour in women and young girls would be thought of as shameless (*besharam*). Young girls are not yet considered to be sexual beings. The power, strength and danger associated with sexually active women is not seen in them. The people in Chamoli love dancing and singing, and take great pride in their daughters and sons who come home from school with a new song or a new dance and perform it in the courtyard of the house or at school. This relative freedom for young girls does perhaps come out most clearly on days of public celebration like Holi, "the festival of colours". In the Dalit villages of Chamoli, people celebrate Holi by walking to every house in groups, sharing sweets and putting colours on all the inhabitants of the house. It is a very joyful celebration and the groups going from house to house usually sing and dance in the courtyard before they go on to the next house. The women and older girls stay in the houses, waiting for visitors with plates of house made sweets and colour standing ready by the door to receive the guests. Groups of men, boys and children get together to move from house to house. In the groups of men and older boys, there is a usually a lot of alcohol involved and many

male villagers are drunk and asleep by sunset on these days. Children, however dance around the village. They sing and dance in groups in every courtyard, eat as many sweets as they can and enjoy themselves. Women and older girls do not participate much in these activities, nor do they go from house to house, nor dance and sing in front of others. They distribute sweets to the visitors, hug them and put colour on their faces, then watch them dance on to the next house. On my first Holi in the village an elderly women tried to convince me to dance with the children. I did not want to dance on my own with the small children and so made a deal with her. I would dance if she and the other women danced, too. We waited until all the men and older boys had left and could not see us anymore, before we all started dancing. This was so exceptional that people talked about it for a long time. The children, however, danced all day in every courtyard of the village. Today most social scientists concerned with theories of childhood (e.g. Alex 2004; James and Prout 1997) argue that children are competent interpreters of the social world and that they form a separate culture, in the sense that they have a space of their own, where they move, speak and behave differently than when they are in the company of adults. Children probably view the social world differently than their parents (see Hebdige 1979; Ricoer 1978; La Fontaine 1978). But, I disagree with those theories of childhood that argue for a strict separate culture of children, such as Opie and Opie (1984) or Hardman (1973) and find myself rather in agreement with Toren (1993), Morton (1996) and James and Prout (1997), who argue that children may live and shape their lives partly separate from the adult world, but that the adult world shapes the first years of their lives and therefore still determines their actions in terms of morality, body movement, social and gendered behaviour. Children should be included in any ethnographic account. But childhood, as gender and old age, has to be discussed within the context of wider society. It is therefore not enough to look at what children do and do not do and what they say about themselves, one must also look at adult understandings of childhood and how parents and other relatives interpret children's actions.

Sex and gender play a crucial role in the upbringing of Indian children. From the day they are born, and sometimes even before, children are treated as gendered persons. However, a child does not have the same gender as an adult person. While

Chamoli people consider children to embody the possibility of later sexual activity, they are not seen as sexual beings, nor are they expected to act in the same way as an adult person of the same sex. Children are neither seen as persons in the sense that adults are, nor are they seen as sexual beings in the way that adults are. Nevertheless they are expected to act according to gendered rules. A little girl has different possibilities and restrictions than a little boy, and the possibilities and restrictions of both will change while they grow older and into a world of ever changing expectations. In this chapter I will therefore focus not only on the question of how children become Garhwali adults, but also on the question of how their possibilities change over time.

During the first months of my research in Chamoli, I spent most of my time with old people and small children. The women went off to do their work on the fields and the forest, the men went to work or to their Male places and the older children went to school. I had my own small room, where I slept, did my cooking and had coffee and tea ready for anybody who wanted to come in. Curiosity caused the children to linger in front of my room, peeping in through the small window or the cracks in the wooden door to see what was going on.

During these first months the children became friends and valuable informants. They played an important role in teaching me how to behave in their village, how to cook (or rather, they told me what they thought their mothers did when they were cooking), how to move, what I was allowed to do, what the village allowed me to know, and what not. Most of all, they enjoyed telling the secrets that their parents had explicitly forbidden them to tell me. One of my friends, Kiran, had already started to take over responsibilities in her mother's household and she frequently accompanied her when she went to work on her fields. She was in the transitory stage between *bacca* and *ladaki*, which showed in the way she was sometimes dressed in the *salwar-kamiz*, the typical dress of unmarried adolescent girls, composed of a long dress, wide trousers, and a shawl, but was still allowed to wear jeans and t-shirt or simple pants with a shirt at other times. She was very interested in the romantic activities of the older boys and girls of the village and frequently told me about how she watched them in their secret meeting place near the forest. Because she had seen so many boys fondling girls' breasts, she was aware that they were

interesting for boys. She knew that adults wanted to restrict the meetings and the movements of these older girls and boys. But she was also aware that she was not under the same restrictions yet. She also knew that she could still touch her mother's breasts, but began to understand why her mother now frequently told her that she had to stop doing that soon. When I listened to her accounts of the day and watched her surrounded by her family and friends, playing with the other children in school, working with her mother on the fields and collecting firewood with other girls, I became interested in conceptions of childhood and especially in the question of when people started to treat boys and girls differently. In many discussions with mothers and grandmothers (and some with fathers and grandfathers) I found out that differences between boys and girls for Garhwali people centred around the social age of a child, understandings of gendered bodies, gendered behaviour, place and residency.

2.2.2 Growing up in Garhwal

The following is part of a long conversation I had with Kamala, a mother of two girls and two boys, about growing up in Garhwal. She summarized very well what I had heard from all my informants.

Q: Are all children the same? Does it matter whether they are boys or girls? When do you start treating them differently?

A: All small children are the same. They all play together. There is no difference. Only when they get older they should start playing separately.

Q: Doesn't the clothing change, too at a certain stage and their appearance? The boys will have short hair and the girls will have long hair?

A: Yes that is true. It is the school that does that. They tell them how to wear their hair. They tell the girls to make a ponytail or pigtails and so on. They also tell the girls what colours to wear. That is why they start changing their hairstyle.

Q: *When should girls let their hair grow? Your niece has really short hair.*

A: *Usually small children's hair is not cut. But when the child does not like it, girls can have short hair until they are about eight years old. When they are 11-12 they also stop playing with the boys. Then people start saying; now they have grown old. When they are still small it is the same, they are just children. But then they should be separated. The girls will start to work more in the household then, while the boys should concern themselves with their schoolwork. The young girls learn to work slowly, they sit with their mother and watch her making roti (bread) and then they want to learn that, too. They come with their mother to the cowshed and want to know how to clean it. A mother will always look after her daughters. She will want them to learn how to work properly. This is important for daughters, because they will have to do this work later in the house of other people (in her marital home after marriage). If she knows how to work it will help her to survive there. She will have to work well and quick there. That is why we teach the girls here how to work. It does not matter so much for the boys. They will always live at home. They never have to leave or go anywhere. It is not that important for them to know how to work. The boys have to study and be good in school. Nobody really cares whether the boys learn how to work, because they will stay at home. But it is important for the girls because they have to leave home eventually and move into a different house. If they cannot work properly until then, they will not learn it any more and then their sas (mother-in-law) and sasur (father in law) will scold them [gale denge]. They will say; 'Whose daughter are you? Why did nobody teach you how to work?' That is why we have to teach our girls how to work. What about the girls in your place?*

Q: *They go to school, they should do their school work, just like the boys. But some also learn how to cook and things like that.*

A: *(She laughs) And our girls really work a lot. They work more then their mothers. They really do work a lot!*

Q: *That is why people say that a house without daughters is a sad house. If there are no daughters the mother has to do all the work on her own.*

A: *Yes, that is true. If a woman has daughters she can do everything. The women without daughters say that they have a hard fate (dusmat). In contrast, the mothers with two or three daughters are lucky. Mothers who have only sons will later have bahu (daughters-in-law). They will have help later. The mothers with daughters have a happy life. Now turn off the machine, I have to scold my son. He has become a real hooligan. He fights with everybody, hits his sisters and raises his voice to me. He has been gone all day without telling me where he went. But he still expects me to wash his clothes and cook for him.*

This conversation raised many of the topics that will organise the remaining parts of this chapter. Gender is recognized and marked at birth, but in early childhood it is not important. However, as soon as children near maturity the difference is not only recognized, but marked through rules and restrictions and inscribed in their bodies through dress and hairstyle. School has become important in the sense that it, more than anything else, marks the change in expectations towards dress and behaviour of the children. The school itself become an agent in this sense, changing and influencing the discourses in Chamoli society significantly. Especially the girls, once they reach high school, are closely watched by their teachers in terms of appearance. Once the children are expected to wear gendered school uniforms, boys and girls should also stop playing together like small children. In this sense, schooling and the fact that almost hundred percent of the children visit high school today, changes discourses in Chamoli society. The school then effects the behaviour of children and because it changes discourse, it also has an impact on gendered performative practices. In her account of children's change in terms of dress and appearance, Kamala depicts the children and especially the girls as having little or no agency. To her, it is the school and the villagers who change their expectations towards them and decide when they should change their public appearance. Adults typically view children in this way, and I will explore to what extent children are deprived of agency and when and how they exercise it. Kamala also tells us that

especially girls acquire their gendered habitus mostly through mimesis and the performance of femininity in terms of cooking and working. At the same time, they acquire the sense for honour and the connection it has with work and chastity. This is one of the central themes in a girl's life. She has to learn how to work to be able to uphold her family's honour after marriage and to secure her own position in her marital family. Boys do not have to do that. Instead, they are prepared to fulfil their future role as official representatives of the family and to earn money.

But Kamala also talks about the importance of daughters. A mother without daughters is in a difficult situation because she has no help with her work. The birth of a girl among the Dalits of Chamoli is therefore not necessarily seen in a negative light, as is the case so often in other parts of North India. I will start the following ethnographic descriptions with an account of conception and birth and will proceed to discuss the value of girls in Chamoli society.

Conception, Birth and Integration

High caste men told me that they considered children to be a product of male blood and semen. A man's child by his wife incorporates his substance. The women, so they said, was only a passive field in which their seed had been sown. Only after the birth of a child the mother starts to share her substance with the baby by nurturing it with her milk. Until then, the body of a child, according to men contains only the father's substance. The woman is merely the vessel carrying the child. This is a widespread view about the conception of children and the growth of a fetus in a women's womb that corresponds to classical Hindu theories on impregnation formulated by Manu. Jacobsen, for example reported that villagers in Central India believed that "a baby grows out of the man's seed alone, developing like a plant's seed in the fertile field of the womb" (Jacobson and Wadley 1977: 143).

While this account of child conception denies any female agency, the women of Chamoli reassert their agency in their understanding of conception and childbirth. High and low caste women in Garhwal said that they had heard men saying such things, however, they laughed about these explanations. I talked to many young

mothers and experienced women about the conception and growth of children, for whom it was only logical that a child must have a sound physical bond with the mother. The mothers in Garhwal had a strong sense of agency in the process of becoming pregnant. They acknowledged that they needed the men's semen to get pregnant, but also insisted that a pregnancy was a matter of destiny and the grace of god in a combination with their physical condition, which they could influence through hard work and devotion. During pregnancy, the foetus is carried around in the mother's womb for ten months², strengthening the link between mother and child. The blood that is shed at childbirth was proof for the women that a child must share his or her mother's blood. None of them denied the role of the father in impregnating a woman, but it was ultimately their menstrual blood and their creational powers that helped the child grow (for a similar indigenous understanding on child conception and growth, see Bennett 1983: 53). Garhwali women understand a mother's nurturing as additionally fortifying the bond between mother and child. They look after their children and breastfeed them sometimes until the children have reached the age to go to high school. Until then, so the women say, the fathers have little to do with their own children. Fathers leave everything to do with young children up to their wives and mothers. The women told me how they have to sleep in the wet part of the bed in their children's urine, while the fathers sleep dry and sound, never worrying too much about wife and children's comfort. In addition, children are considered to be an extension of the mother's body in the sense that her health affects the child's health and vice versa. Mothers and young children are not considered to be independent physical entities. Fathers are not considered to have such a close physical bond with their children, although they are part of his lineage and share many substance with him. Fathers become responsible for their children only later. Fathers take the decisions for suitable spouse or the education of a child. As long as the child is small, they may play with the child, but are not responsible for anything else than providing financial support. That does not mean, that fathers are not happy about their children. Children, and especially sons, are as important

²In Garhwal people say that a child needs ten months to grow, but this is changing with rising levels of education. Today most people speak about nine months of pregnancy. In fact the ten months correspond closely to German allopathy, which talks about a pregnancy lasting for thirty weeks instead of twenty-seven.

to men as they are to women. However, fathers should not show their affection towards their own children too openly. In North India, the relation of fathers to their young children is generally characterized by authority and formality. Fathers should not show too much public affection towards their own children, while it is quite appropriate to display such feelings towards his brothers' and sisters' children. This is usually explained in terms of the importance of joint family unity that discourages strong affective links within nuclear families (see e.g. Dern 1995). Sax (2002a: 80-83) describes the father-son relationship in Garhwal as distant and formal. To him, "the loving and nurturing father is an anomaly" (Sax 2002a: 82). It is considered important to teach children that they are members of a larger group, the extended family, and overwhelming affection of parents is counterproductive in this sense. In addition, the pride of young fathers and mothers in their children is considered as shameful in the sense that an overly enthusiastic father or mother draws too much attention to his or her personal achievements. Family unity is considered to be more important than individual pride or happiness and therefore children should never be placed in the centre of attention. It is considered important for the children to identify as a group member, therefore a man might pay more attention to his brother's young child than to his own.

It is clear that the mother's care is crucial for small children and most men consider looking after small children to be women's work. This does not cause any problems while the mother is still alive, but it means that children whose mother has died are likely to get neglected. Childcare not restricted to mothers. In his psychoanalytical approach on Hindu India, Kurtz (1992) shows how a child has many mothers. It is the group and not the individual mother that is responsible for childrearing and a mother is always concerned to gently push her child to a "voluntary renunciation of infantile ties to the mother" (Kurtz 1992: 60-61). This is certainly true for mothers and their children in Chamoli as well. While children are highly desired and loved, once born, they are cared for, but not given overly attention, as is the case in the Western world. Mothers are keen to give their child to another family member as soon as they enter the room to emphasize the importance of the group membership of the child. In an extended family where an old couple lives together with their married sons and daughters-in-law and their children, babies

and toddlers are often cared for by a number of females, older sisters carry their younger siblings around the village, aunts take care of all the children while the other women are on the fields or in the forest doing their work, and usually mothers-in-law care for their grandsons and -daughters. Children are thus often brought up by multiple mother-figures in Garhwal. However, there is a tendency to separate from the hearth of the mother-in-law and among most Dalits in Chamoli, small nuclear families have become the norm. That means that today's children have a much stronger bond to their mother, even though they spend a lot of time at their aunts' and grandmothers' places. A mother-in-law or sister-in-law who live in a separate household will usually not help a mother extensively with the care of her children. In addition, many people in Chamoli say that only the mother will take good care of a child, while a stepmother or aunt will not give the child sufficient love, or even food. I am not sure whether this notion is new and an effect of the tendency towards nuclear family units or whether this is an old notion and rather an effect of poverty. However, it is clear that Chamoli people put a great emphasis on the importance of the mother of a child, and she is especially important for her daughters. A local ritual specialist once told me that women and mothers embodied much more power than men. Especially the powers needed to look after children. He said:

The most important place on earth is in the womb and with the mother. Mothers are the beginning of everything. Without a woman, no man is able to do anything and without a mother, children will have a very sad life.

Seymour (1999) pointed out that babies and young children in most of rural North India have very little agency in the sense that mothers and other caretakers will not run and drop everything once the child starts crying. In order to make the child understand that he or she is a subordinate member of a larger group, they usually finish what they are doing first, before tending the child. This is true for Chamoli mothers as well, but people say that a mother's love for her child will always keep the balance between the group and the child's needs. Without this love, the child will be alone, and neglected. Therefore, fathers whose wives have died have a great problem. They need a woman in the house to perform the women's

work, most importantly the agricultural work. But if they remarry, children born by their first wife will probably be mistreated. The parent's agency that allows them to raise their child in an appropriate way is shared, and can only be exercised properly if the pair is together. Once half of the pair is gone, this shared agency is broken and cannot be replaced by another person such as a second wife, or a second husband. But a man who does not marry again will also not be able to look after his children. Even if he lives in an extended family, his brothers' wives will look after their children first, before attending to his, as the following story illustrates:

When I was two-and-a-half years old, my mother died. I had a sister who was three months old and a brother who was one-and-a-half. My older sister was seven or eight. She was married very soon after my mother died. My brother-in-law helped us. He raised us like his own children. He never thought of us as strangers, he raised us, he gave my father food and drink and clothes for us. He was a very good man. We had a caca (father's younger brother) and a tau (father's older brother), but what could they do? If children do not have a ma (mother), what can uncles do? Their wives looked after us a little bit, especially after the smallest girl. She was only three months old. But they were hard to us, sometimes they used to shout at us, sometimes they hit us, if there was not enough food, they let us go without. They gave the food to their own children, not to us. They never even thought about us being hungry. When I was six years old my caci send me to look after the cow, "You go look after the cow!" Her own children were sent to school, but I had to clean the cowshed, milk the cow and get the fodder for her. Since I was five years old I did this work. When I could not do the work properly, she used to hit me and shout at me, "What are you doing, be thankful, you don't have a mother so be thankful that we are looking after you, you have to work". My little sister was given to our caci, he gave her to her saying, "This is your daughter from now on". My father did that, he thought, "This girl does not have a mother, I have to go to work every day. The small children are at home, how can I raise her?" So he gave her away. I never went to school. Who should have sent me? My father used to work all day. He fed us at night, and he let my three brothers go to school, somebody had to look after the household! We are three brothers and three sisters. There was nobody who spoke for us girls, if a

mother had been there. Something would have been possible, but there was no mother.

It is clear that motherhood and parenthood do not necessarily depend on biological facts. Sometimes, uncles and aunts adopt children, and a number of different care situations might emerge in certain circumstances. However, there must be an agreement that the child officially becomes part of her new family for her parents, and especially her new mother, to fully accept him or her. In any case, mothers have an ambivalent position in Garhwali childhood. They are the main nurturers and protectors but without indulging the child or making the child the centre of their world. The mother is the most important person in a young child's life and while the father becomes more and more important for boys and for girls alike as they grow up, the mother will remain the main source of strength for the girls even after their marriage and a great authority for her sons even in adulthood. The strong bond between mother and child is exemplified through the very birth of the child, childbirth pollution and the naming ceremony that affect child and mother alike.

In Garhwal, birth usually takes place in the cowshed. They are separate from the houses of the village, so that the birth of a child will not pollute the house of the father's family or the whole village more than necessary³. In addition, mother and child stay in a space that is considered especially pure and protective. Both are seen to be in an especially vulnerable stage, where they can easily get hurt or afflicted by demons and other spiritual beings.

On the day of birth, sweets are distributed to all the villagers. In Garhwal, unlike other parts of North India, the birth of a girl is celebrated. Sweets are distributed for every child that is born, be it a boy or a girl. The plains have a great impact on the Garhwal region and Berreman wrote in 1963 that only "the birth of a son is announced by distributing sugar lumps to friends and relatives on the day of

³Childbirth in Garhwal is, of course, polluting to the father's family. When a child is born, the father's family, including his parents and brothers, remains impure (*sutak*) for eleven days or twenty-one days if it is the couple's first child. During these eleven or twenty-one *sutak* days, there will, the gods will not be worshipped in the house, members of this family should not participate in any other religious ceremonies and very few visitors should come to the house. The pollution ends with the naming ceremony on the eleventh or twenty-first day after birth.

the birth. A girl's birth is not formally proclaimed" (1963: 126). Similarly, Capila (2002) has tried to collect songs sung at the birth of sons. She claimed, "when a son is born to a woman, he is referred to as the redeemer of her austerities. When she gives birth to a son her importance and status in the family increases tenfold." (Capila 2002: 145). This is contrary to the understandings of the people in rural Garhwal and Chamoli. Sax (1990), for example notes that a daughter's birth in Garhwal, unlike other parts of North India, is celebrated. The old women told me that their fathers celebrated their births and planted a tree out of happiness. The birth of a daughter was a lucky event, so they said.

Capila (2002) did not find any old Garhwali songs that are sung exclusively in honour of the birth of a son. I am not sure how much the plains have influenced the villages where Berreman conducted his research in the 1960s and how much Capila was influenced by mainstream Hindu views on son preference. I do, however, argue that the status of girls and women in Garhwal is – and has most probably always been – higher than it has been in the plains. The old women related the high status of women to the former practice of bride price which has now largely been replaced by the dowry system. In previous times, so they said, daughters were also considered to enrich a family in the sense that they are agricultural labourers. There is a saying in Garhwal and Kumaon, that says, "When my daughter is well, there are pestles without number (*Meri cheli kushala mushalai mushala*)" (Upreti 2003: 113). This is still true for most Dalit communities. A mother with girls is considered to be rich because she can share her work with her daughters. Today, the birth of the first boy is awaited with impatience and greeted with special joy if his mother has given birth to more than one girl before. But the birth of a girl after a line of boys is greeted with nearly as much joy. Most people in Garhwal say that there is no complete family, if there is not at least one male and one female child. Therefore the ideal is today to have two children, a boy and a girl. The birth of the first child to a recently married couple is always celebrated joyfully, and people do not seem to care much whether the child is a boy or a girl. Especially when a first child has died, or when there were difficulties in becoming pregnant, as is illustrated by following story, told to me by the child's father.

When I left, Prema was pregnant and after seven months, she gave birth to a boy. But right after the birth of the child, she became very ill. Because she was sick, she could not give milk to the child and therefore, the child died after a few days. Prema wrote a letter to me, "You have a son!" Then a few days later another letter arrived saying that the son had died and that my Prema had fallen very ill. She became so ill that all hope she would survive was gone. She remained sick for three months, but thanks to god, she survived and came back into the world. Exactly a year later, Prema became pregnant again. I went to Delhi again and this time Prema stayed most of her pregnancy in her mait and finally gave birth to a girl. She was very happy and did not get sick this time. Then they spread the news in her marital village that she had given birth to a healthy girl. Prema's sasur went to get mother and daughter. He carried seven kilos of sweets and distributed it among the villagers. Then he took his bvari (daughter-in-law) and his granddaughter and brought them home to give her a name. Then Prema's letter reached me, saying, "You have a daughter, please come home!" I came home straight away to see my daughter and I was very happy. We gave her the name Kumari Rupa. And after the ceremony, their life became more relaxed.

But if the second child is also a girl, people start to get worried. Boys certainly do have a priority over girls for parents, especially for husbands and their parents. They are still needed, not only to assure that the death rites are properly performed, but also because they will have to take over the land and see to their parents' financial security when they are old. Women worry a lot about not having sons. It is true that daughters' status is much higher in Chamoli than it is in the plains, but that does not mean that it is equal to sons' status. Parents might be happy with their daughters, but it is still true that the birth of a son means a high rise in a young women's prestige and stand in her in-law's family. If she is not able to give birth to at least one son, she will usually live in shame and resentments against her will rise. Only the birth of a son can give a mother full security and the strength to respond to her powerful mother-in-law. If she has only daughters, the pressure and sentiments against her will constantly rise, as a young *bvari* (daughter-in-law) once described to me,

My mother had to eat a lot of trouble (kashth). My father caused my mother a lot of pain. He hit her a lot. The first three children my mother had were all girls. Later, after me came my two younger brothers. My father said, "She is a girl-bearing woman." When my brother was about to come, nobody dared face my mother; they all thought that she would have another girl. This is a matter of fate. I don't know what will happen to me. Yes, I also have two daughters and no sons. What happened to my mother will also happen to me. Since the day when my second daughter was born, everybody is angry. My sas, my sasur and my husband, too. My husband is always drinking alcohol, he says that luck has left him because he has two daughters and no sons.

Girls are not considered to be a misfortune, unless a couple has a long line of girls without a single boy. But a man without a son is considered to be unfortunate and a man without children even more so. It is necessary to have children and highly desired to have at least one son, who can inherit the parent's land. As the interview with Kamala shows, women are happy to have daughters because they will help them to work and share the mother's responsibilities in household and agriculture until they get married. Boys, on the other hand should always stay with their parents and bring their wives to their parents' home to take over the mother's and daughter's work. Fathers and their parents desire sons above all for the reproduction of their lineage. A couple in Garhwal will most probably try to get a son and a woman will have as many pregnancies she needs to give birth to at least one son, even if this endangers her health. But a couple with two or three boys and no girl will most probably not try for a girl. Women who have more than one son, or a son and a daughter say that they have done their duty, now they are "on holiday" (*chutthi*) for the rest of their life.

Men are not involved in the birth of a child. There is no cord-cutting- ceremony, where the father or the woman's brother cuts the cord, as in many places in South India. In fact it is considered auspicious if the mother is able to cut the cord herself. Fathers and men in generally avoid close contact with pregnant women during the last month of her pregnancy. And a pregnant woman will start staying in the

cowshed days before her delivery because she is ashamed and afraid to harm any male member of her family and because the cowshed has been especially prepared to protect her and the child from evil influences. Because of the dangerous, polluting state of his or her mother, a Garhwali child usually spends the first week with his or her mother in the cowshed, only seeing her and the women who keep her company and bring her food. A child is usually not considered to be polluted in the same way the mother is. Bennett (1983) wrote about newborn Hindu children in Nepal, that birth pollution

affects only the mothers. The infant has not really activated its karma and entered fully into samsara, thus the ordinary rules of purity and pollution do not yet apply to it. This is not to say that the infant is without karma. The very situation of its birth its sex, the caste and wealth of its family, its physical and mental equipment all these things represent the results of good and bad actions in past lives. However, because the child is not yet socially and spiritually responsible for its actions, it cannot yet generate new karma (Bennett 1983: 53).

A very similar view of newborn children is to be found in the Central Himalayas. It is mainly the women who are seen as dangerously polluting, not so much the children. However, because it is feared that the blood of childbirth may pollute the village space, the child is not washed with water straight after birth. A child will be cleaned with cloth and only after two or three days mother and child briefly leave the shed at night to have their first bath, and after seven to twenty-two days, they finally join their family. The purifying childbirth rituals and the naming ceremony (*nam karna* or *nam rakhna*) are now performed. On this occasion, the child is introduced into the family and exposed to the sun for the first time. In the Dalit communities where I lived and was able to witness some of these rituals, as well as reportedly in the higher caste communities of the region, these are very small family rituals, performed partly in front of and partly in the family home near the fireplace. A special priest (most often a Brahman) is called to perform the purifying ritual for the mother and the child. During this ritual a small fire sacrifice is done and the mother circles her newborn child over the fire three times. This purifies her and the

child and after this is done, the child is held by each member of the family living in the house and thus welcomed into the family. The mother, or the mother-in-law, then takes the child outside and exposes it to the sun for the first time. Then the priest looks for a suitable name for the child. He makes an astrological chart that gives information about the fate of the child as well as the first letter of the child's name. The family can then decide what the child's name will be. Most often, it is the father who names the child, sometimes it is the child's paternal grandfather. With the naming of the child, he or she is officially recognized as a member of the father's lineage. Usually small infants, especially when they are first-born sons, also receive a small *tika* (mark) of sacred ash on their forehead. This is supposed to keep them safe from the evil eye (a common affliction for small children) or any other evil influence.

During these rituals, children are introduced into the social world through the rituals of the adults who are their relatives. They are purified from the pollution of their own birth, dangerous for any male relative. And they are given a name, partly dependent on the time of their birth and the horoscope the priest makes for them and partly dependent on the parents. Name and social identity are first established through this ritual and are prerequisites for social agency. This ritual, in which the first steps toward agency are made therefore illustrates the fact that every person is always both agent and patient, both an active creator of his or her own life, and an object of other persons' actions. The bond between children and their lineage, first established through the name-giving ceremony is strengthened and the children are incorporated into the family through everyday practices.

The first performative practice all children learn is docility. They are not only their parents' patients they also embody this patience through practices. Small children, for example learn to greet adults and especially older relatives and parents by bowing deep in front of them and touching their feet. The adult should respond by placing a hand on the child's head as a sign for his or her protection and the acceptance of the hierarchical relationship. Even though children are usually treated with much love and affection, violence also plays a role in their upbringing. When children do something that their parents do not appreciate, they are often beaten. I have seen mothers hitting their young children with heavy knives, because they did

not eat properly, or because they insisted on getting an answer for a question they had asked, or because they were annoying in some other way. Therefore children learn very quickly to perform the docile and obedient child in front of their parents and family, escaping into their own, separate world for most of the day. This is possible because young children are allowed great mobility within the village.

Small children are rarely seen as complete social persons. They are considered innocent, faultless beings. Especially young girls are thought to be reincarnations of the goddess on earth. They are seen as especially pure. Higher caste girls play a special role in village and community rituals, such as the *jal yatra* where they symbolize the holy river Ganges. There are community rituals, where young girls and boys are given money and other presents as embodiments of the gods. Of course, the children of the lower castes are never in this ritually important position that so underlines their purity, but they are treated with special love. It is communicated to them that they are pure and auspicious, in several ways. Another indicator that children are not seen as fully responsible persons is that children who die before puberty or before the sacred thread ritual has been performed for boys, are buried instead of cremated. This is common in the Hindu world, and Bennett (1983: 56) explains this through the lack of involvement in purity and pollution. As small children are not seen as fully responsible for their actions, they do not need to be purified through fire. In Garhwal, however, people say that children are buried and not burned because they are not complete social beings.

The fact that children are not seen as full social persons has many consequences for their lives. They are, for example, considered to be easily influenced and changed as embodied persons. Children are often instruments in the tensions between their mothers and paternal grandmothers. I have demonstrated above that food and water as well as places are thought of as influencing people's characters and children are seen as especially open to changes in their bodies and therefore their personality through outside influence. Children, so people say will change with the water they drink and the food they eat, they will also undergo physical changes and incorporate the substances of the people who care for them, feed them and in whose house they live. In the competition for the influence over children, therefore food, water and substances play a major role.

After eight o'clock in the morning there are usually only old people and very small children in a village. Older children will have gone to school, men either go to work or meet somewhere to spend the day playing cards with their friends. Married women and older girls have left for the forest or the fields to do their work. The courtyards in front of the houses are empty except for grandparents playing with their young grandchildren. As reported from other parts of India (see e.g. Kakar 1981; Alex 2004), young children are usually treated with much affection. They are often in physical contact with members of their family. Especially paternal grandmothers spend a lot of time with the children. For them, grandchildren and especially grandsons, fathered by their own sons, are the ultimate fruit of their life's work and the high status they should now enjoy. Often, the grandmothers will try and take control over these children. I have often witnessed paternal grandmothers trying to gain influence over their grandchildren by distancing them from their mothers. In this way, children can become pawns in the game of power between their mothers and paternal grandmothers. This tension between a mother and a grandmother does not play a great role for the children's upbringing as long as the family is still united. However, there is a tendency to split the hearths and today many Dalit families have ceased living in extended families. Instead, many nuclear families with husband, wife and children have the control over their own resources and cook on their own fireplace. Especially in such a situation, grandparents will try to gain control over the children, to incorporate their grandchildren into their household so that they will eat with them and later work on their fields and share their resources with them instead of their parents.

One of the first steps to widen the influence over a child is to get the children to literally "eat from one's hands". During a child's first years, he or she moves mostly within the space of the family house and the village. The females of a household share their food with the children. This is especially important for the grandmothers. As stated above, mothers conceptualize their children as parts of themselves. Children are in a way seen as an extension of the mother's body. It is therefore only natural for them to share the food in a way it would never be shared with anybody else. Children can eat food prepared by a menstruating mother, although this is considered very impure for their father, their grandparents or any other adult mem-

ber of their families to do so. Moreover, children eat from their mother's plate and are fed with their mother's hands, even while she is eating herself. The saliva that is supposed to be on the hand and plate of a person eating is considered very polluting in India. A wife, considered to be her husband's "half-body", can eat her husband's leftovers, but nobody would eat from another person's plate, nor eat leftovers from any other human being than their husband or parent. The exception in Garhwal is children. Parents and children can eat from one plate, because they already share physical substance. In addition, it is possible to establish a close relationship with a child by sharing food and other substances with it. The grandmothers, usually take great pleasure in sharing their food with their grandchildren. Food and feeding can also be understood as a special expression of love for the children, or a way of gaining influence over children. The practice of sharing food thus establishes an embodied relationship between people.

Food and feeding in India play a great role in human relationships. As Marriott (1964) showed, Indians think about food as more than just a substance that nurtures the body. Food, salt, and water, all contain substances that influence people's appearance and shapes people's characters. Food and water can absorb the substance of the land and of the people cultivating it. Sharing food means also to share substances. It is also in this context that we have to understand the feeding of children. When a child is given the first solid food, the Chamoli Dalits have no special ritual, but that does not mean that food and feeding are not considered important. On the contrary, people try to feed a child with solid food from a very early age on, trying to share the food from one's own plate with the child. The paternal grandmother and the mother of a child will take food off their own plate and put it in the mouth of the child. They strengthen their relationship with the child daily through the practice of food sharing. However, there are also other persons who are important in a child's life with whom the child has to establish a relationship.

Women, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and female siblings establish their relationship with children through nurturing practices and foodsharing. Women's breasts play a distinct role in this context. Mothers breastfeed their infants. But it is also not uncommon to see a very old woman offering her breast to a crying infant. Breasts are seen as comforting small children with close physical contact. However,

only female members of the child's patriline will strengthen their relationship with a child through sharing food and offering the child a breast. Kinship with the patriline of a child's mothers is learned through different embodied practices of greeting and naming. Fathers, grandfathers and uncles establish a relationship with their children above all through residence and ritual.

Place, Space and Movement

For Garhwali people, a person's "nature" is strongly affected by the place he or she lives. The food from the fields, prepared by a certain person, and the water from the village well have a substantial influence on a person's character, appearance and health. As Marriott (1976), Marriott and Inden (1977), Daniel (1979, 1984), Sax (1991), and Lamb (2000) convincingly show, South Asian people think of themselves and the places they live in as part of a system within which constant exchanges are made. Marriott (1976) argued that South Asian persons think of themselves as much more constituted by exchanges with other people and the places they live in, than Western individuals would. One of his students, Daniel (1979, 1984), showed that people in Tamil Nadu distinguish between territory inhabited by human beings and territory as a political unit. Human beings who together inhabit a certain territory, or *ur*, share bodily substances, because "the soil substance is ultimately mixed with the bodily substance of the *ur*'s inhabitants" (1984: 79). Lamb (2000) similarly argued that Bengali villagers exchange substance among themselves through contact with the same soil. A human body is influenced and influences the place he or she inhabits and people who share the same place also share some basic substances (see also Inden and Nicholas 1977: 7; Nicholas 1981: 373).

Garhwalis also see themselves as being "engaged in a continuing set of exchanges; they have determinate, mutual effects upon each other because they are part of a single, interactive system" (Sax 1991: 73). The place one is born in is thought to determine one's nature to a significant degree. "In Garhwal [...] land and the persons who live on it are thought of as involved in a complex set of exchanges" (Sax 1991: 74). As Berreman (1962) has pointed out, local kinship acknowledges this connection to the land. While kinship hierarchies among relatives who live in

the same place as members of the same lineage are established through age, kinship hierarchy with people who do not reside in one's village, like the mother's father follow a hierarchy that is based on the order of kinship relation. The father-in-law is higher in status than the brother-in-law, but both are higher in status than a male ego (Berreman 1962: 525-527). Furthermore, as Sax (1991) has pointed out places have become names for certain people:

[T]he surnames of Brahmans and Rajputs are commonly derived from their ancestral villages: upper caste residents of Nauti village are surnamed Nautiyal, Nainwals or their ancestors resided in Nain village, and so forth. Since descendants are of the same caste, the surname indicates caste as well: all Nautiyals are Brahmans, all Khandadis are Rajputs, and so on. Over time the relationship between place and person becomes stronger, difficult to alter, impossible perhaps to erase (Sax 1991: 75).

In Garhwal, as elsewhere in India, relationships are substantialised. People see themselves as being in a continuous exchange of substances around them. Therefore, the place of residence is seen as partly determining a person, while itself being determined by the contact with persons. According to Garhwalis, a child's connection to the place of residence is very strong, because he or she was influenced by the place ever since he or she was born. This relationship is established with male and female children, but as mentioned above, while young men never establish a comparable relationship with another place, young women usually change residence after marriage and come into close contact with another place and other people, establishing a relationship with their husband's natal village.

The intimacy with the land affects everyday practice. Females tend the food that grows in the terraced fields, climb the hills to cut grass and walk the paths so often that even the rocks become familiar and thus strengthen their relationship with the place. The village is seen as an "inside", a safe place, and a place that confers protection. Like a relative, this "inside" is caring and a secure environment for the children. Outside of this area, children, and to some extent young women, are considered to be unprotected. Therefore, toddlers and small children usually stay within their parent's house and courtyard. They are most often found playing with

their grandmothers, mothers or siblings in the courtyards in front of their house. Mothers usually do not allow older children to carry the little ones around in the village to play with them until they are able to walk and find the way home on their own. Small children may come to the fields with their mothers, but mothers and grandmothers prefer their children to be in the vicinity of the house. The house is seen as the safest place for the child, where no tigers, leopards, bears, demons, or other spiritual beings can harm them. In the house, they are also protected from the evil eye.

These things are dangerous for every villager, but they can be lethal for small children. People in Chamoli tell stories about small children who were eaten by wild animals, especially when left unattended outside the house by their families. These stories also appear from time to time in the local newspapers, reminding villagers that their children are in great danger from the forest around them. After dark, children were never allowed to move around the village on their own. In fact, very few villagers dare to walk around in the dark. This forest is not only constituted by the wild animals but also by ghosts, fairies, demons and other spiritual beings dwelling there. Children are considered especially vulnerable to attacks of these beings. They are still *kacca*, not “solid” yet, in the way the adult’s are. Older girls and young women are also seen as particularly vulnerable to these spirit beings. Girls and young women are easily frightened and they also cry easily, and this “opens their bodies” to the spirits. In contrast, young children’s bodies are considered to be in this open stage more or less constantly and therefore they are easily afflicted. It is safer therefore to keep very young children in the vicinity of the house.

The house and courtyard also provide a certain security against the evil eye. When young children cry a lot or have constant health problems, people often assume this to be the effect of the evil eye. The evil eye is the result of feelings of jealousy that the child has produced in a person, most often a widow or childless women. The person does not afflict the child intentionally, but when she (and it is never a man) looks at the child and sees in it the reflection of her own unfortunate fate, a part of this thought affects the vulnerable child and makes him or her sick. The child cries, does not eat, has stomach aches, and similar problems. This affliction is easily cured. A ritual specialist can cure the child with the right mantras, some

rice, and a short and cheap ritual in which the rice is circulated over the children's head, the bad influence taken from her or him, and tossed away. An amulet and the placing of sacred ash on the child's forehead can also provide protection.

Despite all these dangers, young children are still taken everywhere and can take part in every event that happens in the village. They can go where women and their older sisters go, where men and their older brothers go. They are welcome at all public rituals. For most family rituals their presence is even required for the success of the ceremony. Boys and girls alike are invited to visit agnatic kin with their fathers or mothers on ritual occasions as well as non-religious visits. Sometimes small children accompany their grandfathers to the teashop, where they sit and often watch them smoking, drinking tea or local liquor. A girl past puberty would find this shameful and her mere presence in such a place would be considered dishonourable. A young women's presence in such a men's meeting place is unthinkable. Her absence is part of her gendered performative practice. Older boys have to subordinate themselves to the male hierarchy, which often means that they can sit there, but also have to subordinate their practices to the expectations. They are, for example not allowed to smoke in front of an elder, nor should they drink excessively, they should and consciously do perform the obedient grandson, son, or younger brother. Young children however, are free to enter male and female spaces. They accompany their mothers to the fields and listen to the songs and stories that will never reach the ear of a grown man.

Children accompany the *barat*, the party that goes to the bride's home to take her to her new home after the wedding⁴. Older girls and married women never go to the *barat*, as this is considered nosy and shameful. The *barat* is a paradigmatically male assembly that involves heavy drinking, dancing and sexual joking among men. To come to a *barat* is utterly inappropriate for a Garhwali women, just as the presence of a man among the girls and women cutting grass and firewood in the fields is considered inappropriate. Children, however are allowed to join the *barat*. These events are a great excitement for Garhwali children were they are not only accepted but also highly valued guests, bringing luck to the couple.

Boys and girls alike are, however, not advised to attend rituals that remove

⁴Wedding ceremonies and traditions will be discussed in Chapter III.

dangerous spirits, for example demon exorcism or a puja were a deity is send to attack someone⁵. That is also the reason why they should not attend a cremation, because the cremation ground is considered to be one of the most dangerous places in Garhwal, where even an adult person is easily afflicted.

Children in Garhwal have access to nearly all adult spheres. This contrasts strongly with childrearing practices in “the West”. As James et al. (1998) argue, in the West,

childhood [...] is that status of personhood which is by definition often in the wrong place.[...] In terms of social space children are sited, insulated and distanced, and their very gradual emergence into wider, adult space is only by accident, by degrees, as an award or privilege or as part of a gradualist rite of passage (James et al. 1998: 37).

In contrast, I argue that children in Garhwal have access to more social spaces than adults, because they can enter the world of women as well as that of men and children. As Berreman (1963: 266-269) writes, there is no special space for male family members in the house. Meeting places for adult men and older boys are therefore in public space. They are on the street playing cards or a local board game, in the teashops and restaurants in the market. Young women and girls past puberty hardly ever enter the public space. They would never eat in public and are embarrassed even to drink a tea in a teashop when men are present. But I have often seen old men taking their granddaughters as well as grandsons with them to such places. One local ritual specialist, for example, took his granddaughter, who was still a toddler, to the teashop every day. She was playing on the ground while the men where smoking mariuana and nobody seemed to think this situation was unusual. My occasional presence however, was seen as unusual. Children also have access to female space, in the house, the fields and the forest. Children hear their mothers and their female friends sing and see them dance in the forest, something an adult male would never hear or see.⁶

⁵Afflictions and healing rituals will be discussed in more detail in Chapters IV and V

⁶The activities of women on the fields and the forests will be described in more detail in chapter IV.

Older children still spend a considerable portion of the day with their mothers working in the fields, listening to the stories the women tell each other and the songs they sing. However, as children grow older they also become more and more *pakka* and are seen as less vulnerable and therefore allowed to move more freely. In the early years of life children spend most of their time with the women of the village. They rarely spend time with the men, although the male space is not closed to them. As soon as they are old enough they start to help their mothers and grandmothers with their work. Boys and girls start collecting firewood and grass, work in the fields, learn how to look after the animals, how to cook and how to clean the house and wash the clothes. All children learn this and all children follow their mothers and grandmothers around. However, boys are not taught to work as diligently as the girls. It is important for mothers to teach their daughters how to work, because that will assure them an honourable life after marriage in the house of their future husband. The boys learn the work but they need not take it seriously. As my conversation with Kamala, cited in the beginning makes clear, boys should rather concentrate on their education because a good education is seen as the basis for later employment. Once the transition from *bacca* to *ladaka* and *ladaki* has happened, the children are expected to act in gender specific ways and they now need to know what to do in certain situations not only according to their age but also their gender. From now on their everyday life is full of gendered performative practices which are partly unconscious as part of their habitus, partly conscious strategies. This has consequences for the everyday life of the children.

In terms of movement and restrictions on movement, the ascription of vulnerability is one of the greatest differences between older boys and girls. Boys are expected to be fearless and therefore to move around not only in the villages, but also between villages and in the markets. As soon as they are considered old enough, they are asked to accompany sisters to their marital home or mothers to their natal homes. Women on the other hand are never supposed to travel alone and always require an escort. Boys are often needed as escorts and usually return to their village alone the same day. Mothers send the boys to the markets to do the shopping, even if the market is thirty kilometres away. Girls on the other hand are supposed to stay in the village. If they leave the village they, like their mothers, will need com-

pany. It is said that they are too afraid, too fearful, to go anywhere by themselves. Therefore they are much more restricted in their movements. While boys are not expected to come straight home after high school, girls get in trouble if they do not. Older boys frequently run away after a fight with their parents and this behaviour is accepted as normal male behaviour. As Sangita, a sixteen-year-old Rajput High School student explained,

Our main problem is that there is a difference between boys and girls. Like where we can go, and what we do; girls do one thing and boys are supposed to do something else. At night a boy can come from far away. But when a girl comes even from a small distance, she will be in trouble. When a boy has run away from home, then it does not matter. He will not get in trouble for doing that. Nobody will ask him, "Why did you go, with whom did you go?" But when a girl does that she will not even think about going back home, and if she does anyway, she will have to listen to all her family. And when she wants to make up for it afterwards people will not let her make up for it. Everyone makes a mistake sometimes, but when a girl makes a mistake then it becomes a scandal and everybody will say, "She has done that!"

Although Sangita seems to complain about the situation, many village girls do not question that they should restrict their movements and that they should not leave the village alone or without apparent reason. It is not so much that they are forbidden to leave the village on their own, but rather that they are afraid, that they feel too vulnerable and weak to go anywhere by themselves. In addition, because the girls rarely leave the village, many village girls said that they would not even know where they should go. They do not have a reason for leaving the village simply because girls have no business in the outside world. All their responsibilities and possibilities to help are located within the village. In my interpretation, Chamoli girls and women are neither inherently fearful, nor have they internalised patriarchal structures, rather, they are performing gender. *Himmat* (courage), is a good example of gendered performative practices that have a great influence on the girl's bodies and their understanding of themselves as females. The girls grow up being told that they are more vulnerable and more fearful than boys and they

see that their older sisters, their mothers and all the other girls from the village lack courage (*himmat*). They grow up seeing that female bodies embody this lack of *himmat* and therefore every single girl will embody this lack herself. This is not the invention of overwhelmingly powerful men, but an effect of local discourses. There is no “female nature” that determines that girls and young women lack the courage males possess. Rather, the lack of courage in females is the effect of a discourse, as is the view on femininity and masculinity in general. Not leaving the village alone is therefore Chamoli female performativity, accompanying mothers and sisters on their way to other villages is male performativity.

Difference, Dress and Affliction

Another important practice, which underlines gender and age differences, is dress. Both young boys and girls are often referred to as *bacca*, which literally means “male child”. Referring to children as sexless or belonging to one sex, is also characteristic of other parts of South Asia. As Alex (2004: 202) shows for the Muthuraja and Kallar communities of Tamil Nadu, children before the age of two are called “*kulan-tai*”, regardless of their gender, they are dressed in a similar way and their genitals are not necessarily covered. Children before the age of three in Chamoli Garhwal are often dressed in the same manner. There is no tradition of children’s clothing that distinguishes boys and girls at that age. Most small children only wear a shirt when they play in the courtyard of the house. People explained this in practical terms, saying that young children cannot control their bodily functions and therefore it was better if they did not wear any clothes. When they leave the village, children are of course dressed in a fashionable way. Like everybody else who leaves the village, children are dressed cleanly and in a manner that shows his or her family’s wealth and sophistication. In particular this is done because children leaving the village space are usually going with their mothers on a visit to the maternal grandparents. Women are expected to wear every piece of expensive jewellery and their best sari when they go on such trips. It is as much a trip to show a woman’s natal family and village how well she is treated and how well off her marital family is, as it is a visit to her parents. Therefore the children are also dressed up. It has become fashionable nowadays to dress even very small children in gendered clothes of western

style. Girls are dressed in little frocks, and dresses in colours considered to be feminine such as pink and yellow, while boys are dressed in small shirts and pants in blue or other boyish colours, also called the “*bacca sut*”. This is however a very recent development and most people still cannot afford such clothing for their children.

Alex (2004) reports for children in Tamil Nadu that bodily boundaries for very small children are different than for adults and that she has often seen people playing with or joking about children’s genitals. I have never seen such a thing among Garhwali people. Children’s genitals are rarely covered, but people usually do not refer to them or touch them in a joking manner. That does not mean that mothers and fathers never touch young children’s genitals. Genitals are touched and massaged for example when a mother massages oil into the child’s skin. But they are never exposed in a joking manner. Later, when children start playing with each other, they discover their bodies and the physical differences among them. I have often seen children joking about each other, but I have never seen adults joke about the genitals of the children in public. However the similarity with Alex’s case in Southern India is that children are seen as having a sexuality that is inherently different from that of adults. In Chamoli, children’s sexuality is for the future and this not connected to danger and impurity in the same way adults’ sexuality is.

From about the age of three or four, children start to be dressed differently. Girls can still wear pants and t-shirts, but they are more often dressed in frocks and pants. Boys start wearing pants and t-shirts most of the time. It would be considered inappropriate for them not to wear pants and cover their genitals from now on. Older children are considered less vulnerable, more *pakka*, and therefore are allowed to move freely within the village and the fields belonging to the village. The children from one village usually do that together or in groups of friends with boys and girls. When they reach puberty and enter High School the attitudes toward friendships between boys and girls as well as expectations towards them change. The school uniform symbolizes this change of attitudes towards the children. In most schools in the rural areas the school uniform for girls is the *salwar kamiz*, a combination of long shirt and wide pants, while the boys wear western style pants and shirt uniforms of varying colours. The girls are expected to wear their hair

in plaits, the teachers often tell them how to make up their hair for the next day and put coloured ribbons in the hair. From now on they are also allowed to wear jewellery and bangles. The girls usually start dressing up at this age, use nail polish, put different decorative marks (*bindis*) on their foreheads and wear bangles. From now on, girls and boys are not supposed to play with each other. Boys are advised not to spend too much time with the girls, lest they become too girlish, while the girls are advised to stay away from boys since doing otherwise would be immodest behaviour. From this age on, the girls take over housework. In most families they are given some duties in the house like cooking one meal, washing the dishes or the clothes, collecting firewood or grass. The boys now usually stop doing these activities regularly and only help when their mothers or grandmothers explicitly ask them. But they are also not yet integrated into the men's world. Or rather, they are now introduced into the men's world at the lowest level of the hierarchy. That means that they have to behave in a certain way while they are in the company of an older male. For example they should not smoke in front of them and should listen to the orders they are given. Performative gendered practices such as body postures, greeting and forms of addresses are now part of the children's habitus and strongly connected to the practices of kinship.

Learning Kinship

Kinship relations are highly gendered. While the father's patrivirilocal lineage- that means mother and father, married brothers, their wives and children, as well as unmarried brothers and sisters - are the most important relatives for a boy in the sense that they know that they will always belong to the same place and share not only substances, but also material wealth and ritual responsibilities. To girls, their father's lineage is also very important. Usually the members of the patrilineage are those persons who are in closest contact with the child in the early years. However, girls also grow up learning that they will one day leave this place and lineage and become part of another lineage. Both male and female children have a different relationship with the lineage of their mother's father and the matriline. Young wives and their children spend a lot of time in their mother's house, some even give birth there. Therefore, children often have a close relationship with their maternal grand-

parents, and other members of their maternal grandfather's lineage. However, the relationship with this kin is fundamentally different to the relationship to the people of children's own patriline. My informants told me that within one's own lineage there are certain obligations and responsibilities that have to be fulfilled, whereas the relationship with people from the matrilineage and the mother's patrilineage is rather a matter of choice. Financial, material or spiritual help for a brother cannot be denied without social sanctions, however married sisters and their children should be helped, but there are no sanctions if the help is denied. In addition the relationship with other children in the village of one's maternal grandparents differs significantly from that of children within one's own village. Every child in the father's village, whether of the same caste or not, is considered to be a sibling, and a marriage between two people of village is therefore virtually unthinkable. The children in the mother's *mait* (natal village), however, are potential spouses. While a marriage with the children of mother's brothers are not possible, it is possible to marry into another lineage in the mother's *mait*. That means that the children have to learn how to name each other and at the same time how to relate to each other in appropriate ways. Children are very early introduced to their most important kinship relations. Even before a child can walk or talk, people start teaching children the appropriate terms with which they should refer to their relatives, neighbours and friends of the family. In this way, a child knows who is a brother, and uncle an aunt and who is a potential spouse and learns to act accordingly.

Traditionally, Garhwali families live in a household with an extended, patrilineal family, which typically means that brothers live together with their parents and their wives and children in their father's house and village. In the ideal case an old couple lives together and shares a hearth with their married sons, their wives and children and their unmarried daughters. In a typical Garhwali two-story house, they all share one kitchen and each couple occupies a room on their own with their children. As a new member of this family, a child spends most of his or her time in this family compound learning its own place within the family hierarchy. The oldest male in the house is the head of the family and responsible for all major decisions concerning the representation of the family in the village, legal questions and in the choice for marriage partners, education and professional development

of all family members. Officially, the agency follows the hierarchy of the family. The head of the household is the main agent in the household. He is responsible for the family rituals, the sacrifices and the family unity, all other members of the household are officially subordinate to him and his actions. This is reflected directly in the language. Chamoli people call the head of the household the *kartta*, which literally means “the doer” (see also Inden and Nicholas 1977) who report the same for West Bengal). However, as I will argue in the course of this book, agency in Chamoli is not as hierarchical as Inden and Nicholas (1977) suggest. Rather, agency is collective and no single person is permanently dominant in this agentive unit.

In Kakar’s (1981) psychoanalytic interpretation of personal development amongst caste Hindus, child-rearing practices in India socialise a child into hierarchical family and village relationships. According to Kakar, Indian child-rearing practices support the internalisation of a child’s own status within this hierarchy as well as that of others. In this way

values, beliefs, prejudices and injunctions, as well as its distortions of reality, become part of the individual’s psyche as the content of his conscience. [...]. It is the internalised [...] norms that define ‘right action’ or dharma for the individual, make him feel good and loved when he lives up to these norms and anxious and guilty when he transgresses them” (Kakar 1981: 123).

This is a process that is true of all cultures. Bourdieu speaks about habitus and field in a similar way. But whereas Kakar’s account is based on ideas, Bourdieu’s theory depends on practices. Hierarchy consists of embodied practices that construct reality and children learn their own position in their household through embodied practices such as the performativity of obedience through greeting and the performativity of dividuality in sharing substances and food. In this context children quickly learn the importance of knowing their kinship position. This becomes more and more important with the age of the children. When a Garhwali person starts moving around, on visits to other villages, for rituals and on similar occasions, kinship is the first reference used to position oneself and other people. It is important to know one’s kinship position and one’s place in the hierarchy because this determines

practices towards other people. Kinship positions clarify how to greet a person, how to talk to another person, and whether a person has obligations towards another. Like most Indians, Garhwalis are full social persons only because they belong to a system determined by kinship. In this sense, kinship practices are powerful social actions that inscribe hierarchies into the bodies of children. Children are taught to greet their older relatives with the typical greeting for status higher close relatives. They are taught to bend down and touch the feet of any person older than them, whenever they meet them. The touching of the feet is not only a sign of respect, but also of subordination. Michel Foucault (1976) convincingly made clear how forms of power operate upon the body in modern societies. He argues that power does not necessarily and exclusively emanate from one central source or sovereign figure, but circulates throughout the social body. Practices can inscribe hierarchies on persons and in bodies. Bourdieu has made a similar argument. To him, kneeling and bowing is not to be seen as a sign of subordination but as a practice that creates a subordinate subject (see also Bell 1992: 79-82, 98). In this line of argument it is everyday practices, such as people's gestures, habits, bodies, movements, desires, and self-surveillance, through which power is communicated and inscribed into bodies. Kinship is one of the most powerful tools of society to integrate children into this web of power; gender hierarchies is another.

When a visitor comes, the first thing adults make the children do is bow in front of the visitor and touch his or her feet. When the children are very young, they are expected to bow down before every adult. When they grow older they learn to differentiate between those people who stand in a hierarchical kinship relation to them that requires bowing and those with whom they are not related and therefore bowing is unnecessary. During visits, children are frequently asked: "*Do you know who that is? Do you know how you are related to this person?*" And even if the child cannot yet speak, people will repeat the appropriate kinship term until they have the feeling the child has understood. As in most parts of South Asia, one should never use the name to address a status-higher person. Therefore it is important that children should know as soon as possible how to address other people. The first terms they will learn are the terms for mother and father (*be* and *buba* are the traditional terms, but *ma* and *bab* are more common today), paternal grandmother

and grandfather (*dadi* and *dada*), maternal grandmother and grandfather (*nani* and *nana*), the fathers brothers (*kaka* or *caca*⁷ for the father's younger brother, *bauda* or *tau* for the father's older brother) and their wives (*kaki* or *caci* and *baudi* and *tai*), their father's sisters (*phuphu* for both father's younger and older sister) and their husbands (*mama*), their mother's brother's (*mama*) and their wives (*mami*), their mother's sisters (*jethbe* or *badi ma* for the mother's elder sister and *kamsi ma* or *mausi* for the mother's younger sister) and their husbands (*jethbabu* and *mausa*), and the terms to refer to the other children in their family and their village, the girls (*didi* for the older girls and *bhuli* for the younger girls) and the boys (*dada* or *bhaiji* for older boys and *bhula* or *bhaiji* for the younger boys). When a child knows the term for a person, then he or she knows that she has a relationship with him or her. The terms for older brothers and sisters are also used to refer to people they are not related to, for example an anthropologist or any other friendly stranger who enters their village or house. Today, if that person is much older than the children, older even than the children's parents, people increasingly use the English terms "uncle" and "auntie" to refer to these people. The naming and the knowledge of the kinship term automatically imply certain practices towards the person named. Children know how to greet a particular person, how to call that person and what they are expected to do and can expect from them. Children learn to perform and embody kinship through practices like naming, greeting, or obedience. Kinship relations often require an obedient gendered performativity that is specific to children. A *caci* and a *tai*, for example, are usually respectable people who have the right to give the children work, scold them and even punish them for any violations of family rules, whereas the *badi ma* or the *mausi* will spoil the children. Male relatives are likely to treat them well and might play with them, but always require the display of respect. Kiran, the girl who climbed into my bed every evening to tell me her experiences of the day, told me that she would never start eating before her father or her grandfather if they were in the same room with her. When her male relatives came home, she would usually leave the house and go to play with her best friend,

⁷The first term is the Garhwali kinship term, the second the Hindi word. Nowadays, both are used interchangeably, sometimes the Garhwali terms are more common sometimes the Hindi terms. Therefore I have chosen to give both terms here. Children usually learn one of the terms first, but will know the other one soon after.

because, so she said, she had to behave properly in front of them and she felt restricted by that. She was not very good in the display of obedient behaviour and her grandparents told everybody that they thought she was crazy. She was different than other girls, because she did not like her nose-ring, she did not want to wear proper girly clothes and she loved playing boy's games in the village. Therefore, her grandparents were ashamed of her and called her crazy. To them, as to most villagers girls of a certain age should behave in a certain way, they should be obedient, pretty and quiet in front of adults. Most children perform this ideal type of child when they are in adult company. However, children spend a considerable amount of time outside the adult world, when they are in school and amongst each other. School and education have a great impact on children in terms of gendered performative practices, and on Chamoli society. For children, school opens a space for themselves, where they form friendships and make experience apart from the adult world.

2.3 Friendship, School, and Agency

School does not only change the way children dress. It also provides children and young adults with a space of their own and an education that enables them to imagine a world different from their own, to dream about a career and a life in the city. High schools and inter-colleges are usually a few kilometres away from the children's villages, and every morning and afternoon the visitor can see boys and girls in their school uniforms walk to and from school together. School is time away from village and parental control. It is the time for friendships among children of different castes as well as friendships among young males and females. One of the most striking changes that modern education has brought with it is that girls stay in their parents' houses longer than they used to, and boys have more time for education and other experiences before they have to find employment and get married. One or two generations ago, Garhwali parents made much more decisions about and for their children and adolescents than today. Today, children are able to make some choices about their own lives. That does not mean that they are completely free to decide about their present and future; however, they do actively take part in important decisions today.

In the villages, children's peer groups, the friends they have, and the houses they are allowed to visit are all influenced by the adult world. The villages I refer to here are communities where I resided for some time and the lower caste people were all closely related to each other. The Dalit hamlets were relatively small and the low caste villagers thought of themselves as descendants of a single male ancestor. As a result, the households were closely linked to each other ritually, but there was also great rivalry amongst them. Quarrels among households over land, marriages, gifts and other things were going on all the time. New alliances were formed constantly. Being friends in these villages meant that women shared their work, men drank together, and children played together. But in times of fighting, people did not speak to each other (other than women occasionally shouting at each other) and they tried to avoid each other's houses. Children were then usually told not to play with the children of these families, not to enter their houses and, most importantly, not to accept any food or drink from them. There is a great fear that children might be fed "bad food" (*kabad*, also rubbish, dirt, bad substances). By bad food, people mean food into which somebody puts bad influences. It is food that is supposed to make the children sick. The bad influence could be a spell or a mantra in a ball of hair, or similar things. Like poison, these bad influences can affect a child's health, but they can also influence a child's character. For this reason, when a child started acting in ways unacceptable to her parents, not listening to them, shouting at relatives, running away frequently, having premarital sexual relations, and so on, people often assumed that she might be under such a bad influence.

When children reach high school age, they have many more opportunities for friendships and practices their parents would not appreciate. They spend a considerable amount of time away from the village and their parents. School is the time they can use to start friendships, have romantic liaisons, write letters to each other, and similar things. In relation to their parents and other villagers, the children's agency increases, however they also have to subordinate themselves to new agents who make decisions about and for them, such as teachers, school and older school-mates. At the same time, gendered performative practices and the performance of gender change significantly. The young people who are allowed to move to a university town for their studies, are the most extreme example, but as this is only

possible for families with a considerable amount of money, I will restrict myself to small increases in personal agency and the changes in gender performativity that schooling brings about for children who stay in their villages. School gives children and young adults the possibility to form friendships outside of the village, to have friendships with children of different castes, and to have their first romantic experiences. The friendships formed during late childhood or during the time that is today often called “adolescence” are often highly emotional. These friendships typically only exist at school. Therefore the children write each other extensive letters in which they communicate their feelings for each other. Every small market in Chamoli has a shop where children can buy romantic greeting cards and so-called “gifts” such as plastic flowers, framed pictures, and so on. These cards and gifts circulate between girlfriends as well as between girlfriends and boyfriends. The children usually do not have much money and must therefore save for a long time in order to be able to buy a card or a gift for a friend. These signs of friendship and love are highly valued and kept in a special place in the house. Girls in particular do not have many opportunities to meet their friends outside school. That is why they like to exchange these cards and gifts. But they usually also have close female friends in their own village. With these friends, they can sit around and talk, sing when no male is around, dance behind closed doors, exchange nail polish, or pose for the anthropologist’s camera. I was rather surprised to see how interested these girls were in fashion. One of their most popular occupations was to get dressed in each other’s clothes, to try out saris and, if their parents had the money, new styles of *salwar kameez*. Like girls all over North India, as described by Joshi (1997) these “unmarried girls who await marriage, the ritual of purification, have the freedom of being fashionable and adopting new dresses while they are studying in schools and colleges and are aware that marriage will restrict their freedom of dress” (Joshi 1997: 228). The Garhwali girls know that they only have a limited time of relative freedom, during which they can talk to everybody in their villages without having to hide their faces, during which they can wear new and stylish accessories if they can afford them, during which they can lock the doors of a room in their parent’s house to sing, dance, or talk to their female friends, and during which the pressure of work and responsibility is relatively low. Gender performativity for young unmarried girls

differs significantly from that of married women. Fashion, romantic letters, singing and dancing all belong to the unmarried girls.

However, not all that marks the performativity of gender in young girls differs significantly from married women. If girl-friends are from one village or neighbouring villages, they usually spend their working time together, too. In most Chamoli villages, girls go to the forest to collect firewood or climb up the hillsides to cut grass in the afternoon. While they are doing this work, they sing the songs they learned from their mothers, make up new ones, and tell each other their secrets. This is very similar to the gendered performative practices of young married women in their *sauryas* (the marital home), who also form alliances of women to share the work in the forest and exchange news and sorrows amongst each other. The difference is that the girls are not under the same pressure a *bvari* is while they are doing their work and that the friendships between young unmarried girls in their *maits* and the friendships between young married women in their *sauryas* ultimately have a different basis. A young girl's friend is usually called by the Hindi term *saheli*, or female friend. The friendship between *sahelis* is not necessarily kin-based, although it may be. The relationship is emotionally intense, but does not involve any obligations. In contrast, a married woman is surrounded by relatives and the relationships between her and the other women of the village are usually characterized by mutual obligations and restrictions. Friendship among daughters-in-law of the same village is more circumspect than friendship between daughters of one village. Often, the women in one village who share the same caste or *jati* are also kin, but in any case all married women of one village use kinship terms to refer to each other, regardless of their caste or actual kinship status. Narayan (1986) observed a similar understanding of friendship in Kangra. She wrote, "the intimacy that exists between *saheli* is not thought to be accessible to married women". As one of her informants said,

With a *saheli* you can share those things that can't be shared with others, you can say things that you shouldn't say to our husband's sister or to the sister made there [...]. Only a *saheli* can be counted on to keep secrets. A woman you know later might tell anyone (Narayan 1986: 66-67).

I do not totally agree with Narayan's view on friendship among married women because in Garhwal, friendship among young *bvaris* is not only possible but also very important, as will be elaborated in chapter IV. But it is certainly true that friendship among girls before their marriage is special in Garhwal as well. It is true that there are things a young woman can only tell a *saheli*. Their relationship is not ruled by respect, but by mutual trust. This is closely connected to the different gendered practices before and after marriage. While the young daughters-in-law need to establish friendships with other daughters-in-law to form alliances in their new village, they also have to be careful. In the first years in their marital home, every mistake they make can easily dishonour them and their natal family. In contrast, unmarried girls of one village are so closely connected to each other that one's dishonour means dishonour of the other as well. They are in the same situation, and they are not in a hierarchical relationship with each other. There will never be any obligations between them and they know that they might not see each other very often once they have left the village to get married. Thus, friendship among girls is completely different from friendship among male adolescents, as are gendered performative practices from this stage on. Boys and young men are always in a hierarchical relationship with each other. Young males of one village know that they will always remain inhabitants of the same village, and usually they are in a relationship that includes obligations. Friendships among young males in one village or in neighbouring villages have the potential for political implications, financial support, assistance in finding suitable spouses, and so on. Young village men spend a considerable amount of time together, walking to the market, sitting around in teashops or on the streets, playing cards and board games, and similar things. When they are younger, parents try to restrict these activities and involve boys more in household activities or send them to work with their fathers. But the older a boy gets, the less he wants to stay at home, as activities in the house get more and more connected to females. Boys often start to disobey their parents in the last years of inter-college and the first years at degree college, the years before they start to earn their own money and before their marriage. To a certain extent, disobedience, fights with the parents and even staying away from home for several nights is considered to be normal for young men, even though families do not appreciate it very much.

It is part of male performative practices, part of becoming a man.

Like any social person, young men and women are restricted by rules and norms of their society. However, not all of them act according to the rules. It is not unusual in Garhwal that people assume the source of disobedient, shameful or strange behaviour of young people, especially girls, to be supernatural. Premarital pregnancy, for example, does not only cause problems for the girl, but can also affect the whole family if handled in the wrong way. It cannot only lead to the loss of honour, prestige and integrity, but also has direct negative results on material wealth, future alliances, marriage changes for all villagers and so on (see also Yalman 1963). A girl's honour is directly connected with her family's prestige. In fact, children's characters are said to reflect the parents' integrity, as one mother told me,

People say that children are the same as parents (jaisa ma bab hai, vaisa bacce bhi homge). If the family is good, that means if they work hard, then the children will be good, too. But if parents only sit around and do nothing, if they have no shame (sharam) and no sense of honour, then the children will not be good, either. People here say, a good house will have good children, if the parents are bad, they will have bad children.

Another mother made clear how, on the other hand, good children reflect on their parents. She said,

Our whole family is very good, our children are very good at school, too. My son is always first in class. My other son is studying in Srinagar. He is also very good. My daughter is also good at school. Not one child of this village has passed class ten this year, but she did. My children make me happy. I am not good for anything, but because I have such fine children people come and ask me for advice.

In the following section, I will show that the fact that today girls remain unmarried longer and stay with their parents until early adulthood brings with it a considerable change in the lives of young unmarried women and their parents. On

the one hand, the girls have more opportunities to shape their own lives than their mothers had. On the other hand, their parents have to try and protect them from any harm they might do to themselves or the family.

2.4 Adolescence, Obedience, and Spirit Possession

Gradual changes in marriage patterns as well as rising educational levels among Garhwali boys and girls result in prolonged childhood, perhaps even the introduction of a new category of young people in Garhwali villages that is similar to adolescence in the western world. When Berreman (1963) wrote his ethnography of the Himalayas in the 1960s, he observed,

by the age of 14 a girl is ready to live with her husband, whom she has married one to three years earlier. Ideally, she should have her first menstruation in her husband's household, but some marry considerably later. A boy is ready to take a wife by 16 or 17, though some do not do so until later (Berreman 1963: 165).

Today, most girls do not get married before they have at least tried to pass high school, which means that they are usually married between the age of sixteen and twenty-four. Most girls even hold a Bachelor of Arts or Science before they get married. This is a new development that has happened gradually over the past four decades. As is shown by the following story of Kamala, a mother of four, it used to be very unusual for girls to attend school for more than a few years, especially if she came from a low caste.

I went to school. Who went to school in the old times? Where were schools at that time? Especially for poor people there were not many. For us, for our Dalit people there were none, the few that were there were for Brahman people. So at that time in our area, we were the first Dalit people, the first Dalit girls who went to school. It was us- two sisters and two brothers- who were the first and at that time

the only Dalits from the area around Adibadari, who were literate. Well, my whole family was the first, my caca (FyB) was a teacher, and my father was also literate. At this time, it was a lot if somebody passed class eight, he did pass class eight. My father was a clerk in the district offices in Karanprayag. He was in government service, he got a salary of hundred-and-fifteen rupees per month. That was a lot at the time. At that time you got a lot for twenty-five paisa. And for 1 rupee you could buy food for the whole family. So with hundred-and-fifteen rupees per month we could do a lot. My father saw to it that we children got educated. The family had everything that was needed One of my sisters died after her marriage. After that my father and mother thought that it was best to let us two girls study. One of the girls had died there, in her sauryas (marital home), and that is why they wanted us to study - so that we would find good husbands. Therefore, we had a very good education when we were young. I studied, passed class ten and went to inter-college. My younger sister passed class 8 and decided to quit school. But I went on attending a school. I wanted to pass inter-college. That is the reason why her wedding was six months before mine- because she had quit school. Therefore my father and my brothers said to arrange her wedding, when she was just at home, but about me they said, "Let her pass class ten at least, then we will arrange for a husband". So her mangni-jangni (engagement) passed, and her fianc wanted to get married soon. That is why her wedding took place before mine. By then, I had passed the exams for class 10, and after that my engagement (mangni-jangni) took place. I was 16-17 years old at that time, and times had already started changing, people did not marry their daughters at a really young age anymore.

Kamala said that the times had started changing when she was a child. She was one of the first girls, and probably the first Dalit girl in that area, to finish inter-college. Her parents were quite progressive; otherwise they would never have allowed her younger sister to get married before her. Usually, parents insist that the oldest daughter gets married first, a practice that can be found all over India (see, e.g. Jeffery et al. 1989; Wadley 1992; Seymour 1999), because it was considered shameful to overrule sibling hierarchy and would decrease the chances for a good marriage for all sisters. It reflects attitudes toward unmarried daughters. While it used to

be shameful for a father to have an unmarried but sexually mature daughter in his household, it has nowadays become the norm. Since Kamala's wedding about thirty years have passed and the average age at the time of marriage in Chamoli has risen significantly. With these changing attitudes towards marriage and the preference for an educated girl as a suitable match for one's son, girls remain at their parents' house for a much longer time today than they used to do forty to fifty years ago. Narayan, for example, observed for Kangra in the 1980s that it used to be shameful for a woman to remain unmarried after twenty years of age.

It is considered appropriate for a girl to be married sometime between about 16 and 21. 'You are a shame on the family!' thundered the paternal grandmother of one of my friends, Kamal. Then 21, she was still unmarried. 'At this time in a girl's life', Kamal confided later, 'all a girl's hopes and all her fears are around this question of marriage' ” (Narayan 1986: 50).

I found myself in a similar situation when an old shopkeeper shouted at me. I met him when I was accompanying my friend Sushila to buy fodder grass from another village. This shopkeeper was sitting in his shop with his two young grandchildren, aged about four and six. We bought some food from him on the way to the village and he asked me whether I had children. I told him that I did not and that I wanted to complete my education first, when he started shouting at me: "Aren't you ashamed? Your hair is already turning grey and you still run around like a child? Here, women have children when they are young!" This incident confirmed that most older people in Chamoli villages did not like the fact that girl's age of marriage was steadily rising. They still preferred young girls as *bvaris* and grandchildren as soon as possible. It was their children, the young girls'parents, who made the decision to wait and give their daughters a good education before arranging their marriages. It is difficult to prove, but it seems that the level of education has a great impact on parent's changing attitudes. While many older people are still nearly illiterate, most men who have children in marriageable age today visited high school and their wives can at least read and write. Whatever the reasons are, however, it is clear that family values and practices have changed significantly. The

last four decades brought a considerable change in attitudes towards girls' education and the appropriate time to get married. When I was in Garhwal between 2002 and 2005, most girls did not get married before they were about twenty. Some girls had a university degree, some just stayed at home after high school or inter-college. It was definitely considered more prestigious to wait longer until a girl's marriage. Child marriage still happened in some remote and poor villages, however, it seemed to be slowly disappearing.

For girls, the situation has changed even more significantly than for boys. Forty years ago, most girls were still married before or shortly after menarche, and in very remote villages this is still the case. Although girls did not move to their marital home immediately after the wedding, they usually started living in the marital home a year or two after the onset of their menstruation, sometimes earlier. Today, most Garhwali girls do not get married before they have passed inter-college, which usually means that they are in their early twenties. They stay with their parents and remain *ladakis* much longer than the generation before them. Instead of going through the transition from child to adult, from *bacca* to *bvari* with or shortly after menarche by marriage, they become and remain *ladakis* and thus "children" long after they have reached sexual maturity.

Young, unmarried, adolescent females still living with their parents have more agency than young married women, but a lot less personal agency than their mothers and grandmothers. They are under the control of their parents, but because they have their own space, including school and little responsibility there is enough room for exploration and friendship. Narayan (1986) argues that friendship between unmarried girls is important in Kangra mainly to help the girls through this transitory and traumatic stage just before and at marriage. In Kangra, girls reportedly place great emphasis on their separation if one of them gets married. Narayan collected wedding songs, sung by the friends of the bride that all concentrate on the fact, that these young, unmarried girls are only "birds on a branch" and will one day all fly away in different directions.

In Garhwal, girl-friends are also aware that they will one day be parted, but there is no tradition of special songs about this separation, nor is this topic extensively elaborated on in Garhwali folk songs. Friendship between girls is based on the

fact that they have grown up together, learned to work together, have danced and sung together, attended countless rituals and weddings together. The girls become women together. They work together in groups on their mother's fields and in the forests. Together, they do what young women should do, and together, they hide their secret practices from the adult world. It is true that there is much talk about marriage among adolescent unmarried girls in the village. However, the years between sexual maturity and marriage are also a time of exploration and considerable freedom, in which girls enjoy a lot of time alone with each other, have their first romantic and sexual experiences, and explore, find and exceed their limits. This is possible only because adults have a view of these young women that differs considerably from that postulated in most of the literature so far. One of the most popular examples was always that a father had to worry about a daughter who lived in his house after menarche. This is described as dangerous for the father's house in terms of pollution as well as dishonourable because the girl's father wasted her potential offspring. It was considered to be dishonourable to have a girl long past puberty unmarried in one's own house (see e.g. Kakar 1981; Yalman 1963). In today's Garhwal, however, views on girls after menarche must have changed considerably, otherwise the gradual rise of the age at the time of marriage would never have been possible. One of the changes has to do with understandings of pollution, especially the polluting blood of menstruating women. This is deeply connected with a girl's sexuality, and eventually the changing views on pollution and daughter's sexuality lead to more agency for the girls during this time of their lives as described throughout this chapter. In fact, I argue that adolescence, or rather, the time between menarche and marriage, is a time where female Garhwalis do actually have a considerable potential for agency, and some even exercise it.

But girls still have to perform femininity and they still have to act in honourable ways. This is true for work and docility, but it is also true for practices related to menstruation and sexuality. I have never seen or heard about a special puberty ritual for girls in Chamoli. The girls told me that their mothers instructed them in how to protect themselves and, most importantly, how to conceal menstruation from others. Menstruation in Garhwal is similar to what Wadley (1994) describes for Karimpur, a time of awareness. The first menstruation reminds a young girl of her body and of

her future role in reproduction. Menstruation is connected to procreative powers and with sexuality. However, as mothers have told me, unmarried girls are not yet seen as sexual beings. They should not yet have sexual contact. Therefore their menstrual blood is “empty” and without sexual power. Menstruation is a sign that a girl’s body is sexually mature, but these girls’ menstrual blood is not yet seen as polluting in the same way as the menstrual blood of a sexual active, married woman. Several women have told me that they would eat food cooked by their menstruating daughters. They did not consider this food dangerous for the girl’s father, either. Mothers would never serve food to their husbands made by themselves while menstruating, as their menstrual blood is considered dangerous for their husbands’ health. Nobody in a family would eat food prepared by a menstruating woman. However, it seems fine for many to eat food prepared by a menstruating unmarried girl. I acknowledge that this might be a matter of caste. However, I was offered and ate food prepared by menstruating Brahman, Rajput, as well as lower caste girls. None of them would enter a temple while menstruating, because they fear that they will offend the deity. But their menstrual blood is considered not as polluting as that of sexually active women. A young, unmarried woman’s relative purity is clearly connected with ideas about her sexuality. Unmarried girls should be virgins until they get married, they should not be considered to be sexual beings. Of course, this does not mean that they do not make first sexual experiences. It means that attitudes towards girls have changed and these changes of attitude give them possibilities their mothers did not have.

This is as much a sign of a changing society as it is a sign of a society whose members are more educated than previously. Seymour (1999) suggested that a major factor behind a similar change in Orissa Hindu society was education. For her, education and marriage are closely connected because both are under parents’ control. Previously, marriage was linked to puberty,

but today to be attractive to a suitable bridegroom a middle-or upper-status girl should have [a certain level of education]. Too little or too much education can be a problem in arranging marriages (Seymour 1999: 183).

The same holds true for Chamoli. Parents want their children to receive a good education. Sons need a good education as a prerequisite for any chance of getting a government job or any other permanent employment. Daughters need to be educated because parents want to find the son of a good family for them. In Garhwal, as in many parts of the world, marriage is not only an inevitable destiny for everybody, but it will also establish long-lasting links of kinship with all the obligations and rights they bring about.⁸ If a daughter marries into a good family, her parents' honour and prestige will also rise. But parents usually also love their daughters, and they want them to find a good home. A good home first of all means that at least one member of the husband's family has permanent employment, if possible government employment that ensures a pension. In the ideal case, the girl's husband should be educated and employed. To find a husband who is in this situation, a girl has to have a good education. Sometimes, marriages are arranged early, but the girl's parents try to convince her new parents-in-law to allow her an education. However, most parents-in-law in rural Chamoli are of the opinion that their new *bvaris* should work in their house and on their fields, or contribute to the household's income in any other way. Sending her to school would not only mean that she cannot work during this time, but also that she costs money. Young married and unmarried women have often told me that they feel ashamed to eat in strangers' houses, because they have done nothing to earn this food. If girls do not work in their *sauryas*, they feel ashamed to eat there every day. It is honourable to eat only the fruit of one's work, and shameful to eat without working. Again this is nothing that is naturally female, but gender performativity and part of the habitus. There is nothing natural about the feelings of shame and honour connected to female work and food, but Chamoli girls and women deeply embody the sense for shame and honour in this respect. Therefore, while a young married women may be happy about her parents-in-law's generosity to send her to school or university, it will also usually make her uncomfortable and ashamed of herself. Therefore, parents usually decide to take responsibility for their daughters' education. It is their responsibility to pay for their education and to feed them as members of their household during this time. In this way they gain honour and increase the chances for a good

⁸The economy of kinship will be further elaborated in the next chapters.

marriage. If parents do not have the financial resources to send their daughters to school, or if children simply are not good enough to pass the exams, they decrease the chances of a good marriage. Bira, a seventeen-year-old girl attending her last year in high school, expressed her anxiety:

Bira: *Yes, I would like to go all the way in my studies.*

Q: *What would you like to do after school?*

Bira: *I can't complete school. We have so many problems at home. That means that I won't be able to finish school even if I want to.*

Q: *What is your situation at home?*

Bira: *Sometimes there is just not enough for everybody. I ask for money and I do not have any money!*

Q: *If you have passed the 10th class and your mother and other family members want you to get married, what will you do?*

Bira: *If I pass the 10th class, I will go on studying, if I don't I will get married.*

Q: *What kind of boy would you like as a husband?*

Bira: *I do not need an unemployed boy. I want a boy with a decent job, whose financial situation is O.K. If he is just free (doing nothing) I will not marry him.*

Q: *Do you want to see the boy before you marry him?*

Bira: *Yes, for sure. First I have to look for myself how he is and how he looks like. Then I will say yes! If I do not like him, I will refuse. I won't do it the traditional way. First they make us janam patri, then I get engaged, and then I see the boy after the wedding. No, I won't do so like that! First I will look at the boy and then we will see!*

Q: *If, by chance you meet a jobless boy will you say yes or no?*

Bira: *If he is unemployed. I don't know. If he is a fine person, then maybe I will say yes. What can I do, when I fail the 10th class, I will not find a nice, employed boy!*

Girls and parents recognize that a good education is also a prerequisite for a good match. Hira, a young girl who had just passed her inter-college exams, told me,

The old times were one thing and today is another thing. If a girl is not educated, the boy will say: I will not marry her! Therefore, if a girl is not educated, who will get married to her? Nobody is interested in why she is not educated. If a girl is free, people will be ready to marry her, the difference is that the educated girls will marry a boy with a job and the uneducated girls will get an unemployed person.

Further, some girls recognize that a good education does not only give them the chance to get a good husband, but it will also enable them to work outside of the village, as a teacher, clerk, or anything similar. Theoretically, education opens doors to the girls that will enable them to lead a life very different from that of their mothers. Education increases a young girl's personal agency considerably and it also changes gendered practices. While a generation ago it was unthinkable for a young woman to work outside of her village, today a young woman with a good education can seek employment in government offices, school and so on. Once they earn their own money, they are not dependent on their father's and later their husband's family. A young woman with employment never needs to feel ashamed to eat in her *sauryas*. Education does not only give young women the possibility of earning their own living, but also of taking part in the decisions about their children's and their own destiny. Education and employment can provide a woman with a certain independence from her husband. If the marriage fails, if the husband takes a second wife, leaves or dies, there will be some security for her. Her education might enable her to "stand on her own two feet". Sangita, an unmarried Rajput girl, explained,

Sangita: I will not get married yet. Before I get married, I want to stand on my own feet.

Q: How far do you want to go with your education?

Sangita: I want to pass the exams of class 12, then I want to get a private degree.

Q: If, by chance, your parents find a nice boy for you soon and want your marriage then, what will you do?

Sangita: I will not agree. I will tell them that I have to complete my education first. First I want to stand on my own feet.

Unfortunately education does not automatically lead to employment. Many young Garhwali people are highly educated but unemployed. Not everyone in Garhwal who wants work finds it, and this girl's plans to "stand on her own two feet" represent perhaps more pious hope than reality.

Bira and Sangita both mentioned another point that marks a considerable change and increase of personal agency in the lives of young girls. "In the old times" (*purane zamane mem*), as Garhwalis would put it, girls were sometimes not even told that their wedding day was approaching. Bira's and Sangita's mothers were probably told that they were getting married, but nobody would have thought of presenting the groom to the bride for her to decide whether she accepted him or not, nor would the boys have had much say in the match. Girls and boys had to accept their parents' decision. To a certain degree, this is still expected today. However, children are consulted more frequently and seriously during the decision-making process than was previously the case. A love marriage is still highly unusual and has low prestige; however, people generally agree that children should have a say when it comes to choosing a future wife or husband. The children's agency in this decision has certainly increased considerably during the last decades. Today, a girl can refuse marriage to a man. Of course, this is not true for all families, nor does it have an impact on all parents' decisions. But to involve sons and daughters in the decision about their own marriage is closely connected with education and modernity and therefore also considered to be honourable. It has become common practice to ask for children's agreement. Again, some girls take this opportunity, others don't. Some avoid marriage in this way for years, while others say that they would accept their parent's decision without question.

Marriage and prospective spouses are certainly a popular topic of discussion amongst young men and women. And nowadays children are involved not only in the decision about who is going to be the prospective groom or bride, but also when the time has come to arrange a marriage. But there are other changes in the lives of young Garhwali adults that influence practices and everyday lives of children and adolescents before marriage arrangements are made. Narayan (1986), Wadley (1992), Seymour (1999), and many more scholars writing about young Indian people concentrate almost exclusively on marriage. But this presents a rather limited view

of adolescent life. It is true that marriage is seen as an inevitable fate for everybody, but the time between menarche and marriage is not dominated by the topic, and it is not the only reason for friendship between girls of a certain age. Moreover, the transition of Garhwali society brings with it a change in attitudes and possibilities for young people to shape their own lives. Not so long ago, for example, parents and grandparents decided how a child should be educated. They decided about their children's major subjects at school and university, they decided about the kind of university degree they would pursue, and the kind of employment they should seek. This is still true for many families in Garhwal. However, as children become more and more educated, conflicts about their futures arise more and more frequently. Changing educational standards and economic conditions along with global influences through media have dramatically raised the age of marriage in recent decades and the potentials of agency for male and female adolescents. While the rise of agency is significant for the girls, boys still have more agency than their sisters.

Boys can theoretically always leave their parents. Especially if they are only sons, they can put pressure on their parents by threatening to leave. Often, such behaviour is explained in terms of affliction by some non-human agent. Pankaj, for example, had just finished inter-college and his parents wanted him to study at the local degree college to become a teacher. But he decided to become a soldier. As his father was not willing to give in, he became very hostile towards his parents. He stayed away for days at a time without telling anybody where he had gone. He insulted his mother, and tried to order his sisters to cook food for him and wash his clothes. If they did not do as he said, he tried to beat them. His father had already paid the fees for the degree college, but Pankaj refused to go there. In the end, his father gave in and not only allowed him to go to Dehra Dun, the capital city of Uttaranchal, for recruitment, but actually accompanied him and paid his way. Luckily for the parents and unfortunately for the boy, there were so many volunteers that the army had decided to change the minimum height for recruits on the morning they arrived. Pankaj was not tall enough and had to return home. Eventually, he started studying as his father had wished. But not before his mother had consulted a local *guru*, a ritual specialist and healer.

Because of her son's disobedient and disrespectful behaviour she was convinced that he was under a bad spiritual influence. She consulted an oracle, a medium of the deity Bhairav. She took rice from the house and eleven rupees as an offering to the deity she wanted to ask for advice. Such oracular sessions are very popular in Chamoli. They usually take place on the auspicious day Tuesday (the day of the goddess) and the inauspicious day Saturday (the day of shani, Saturn). Some oracles are very popular, and in front of their houses there is usually a long line of people waiting for their turn. Every patient brings a bag of rice from home and money in uneven numbers such as one-and-a-quarter, eleven, or fifty-one, as an offering to the deity. The rice should be taken from one's own home so that the deity can "see" the family's condition from it. Places and persons have a special relationship in Garhwal and the rice that grows on a family's land and is stored in the family home, is thought to contain information about the family, because it is subject to the same influences as the family. A deity, and some ritual specialists, can read the family's situation from the grains.

Usually, a visitor approaching an oracle's home can see a line of shoes in front of the oracular chamber. The people waiting for their turn sit inside the chamber, giving their comments and suggestions to the people who ask the deity's advice before them. Then, when their turn comes, the oracle will take their rice, place it in a plate in front of her or him and begin tossing it into the air, catching it again with the hands. The deity then speaks through the oracle, explaining the patient's problems and defining the reasons for it. Pankaj's mother had been to such an oracular session and was told that her son had been fed *kabad*, the bad influences that can be mixed with food. It happened shortly before and therefore the cure suggested by the guru after the oracular session was simple and cheap. He gave Kamala some salt and suggested to put this special salt in Pankaj's food. He spoke some curing mantras over the salt and gave it to Pankaj's mother. This, he said, would restore him to his old, more obedient self.

Pankaj tried to exercise personal agency in a rather violent and insulting way. With his threats towards his parents and the displays of anger towards his family, he clearly performed his maleness, but he did this so violently that his behaviour became unacceptable for his mother. When he came home from Dehra Dun, she

wanted to cure his affliction to make sure that he would not disturb their everyday life in the future and remain part of the family unit. To me, Pankaj's affliction is another example where otherwise dishonourable behaviour is redirected from him onto a non-human agent. The affliction caused him to act in such an aggressive way towards his parents. At the same time, this incident is an example of gendered performative practices. While Pankaj acted aggressive and male, his mother acted as a mother to protect her son.

Another incident where inappropriate behaviour was attributed to non-human agents happened to Bira, a sixteen year old Dalit girl, who had started to act strangely towards her family and village elders. She ran away repeatedly in the evenings, even after her father had forbidden her to go out after dark. A few weeks earlier, a male villager had seen her and a higher caste boy kissing, and the whole village was worried. Her father had tried to talk to her, her mother had beaten her, and the villagers had tried to convince her that her behaviour was not only bad for the village's reputation, but would also destroy her future. Bira was however very stubborn and did not want to obey. She did not insist on meeting the boy again, but nor did she wish to accept the control the elders were exercising over her. Therefore she had started to act very disrespectfully towards fellow villagers. She had also stopped going to school. Her father wanted her to pass at least class twelve as he still hoped to find a good husband for her. Because of her increasingly disrespectful behaviour that was dishonourable for her and her family, and her refusal to go to school, he was convinced that his daughter must have been afflicted by some evil influence. He went to a local Brahman, who acted as a ritual specialist in the region, for advice. The guru suggested a small ritual to rid her of the *chaya*, the "shadow" that had afflicted her. During the ritual, the girl did what her father and the ritual specialist told her. She held her head low and acted just as was expected from an obedient young daughter. This ritual, like the salt that Pankaj's mother put in his food, acted as elements of reintegration. The ritual and the salt made it possible to excuse and accept children's otherwise unacceptable behaviour. This way the parents did not have to feel ashamed, because it was not their children who brought shame to the family, but an evil influence that had afflicted the children. The children did not act according to the norm, they turned against practices of

family unity and honour. But the ritual made it possible for them to return to their family. When I saw this ritual, I asked myself, whether the young daughter consciously performed the docile girl because she knew she had to do that in order to get re-integrated honourably into her family. It seemed to me that she reflected her age and her gender and was able to strategically perform this during the ritual, clearing the path to return to normal family life. Once the ritual is done, or the salt is given, people expect a change. After the ritual treatment the children were clearly expected to act according to gender and age norms and if this did not happen the family unity was endangered. I have never seen this happen in the case of disobedient daughters. However, I have seen the bond between sons and parents break. When that happens, the sons leave their parents and their village. They deny their parents control over their future along with the security a son is supposed to give his parents, by going away. But they also give up their link to their family, their land, and their ancestors.

It is a common practice in Garhwal to ascribe disobedient behaviour to supernatural influences. Many visitors to oracles have a similar problem. One morning, I had come to the oracle with one of my informants and we were waiting for our turn, I met a mother with an adult son. He had not spoken to her in years and had recently left his young wife. She came to the guru nearly every day in order to get him cured from the evil influence she was convinced he was under. I also met a young man who had come to the oracle himself to find a cure for his own disobedient behaviour. The guru told him, too, that he was under the influence of *kabad*, something that somebody had fed him. He was also under the influence of bad stars. The boy told me that he had come to the guru because he had become disobedient and disrespectful towards his parents and all other older relatives. He said that he was shouting a lot at home and that he could do nothing about the anger he felt every time when an elder told him what to do.

I don't really listen to anyone or worry about anything any more. When I want to go out, I will get ready without asking, then my father comes and asks, 'Why are you getting ready? Where do you want to go?' Sometimes I tell him, but most often not.

He was doing his B.A. in a nearby town and since he was in this state of mind, he had also neglected his studies. Because of the *kabad* the boy was no longer considered to be a moral agent. The oracle diagnosed that the *kabad* had been fed to him a long time before, and therefore an elaborate ritual was needed to loosen the bad substances that had been in the boy's body and become the agent in his body for such a long time. After the oracular session, the ritual specialist told him to come on the next Saturday to the cremation ground (*ghat*) on the riverbank. He was not allowed to eat meat, eggs, and black lentils, nor to put spices like garlic and onions in his food. The ritual specialist said that the mantras would not work if the body of the patient was not pure. The next Saturday, I came to the riverbank with my camera to see the ritual. I was waiting with the guru at the riverbank, when the boy came. He arrived with a friend. Once they had reached the place for the ritual, the three men started digging a pit. The cremation ground was large and the river shore very wide. The guru chose a place near the water. He said we would need the water later during the puja. Once the pit was dug, the guru made a yantra, the sign of Masan, the master of spirits, in the pit. Then he took flour from a local millet called *manduwa*, mixed it with water, and formed a ball. The guru then circled the ball over his patient's head. Then he formed a face from the mass. He made a tongue for the face and coloured it red. While he was doing that, the guru explained,

The thing that is stuck to him (jo laga hai), I make an image (akar) for it so that when we offer the chicken we can put it in its mouth.

The figure was thought to embody *Masan*, the master of all ghosts who lives in the cremation ground and who should take the *kabad* and digest it. The guru placed the figure in the pit and put a black cloth on top of it.

He has a naked head, you should never leave him naked (nanga nahim karnea. It has to be covered. This is black, on others you put red cloth or white cloth. That completes the image (akar).

Then he took a mixture of seven grains, circled it over the boy's head and also put the mixture in the pit. After that he put little oil lamps made from flour into the pit and lit them. While he was doing all this, he explained what he was doing to us.

Kabad is fed to someone. What do they do? They go, maybe at night, and place it there. They feed it to the person they want to be sick. They make a ball of dirt and feed it to people. That is what you call kabad; hair, dirt, all the dirty stuff with which they feed somebody. And from that stuff a person's mind becomes disturbed. And all that dirty stuff comes from the ghat. It's place is the ghat and what is the ghat? It is Masan's place. That is why we have to make his akar here. Masan will take our puja. This boy's health, everything that is in him, and everything you put into the pit, as if you give an animal sacrifice, who will eat that? He will. So, when we do the work from above, we put everything down into the pit. And after the work, we put the grains in there together with everything we used for the ritual (puja), and then we close the pit. After the pit is closed, nothing will get out again. The kabad is bound then. It will not go back to the person who sent it or to the person who was afflicted. We close it with stones, then with rice, and then with water, then it is really closed.

The chicken was sacrificed after the ritual. But before the men did that, the guru had to make sure that the *kabad* was taken out of the boy's body. To do that, he took water from the Pindar river, one of the Gange's tributaries, and mixed it with mantras, the mixture of seven grains, small pieces of wood from Bengal and Nepal, rice, and sandalwood. He gave the mixture to the boys to drink and started the rituals. During the ritual he circled an eagle's feather together with stinging nettles over the boy while chanting mantras and prayers. While he was doing that, the boy was supposed to drink the mixture, the bottle was refilled until the boy finally vomited into the pit. This was supposed to bring out the bad influences of the *kabad*. The guru told me that it was necessary for the boy to vomit to begin to get the bad influence out of his body. The stinging nettles, the mantras, and the ingredients of the water all then had to do their work over the next weeks. He said

that the bad influence would then leave the boy's body over the next weeks. The boy would slowly return to his old self and lose his anger towards his family. That way, the reason for the conflicts was not located within the family or within the boy himself, but attributed to an outside agent. The boy's misbehaviour was explained in terms of affliction that some jealous neighbour had given to him. People say that this happens when a child or young person is lucky, very smart or very pretty. Other people get jealous and do not want him or her to be "get ahead" (*age nahim calega*). That is why they feed them with *kabad* to disturb their minds. The guru does this sort of ritual for male and female patients, and there are other afflictions, other rituals that are done all over the region to reintegrate children, young adults and young, recently married wives into their families.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how children acquire the specific habitus and gendered performativity of Chamoli. I clarified that they do not learn this as fixed rules or structures that can be taught through language and explanation, but that it is above all practices that inscribe the norms and ideas of their society into the children's bodies. Both habitus and gender performativity are developments that constantly change. Although babies are gendered at birth by being given a name, there is not much difference in treatment, dress and expectations towards these young children. But as they become more mature in their understanding of the world around them and in their physical development their practices automatically change according to the expectations of their social world. Mastery of habitus and gender performativity become more and more important.

As a result of modern discourses that are entering Garhwal mainly through education and media major changes occurred in Chamoli over the last three generations. The effects of these discourses are numerous and seriously affect practices concerning children and adolescents in Chamoli. Young people in Garhwal remain unmarried much longer than they used to and girls stay in their parents' house much longer, which means that attitudes towards girls, girls' sexuality, and purity have altered significantly as well. Today, adolescent girls live with their parents.

Forty years ago, the category “adolescent-girl” was not even locally recognized, because it simply did not exist. Female children became wives and daughters-in-law. Today, the word *kumari* (lit. virgin) is used for these adolescent girls. The time between the onset of puberty and marriage is increasingly a time of explorations, new experiences, and a considerable amount of freedom. The fact that girls remain in their parents’ house and under their parents’ responsibility much longer than their mothers used to also causes tensions. Their gender is marked by obedience, hard work, and docility. If a girl acts in an unusual way, her and her family’s honour are endangered. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the unchastity of a village daughter or any woman of reproductive age threatens the honour of her caste, village and family.⁹ On the other hand, the chastity of women adds to the villager’s and the family’s symbolic capital. This “capital of honour” is closely connected to gendered performative practices and performances of gender and needs protection. Therefore the tensions and the children’s abnormal behaviour are explained through supernatural involvement and solved with ritual actions. In doing that, responsibilities for children’s behaviour are taken away from the parents and the children and projected on to other persons or supernatural beings. The non-human agent is expected to act in unusual ways and the affliction thus explains why the girl has left the path of the norms. This enables families and villages to deal with the new situation, to retain their honour and to honourably reintegrate individuals into their community. At the same time gendered performative practices for young women slowly change and the potential for agency increases.

Young women’s personal agency has increased through this social change while the personal agency of young men has not changed much. While both girls and boys are under the control of their parents, or their parent’s patients, boys and young men are often under more pressure because their future also often determines their parents’ future. Consequently, parents try to find education and employment opportunities for their sons that increase their chances to find employment. Young men are under a lot of pressure in Garhwal because it is not easy to find employment, even if they are highly educated. As long as they have not found a job, they are financially dependent on their parents and therefore it is parents who make their

⁹For an extensive discussion on female chastity and the threat to the caste, see Yalman (1963)

decisions. Young men often cannot get married before they find employment. Today sons should be able to fill their wives' stomachs before they can get married so that the financial responsibility for the new family does not lie with the husband's parents. Kamala, the mother of two girls, aged fifteen and twenty-two, and two boys, aged sixteen and twenty, explained to me that it was time to marry her oldest daughter, but that the family would wait to find a suitable match for their sons.

No, we will only arrange their marriage when they have found employment. My youngest son is still at school and my oldest son should finish his university degree and find employment. We have enough problems filling our own stomachs – how could we afford feeding a child of other people, too?

On the other hand, boys remain in a state with little responsibility much longer than girls do, in the sense that they usually stay in their parents' house and under their parents control until their own children are older. Parents do not only have a major say in the decision whom they will marry, but usually also what they will study, how they will study, and where they should look for employment. A young man's parents usually also make the decisions for his wife and their children. However, boys and young men's personal agency was higher than their sisters'. While women's agency is usually collective or joint agency, young, unmarried men exercise personal agency. As I have described above if the young men's own sense of honour and agency are confronted with his parents' wishes, tensions in the families are the result. Boys often run away or fight with their parents to be able to decide about their own lives. Many parents have lost sons because of this tension.

However, in Chamoli agency is usually distributed and collective. Individual agents are rare, instead units like a family or a village exercise collective agency. When I say that the young men act as individual agents, I also have to acknowledge that this is only possible because they are not yet married. And usually, this phase of tensions is also a search for their own position within the family. It is a phase after which the young men subordinate themselves again to the family unit, where personal agency plays only a minor role. Household and family are crucially important for parents as well as children. Villagers usually identify themselves with their

family and all their interests are located within this unit. A existence in permanent emotional, economic and social independence from parents is nearly unthinkable for Chamoli sons (see also Patel 1994: 53-54). A Chamoli person, whether male or female, is always at the same time an agent within this network of distributed agency and subordinate to the will of the unit. The way this agency and the membership in a unit are played out depends heavily on gendered performative practices, like movement, bodily postures and speech. Performative practices and expectations are never fixed, but themselves fluid and constantly changing. As a child gets older, his or her body will also change. The vulnerability of being *kacca* decreases significantly for male children as they become young men, while it changes for female children as they become young women.

During childhood the habitus is acquired through gendered performative practices and gendered performative practices change and are in constant flux while children become adults. During childhood, persons are expected to make mistakes, but by the time of marriage, they should have mastered their habitus and know what to do and how to move, dress and speak in any given situation. Strategic actions and performances of gender become possible at the moment when persons are able to reflect about their gender and use this knowledge strategically as will be seen in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

Engagement and Marriage

Marriage arrangements and marriage practices provide good examples of habitus, practical kinship and gender performativity. From the arrangement of the marriage, to the ritual wedding ceremony and successive practices of gift-giving and visiting, everything is determined by strict practices of conduct. Marriage in India, as in many other places in the world, is not just the union of two individuals. It is also the union of two families, lineages, and villages. Marriage creates new kinship ties that will influence the future of all members of these groups. Bourdieu suggests that we should think about kinship as practice, as “something people make, and with which they do something”. Kinship is alive and important because it is “practices which produce, reproduce, and use them by reference to necessarily practical functions” (Bourdieu 1977: 35-36). He further observed that among the Kabyle, kin relationships are principles that structure the social world and as such always fulfil a political function, more importantly, men and women can make different uses of the same field of genealogical relationships. The same is true for Garhwal. This chapter will clarify how important the different uses that men and women make of their kinship relations are for the arrangement of a marriage and will lead to an understanding of collective agency. In addition I explore how kinship is connected to gender performativity. In her work, Butler claims that kinship relations play a major role in the way one’s sexuality is “constructed through more deep-seated constraining and constitutive symbolic demands[...]” (Butler 1993: 96). Marriage and kinship are thus among the most important fields were gender performativity

and habitus can be observed and where changes are most easily recognized.

One of the most striking effects of “sanskritisation” (Srinivas 2002: 200-220) and modern discourse in Garhwal has been a gradual, but revolutionary change of marriage practices. Kamala, a mother of four grown children, remembered the time of her wedding and reflected how social changes had affected her own life. Her father was one of the first to educate his daughters and he was one of the first Dalits, she says, who arranged dowry weddings for his sons and daughters. For Kamala and most Garhwalis this was a sign of sophistication and liberalisation. She compared the old and the new marriage traditions and was clearly proud of her progressive father:

In the old times, people arranged their children's marriages when they were still very young, didn't they? Those days in-laws took a small girl with them, there was no dan (gift)-celebration no party in the girls home, no dowry, nothing like that. People from the sauryas came to get the girl. They simply took her and performed the wedding ceremonies in the sauryas . They invited a brahman and did the ceremony. But my wedding was different. We had a proper celebration (danwali shadi¹). All my sisters' and brothers' weddings were danwali weddings. At that time the first wedding that was done in this way among our Dalit people in Chamoli district was my brother's. He went to introduce himself in the girl's village and did the ceremony there. Before that, people used to say, “Get the girl from her parents' house and do the ceremony here.” Now it has become normal that the bride and the groom come to her sauryas after the wedding has happened in her mait. This is a new tradition. Old people never saw a wedding like we do it today. In the old times, the girl did not even know that her wedding was taking place; neither did she know where she was going when the in-laws came to get her. She started playing in the grounds of her sauryas once she got there and thought her parents would come and pick her up soon. In my mait, there is one woman who came when she was seven years old. Her husband was nine years old. His father was very old. He had married seven times but only had one son. Therefore, when the son had grown up a little, he had

¹Dan is a pure gift and connected to an ideology of gift-giving that does not demand reciprocity. The *kanyadan* is the gift of a virgin.

decided to arrange his wedding so that he did not have to worry any more. After the wedding, the two of them always used to play together, that is what young children do, isn't it? Today they have four sons. They are all grown up now.

In the previous chapter I argued that one of the main consequences of the rapidly changing Garhwali society is that children remain free of adult responsibilities much longer than a generation ago. When their parents were their chronological age they were long married and when they were their social age, living as unmarried, dependent children at their parents' home, they had less agency. I claim that this change affected girls the most. Girls are no longer expected to take over the responsibility of a household with agricultural duties or a family during their youth and this goes along with a considerable increase of personal agency in their everyday lives. The rise in agency and the change in gendered performative practices among young men and women, described in the last chapter, also has deep effects on marriage arrangements as well as the young people's situation after their wedding. In this chapter, I explore how Garhwali people, mostly Dalits, arrange weddings, how the bride and the groom are involved in the search for a suitable match and how wedding traditions have changed over the past generations. These insights do not only reflect effects of "sanskritisation" (Srinivas 2002: 200-220), but also and perhaps more importantly the growing influence of education and media on habitus and gender performativity. I argue that social fields and therefore the practices in Chamoli have changed significantly over the last decades as an effect of modernity and modern education. However, while many practices have changed, habitus and gender performativity still mostly follow traditional norms which often leads to tensions. Bourdieu calls this situation the hysteresis effect. The social fields have changed, but the embodied sense of self, honour and gender are still influenced by other discourses. This is especially true for females and is reflected in the tensions between young women's sense of duty towards their parents and the wish to exercise agency over their own lives.

During my discussions with young girls about marriage, marriage arrangements, and parents' authority, it became increasingly clear to me that the girls' opinions reflected this social change in the most articulate way. While many girls had a strong

sense of duty towards their parents, did not question their obligations and respected their parents' wishes and choice in regard to their marriage, others clearly hoped to finish their education and find employment before deciding about marriage. What is important is not so much whether the young women acted according to their statements, but the sheer fact that they articulated and discussed such possibilities with me in the presence of older women. That the local discourses have changed is clarified through that fact that it is not shameful for girls to talk about these issues and the old women did not scold them for improper talk. But the old women also said that the thought of having a choice did not even occur to them when they were getting married. For them, it was the "natural" way to get married according to their parents' wishes. For many young girls I interviewed, it was not unthinkable any more to have a say in the choice for a groom. I was in Garhwal at a time where this transformation in gender performativity had just begun and therefore it was still unthinkable for many girls to tell their parents their own opinion about the choice of their groom. They considered it inappropriate and shameful to give them a judgment on their own marriage. Sunita, a twenty-two-year-old Rajput woman, who was married by her parents when she was twenty years old, said,

What did I think about my marriage? Nothing. When I got married my parents simply told me that my wedding would take place. That was the way it was supposed to be. Nobody asked a daughter about her opinion at that time. They said that it would happen and I obeyed.

Obedience to the parents' choice is also always an acknowledgement of their experience and good judgement, and shows trust in their love for their children. But most importantly it is the naturalized way of living. The girls behave in the way they should behave. Habitus and gender performativity play together to naturalize social practices and therefore, young Garhwalis rarely ignore their parents' decisions and the change in social practices only happens gradually. However even the women who report that they would not want to give their opinion on their parents' choice for a groom start doubting that the traditional way is the only and the "natural" course of things. Today many children prefer to let their parents make the first selection and

then get involved in the decision. Many recently-married women or women who were about to get married, like Mina, a twenty-two-year-old Dalit woman who lives in the same village as Sangita, were happy that their parents involved them in the decision.

I was happy with my wedding. I liked it. When my parents came here to see my future husband, they asked me whether they should give me there or not. They wanted me to tell them my wishes. “We’ ll invite the boy to come here for you,”they said. “If you do not like him, you should tell us. We will not do anything if you do not want to.” After I had said yes, they made the arrangements.

These women feel it was good to be involved in the decision. It made them happy in their marriage. For many, this was their understanding of a “love marriage”. If they had a say in the decision, they said that they had found a husband according to their own dreams and wishes. None of the girls I talked to could imagine looking for a spouse on their own. For them the concept of love (*prem*) had nothing to do with a marriage. That does not mean that *prem* or love could not be part of a marriage, but duty was a concept much more important. For these girls mutual obligation, family traditions, and honour were the concepts connected with marriage, not love. However, significant changes have been taking place in Garhwal over the past generations and these changes go with a transformation of gender performativity and habitus of Garhwali people. Being young and female in Garhwal has different meanings today than it had twenty years ago. Young women know that their parents exercise control over their lives, but they also know what they can do to influence the course of their own lives without breaking the rules.

3.1 Preparing for Marriage

Rupa was seventeen when she failed her final high school exams for the second time. She did not study much for them, either. She told me that she preferred working in her family’s fields or taking care of her grandmother’s household to studying for school. “I do not want to be educated, I would rather get married and leave for my *sauryas*”, she told me repeatedly as I sat by her grandmother’s

culha, watching her preparing the family meals. This was unusual for a girl of that age. Most of the other girls in the village, as we have seen in the last chapter, preferred to stay with their parents longer and receive a good education, which, in turn, increased their chances of getting an educated and employed husband. Rupa was always exceptionally beautiful in the eyes of the villagers and she had run her grandmother's household since she had been a little girl. Tensions between her mother and her grandmother had become worse over the years, and this might have been a reason why she wanted to leave her village as an honoured bride as soon as possible. Failing school was a good way to reach this goal. She hoped to convince her parents and grandparents that she would not succeed in education, so that they would start looking for a groom sooner. In the last chapter I argue that parents consider it honourable to educate girls and that parents therefore arrange their marriages much later compared to practices a generation before. However, it is considered dishonourable not to arrange a marriage for a daughter in marriageable age, who does not go to school. Rupa knew that her grandparents did not think much of educating a girl, anyway. It had only been her mother Prema's influence that had made it possible for her to visit high school. When she failed the exams twice, her mother was overruled. It is hard to find a groom for an uneducated girl, or a girl without higher education, once she has "grown old", which usually means over twenty. Her youth and her beauty, so she said, would ensure that she got a good husband and had the possibility of leaving her own natal family and their quarrels behind.

A few months later, Rupa had reached her goal. Her grandfather and grandmother spread the word among their friends and relatives that she was ready to get married and they in turn passed the message on to their friends and relatives. In Garhwal, daughters' parents are not supposed to actively search for a groom. Therefore, usually people spread the word through networks of kinship and sometimes friendship. As in most societies, kinship plays a crucial role in the search for a prospective groom or bride. During engagement and wedding ceremonies, kinship ties are strengthened and new kinship alliances formed. As Fruzetti (1982a) made clear for Bengal, marriage rules reflect constructions and meanings of the person as well as the way persons are created. "Discussing marriage rules", she wrote, "is

in fact discussing an indigenous domain of kinship” (Fruzetti 1982a: 17). Kinship studies often depict females as mere resources controlled by society. They appear as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, but rarely as active persons. In this context, however, society means male society and the female point of view has often been ignored. I assume, in contrast, that all people both male and female exercise agency in respect to their own society and play an active role in kinship relations. Women and men of different ages and generations complement each other in all aspects of society. One of the best examples of this collaboration is the arrangement of a marriage, as Bourdieu makes clear with his example of the Kabyle. Men and women use their kinship relations in different ways, but they both have the potential to exercise agency through their kin relations. I agree with Eriksen (2001) who postulates that “classic anthropological studies of kinship have rarely explored how particular kinship systems create particular kinds of gender relations” and they rarely “reflected on the fairly obvious fact that a kin relationship is often a gender relationship as well” (Eriksen 2001: 123). There are few studies on gender in South India that acknowledge the complex relationship between gender and kinship. Bennett (1983), for example, found for the Nepal Himalayas that there is a great difference between females who were born from the same patriline and women who married into the patriline. She explains that a sister has a ritually higher status in her natal home than her brother and his wife. Bennett explores women’s roles within networks of kinship and argues that

women enjoy high status in their filiafocal relationships because of their superior ritual purity within these relationships. Consanguineal women, through certain rituals which symbolically shield their sexuality from filiafocally related males, remain categorically pure. As such, they are worthy of both the high status and the relative freedom they are allowed in their natal home. The greater concern with maintaining control over the sexuality of affinal women is clearly related to the fact that they become members of their husbands lineage and, more important, the producers of its next generation, while consanguineal women are transferred at marriage from their natal lineage and obviously have no part in its biological continuation (Bennett 1983: ix).

In Garhwal, women are not only links between male patriline, but they actively use their own kinship networks, for example to arrange a favourable marriage for their daughters and sons. Mother and father exercise joint agency when they arrange a wedding for one of their children.

3.1.1 Family Decisions

In a sociological study of changing patterns of bride price and dowry practices in connection with sex ratios in India, Bhat and Halli (1999) argued that “marriage in most [...] societies is a family decision because it involves the transfer of an individual, usually a female, from one household to another” (Bhat and Halli 1999: 129). A marriage is, however, more complicated than that. The marriage between two young people is of course a family decision, but a marriage is not, and has never been, merely the transfer of one person into another household. It is above all a new alliance between two families, an alliance that will usually last for generations. Agency is to be seen here as collective family agency and not the agency of an individual male. As for most families in South Asia, the arrangement of a marriage is the business of parents, grandparents and other senior family members. Neither the groom-to-be nor the future bride are involved in the preliminary search. The increase of agency for young people of Garhwal, described in the last chapter, extends to the practices for the arrangements of their marriages. However, a marriage arrangement is too important for the family as a whole to leave the decision about eligible families up to sons and daughters. The family is a complex agent in this context who selects other eligible families. Sons and daughters should not even talk about their marriage in front of any older or any other person higher in status. It is considered particularly shameless for girls to talk about marriage, as any interest in marriage is also connected with sexual desire (see also Jacobson 1992: 41; Narayan 1986: 56). Girls who want to choose their own husband, so people say, display a great and dangerous sexual appetite and are in danger of losing their and their parents’ honour. But today, once a family has decided that they would favour a certain marriage alliance, children can get involved. In some cases, young men are allowed to express their interest in a young woman and ask their parents to act in their

interest. But this is rare. Usually, prospective grooms and future brides wait until their parents or guardians ask them to speak up.

Garhwalis consider any blood relative in the patriline for about seven generations and about three generations in the mother's father's patriline, as well as all outmarried females of these lines and their descendants as ineligible for marriage. As Hindus, Garhwalis usually marry within the same caste. Intercaste marriage is possible today, but remains rare. Anybody who may be related by blood or place is not eligible. Because people also establish a real kin relationship with people who live in the same place, it is highly unusual to marry within one's own village². In bigger villages with more than one lineage in a similar ranking caste group, a marriage between children of the same village is possible. Yet, such an alliance is highly unusual and connected with low status because people see such an alliance as quasi-incestuous due to the kin relationship through place. Instead, Garhwalis prefer marriages with families of distant villages. Families have to rely on their networks, established most importantly by and through female family members, to find a suitable spouse for their offspring. Mother's parents, sisters, and brothers or father's sisters, outmarried daughters and sisters all get involved in the search. The luckiest case for the girl is a marriage with the brother of her sister's husband. Such an alliance strengthens the ties between the two families established through the first marriage and it ensures the well being of the girl in her *sauryas* after marriage. Sisters, so I was told, are most loyal to each other. But this seldom happens, as the groom's family does not have a preference for this type of marriage. They prefer to have *bvaris* from different villages, as the possibility that they will ally against their mother-in-law is less, thus making the hierarchy within the family clearer.

A family with a daughter of marriageable age is expected to wait until the parents or guardians of a suitable young man approach them. A family looking for a new *bvari* (daughter-in-law) should actively search and visit suitable families. Both sides rely on their kinship networks to find each other. Matrimonial advertisements in newspapers or the internet are not very common in rural Garhwal. I have found

²This form of kinship through place is not the same as a kin relationship through blood. But it is not "fictive". The kinship through place is as real as the relationship established through blood and even cuts across caste.

a few from very rich Rajput families or non-resident Indians from Garhwal. However, most families in Chamoli rely on traditional channels of communication, and these are dominated by kinship relations. In most families, outmarried daughters, and mother's sisters and brothers are the most reliable source of information, and these relatives usually establish a first contact with eligible families. In that way, mothers who do not usually leave their village to find a suitable spouse for their children exercise their agency through using their kin relations and therefore have a great influence on the selection. It is often mothers who pull the strings in the background. Usually, the number of visitors, possibly mother's relatives, rises during these periods. Members of the mother's natal family frequently visit her to discuss suitable spouses. In this way, mothers may arrange their husband's trips to families with daughters. In other cases they let a family know that they might be interested in giving their daughter to them by marriage. The next phase of negotiations is men's business. When a groom's family hears of a girl at marriageable age, the father and sometimes other male relatives will go for a visit to the girl's village. Usually, a young man's father or elder brothers arrange his wedding. In this way, the family exercises collective agency and each family member contributes to this collective agency in a gender specific way. Inden (1992) talks about complex agency in India as a form of distributed and shared agency. But to Inden, complex agency is a form of agency with unequal distribution of powers, where the male head of the family, the *kartta* is the leader (see also Inden and Nicholas 1977). Instead, I prefer to use the term collective agency because I understand agency to be shared and distributed. The hierarchical relations within a family surely play a role in collective agency as well. However, the role of the *kartta* is only officially the leading voice. Male and female agency are different, but not necessarily hierarchical in this context. It is the combination of male and female practices that creates collective agency.

Young people are considered and consider themselves lucky to be the beneficiaries of their family's collective agency. It is, for example, difficult for a young man to arrange his first wedding himself. Only young men without any older male relatives arrange their weddings themselves and they are pitied.³ Men who are

³Widowers or men who want to get a second wife will usually find a woman themselves. But

without family are without any spokespersons, and will not be able to find a good match. They will only find wives not favoured by others. If a father dies before he has arranged all his sons' marriages, he will most probably become a ghost like Sarojini's father-in-law, who was so worried about his youngest son's wedding that he was not able to leave this world until he knew that his son was married. She said,

My father-in-law became a ghost. When he died, he had not arranged my devar's (husband's younger brother's) marriage. His mind was full of the thought that he had to arrange his son's wedding. My husband had just gone to ask for a bvari (daughter-in-law), and then my father-in-law died. My Sasur-ji (father-in-law) always said that he did not want to stop breathing as long as he had not arranged Rakesh's wedding. He told my husband to go and ask for a bvari , to go and put pithaim⁴ on her forehead. The desire to marry his youngest son remained in his mind. Because of that, he became a ghost.

A Garhwali person is incomplete without a family. A child without parents is pitied, as is a man without wife and children. Marriage is the last important thing parents have to do for their children to make them true and whole Garhwali persons. Young orphaned women have similar problems. It is particularly difficult for them to find a suitable husband as they not only have to find a spokesperson, but also arrange the money needed for the dowry and the wedding ceremonies themselves. Young women often asked me how we arranged weddings in Germany and to them the idea that we have to decide ourselves whom we are going to marry was horrifying. Children know that they are the decisions in respect to the arrangement of their own wedding lie in the hands of their families, but they also happily leave the agency in their family's hands. The parents on the other hand regard the arrangement of their children's marriage as their most important duty. Everything else, so my informants, is in the hands of god. Sarojini's father-in-law is a good example for the sense of parents' duty and there are many similar stories. For Garhwalis it was enough that he was so worried about his son's marriage at the moment of his

this second marriage is almost never celebrated in the way the first wedding was and usually it does not establish such a strong bond between the families involved.

⁴Pithaim is a mark of red paste, put on the forehead of the girl by the groom's male relative.

death that he became a ghost. He could not leave his family behind without having fulfilled all his parental duties.

Parents are always worried about their children's marriages, perhaps more than the children themselves. For children, marriage is simply inevitable, part of the "natural" course of life. There are no unmarried people above a certain age in their village or their relative's villages. They are convinced that marriage is natural and inevitable for everybody. Parents, however always worry that they will not be able to find a suitable spouse for their child. This is especially true for a daughter. Therefore, parents will carefully check every opportunity for marriage they hear of. Once a daughter has been married into a new family, the in-laws should be invited to many important rituals, social meetings, and family occasions. On the other side, the husband's parents not only have to think about their obligations towards his new wife's natal family, but also need to ensure that the new bride will integrate into theirs. Most importantly, the bride has to fulfil their expectations in terms of fertility, work in their fields, care for their animals and the household duties. After all, she will not only be the wife of one of the sons, but also another worker in her mother-in-law's empire. In addition, a bride should be beautiful and fair, docile and obedient. In other words, they want a daughter-in-law who perfectly embodies the gender norms of Chamoli society. But before they can judge how well the bride is suited for their family, they themselves have to follow certain practices that follow strict rules of gender performativity and call for practical mastery to arrange the first meeting with her parents.

The first visit to the prospective bride's home is usually rather informal. The father or brothers of the prospective groom come to find out if there is a possibility of a mutual alliance. The boy's party comes to the girl's house and is welcomed by her family. Often, they are invited to sit down in the house to drink alcohol, English whiskey or local *daru* with the girl's adult male relatives, and they will be offered food. While the men eat and drink, they discuss family issues. They exchange information about their children, their age, the education, their performance at school and college, employment, and character. They do not always tell the truth. I have mentioned the girl who was pregnant and whose baby was given away in the previous chapter. Her secret, so the people of the village said, will be safe. It is

important for the villagers to be able to trust each other in this respect, because the disgrace of one family or daughter also extends to the other families of the village. I also met young women who got married to young men in the belief that they had jobs in Bombay and were engineers or Hindus, only to find out after the wedding that none of this was true. Whether or not parents accept what they are told depends on them. They could ask other people of the village, but nobody will give them an answer unfavourable to the child's parents unless they are kin. Therefore negotiators have to rely heavily on their kin relations and the information they obtain through their kinship networks. Because most kin relations with people in villages far away from one's own are established and maintained through the out-married women or the women who have married into the village, it is extremely important to keep these relations alive through practices such as gift exchange, visiting, invitations to family rituals and so on. As Bourdieu (1977: 35-36) said, kinship is only valuable and useable if it is practiced. In Garhwal that also means that people cannot assume that relatives will help them just because they are relatives. Kin relations have to be maintained through practices and thus made usable. Some people therefore start looking for suitable spouses for their children long before they have grown up. Every time they hear of a reputable family, they will check whether they have children and try to establish relations long before marriage negotiations start. This takes a lot of time and effort, and not every family can afford to do this. Rupa's father, for example, never had a family in mind for his daughter. His family was rather poor, he was unemployed and because of his family's financial situation, he wanted to marry her off as soon as possible after she had failed school. He did not check her in-laws family very carefully. He agreed on his daughter's marriage even before he had visited their house. He said that he loved his daughter, but he was depressed because he was still without a son and because he would not be able to pay a big dowry, he was worried that both his daughters might not find a husband. Rina, the daughter of Rupa's mother's brother, on the other hand, had parents who had thought about her marriage for years. They had made sure that she passed her school and sent her to a degree college afterwards. They wanted a marriage for their daughter that would widen their influence in the region, add to their prestige and, if possible, enable her to lead a comfortable and honourable life. Her father had made

contacts with many families in the region and had kept track of all their sons and their occupations. When it was time to find a groom for her, he was not too worried. He and his wife had always maintained good relations with all his sisters and her natal family. They knew that many people knew them and their oldest daughter. Therefore they could confidently send people away, when they considered it too early for her to marry. Rupa's family, on the other hand, did not treat her mother's kin with respect, nor did they establish good relations with other kin. Therefore, her father was worried that he would not find a good match for her, and he arranged her engagement to the first interested candidate to whom Rupa agreed.

If a boy's family favours the idea of a marriage, parents may ask their son if he is interested. If he is interested, they will make a second visit to the girl's house after a few weeks. Again, the men eat and drink together and discuss possibilities. Only when the possible groom's party has expressed interest in a marriage will the future-bride's father be invited to visit their house and talk to the prospective groom. The girl's father or guardian is given the opportunity to see whether the house and the standard of living are good enough for his daughter. Not everybody does so. Among low castes, parents often do not inspect the groom's house. When parents feel that they have enough information and that the family's reputation is good, they might try and come to a quick decision, for fear that the boy's family might find a better bride if they take too much time. That is how it sometimes happens among Dalits that families marry their daughters unknowingly to a Christian family or to a man who is already married. However, today this seldom occurs. Today, weddings should bring high honour for the family of the girl's father. And a prerequisite for an honourable wedding is that the house of the groom is respectable. In addition, Chamoli people consider it increasingly dishonourable to give a daughter in marriage into a house with a bad reputation, because she will be part of that family and forced to live with them for the rest of her life. This is strongly connected to people's view on bride price weddings. Sax (1991: 112) reports that one of the main differences between bride price and dowry wedding is the connection to family and place. While divorce or remarriage after the death of a husband was possible and common practice in the bride price system, neither divorce nor remarriage is accepted after a dowry wedding. Women should not flee from their *sauryas* to their

mait after a dowry wedding – as their formerly used to – as such behaviour brings shame not only over her natal family, but also over the whole village. After a dowry wedding, the husband is responsible for his wife. He will not be able to divorce her, even if he marries a second wife. In a dowry wedding, a bride is transformed, physically becomes part of her husband's family. Therefore, her in-laws should protect her like a family member after the marriage. It is common knowledge that new *bvaris* are seldom treated like daughters in their in-laws' house, but if she is so mistreated or unhappy in her new home that she has no other choice than to flee or even to commit suicide, people often blame her parents. Giving daughters away too quickly and without careful thought is today considered to be a sign of poverty, carelessness, and ignorance and is therefore highly dishonourable. Rina's father told me:

The boy does not have to be rich, but he must be a good man. His family must be good and the house must be good. Only when a father knows that house and groom (ghar bar) are fine, he can give his daughter in marriage. If she is mistreated in her sauryas, it will be her father's responsibility.

Today, therefore most families try and check the groom's family's reputation more carefully than they did in the past. When parents are interested in a marriage alliance, they may ask their children's opinion, but the responsibility still lies on the parents' shoulders. It has become quite common to give young people an opportunity to see and briefly talk to each other before a final decision is made. That does not mean that they are allowed to spend time together alone, as it has become common among, for example, the upper middle-classes in New Delhi, but it means that they can see each other and briefly talk to each other. This meeting is one of the effects of modern discourses in India and shows nicely that, while the practices have liberalised and the social field is slowly changing, the boys' and the girls' gendered habitus changes much slower and, to a great extent, still follows the old social field. Usually, the boy will come, together with his male relatives for a third or fourth visit to the girl's house. He is then invited into a room in the house, where the girl is sitting with one or two female relatives. The young man is offered tea and the couple looks at each other shyly, sometimes they even speak a few words. This is

usually an uncomfortable situation for both of them and the reason for this is that their sense for their own gender and their habitus tell them that this situation is inappropriate. From a certain age onwards, girls should not talk to any man who is not a relative or a village resident. At their home village, they move freely and can talk freely to every man. But all the men of the village are considered close relatives. Since they were little girls, they have been taught that it is shameful to talk to male strangers. In addition, a potential husband is always also a potential sexual partner, and therefore the girls often giggle out of embarrassment and are seldom actually able to talk to the boy. The meeting is similarly awkward for the young man. The potential bride is also his potential sexual partner and therefore makes him uncomfortable and nervous.

After such a meeting, the young people are asked their opinion. If one of them refuses, it is most unusual that a marriage will be arranged. But no rule exists about this, and sometimes parents marry their daughter to the boy, even though she has refused. This usually does not happen because parents are mean. But sometimes they allow too many visits by the groom's side before they asked their daughter's opinion. In practice the groom's side assumes that they have come to an agreement after several visits have been made and no refusal was indicated. After a long line of visits a refusal of marriage would result in an open affront and might make it difficult to find another groom for their daughter because her parents have brought shame to the family by thoughtlessly refusing this marriage alliance at a time when it practically was already too late. This happened to Sangita (22), who is now married to a terrible husband, whom she had tried to refuse,

Yes, I saw him. But he did not appeal to me at all. I wanted to tell my parents not to marry me to him. On the day he came to my home, he was drunk. That is why I said no. I thought, if he comes here drunk on a day like that, what will he do later? I wanted to refuse, but my people did it anyway, what was I supposed to do? I saw him a little bit, what difference did it make? My parents decided. I only saw him come and go. I sat on the bed and he went up and down in the house. And he was drunk. That is why I wanted to say no. But these people came again and again to our place that is why it was agreed on. Had he only come this one day,

I would have been able to say no. But when he came back again and again, then my mother's people said that this boy had come here so often, that if we then said, "No", he would not have liked that, so that is how it came to this.

I do not know what might have happened, had Sangita insisted on her refusal. There are many girls who say they would refuse to get married to a man they don't like at a time they don't like, but it is difficult to say what would actually happen in such a situation. However, there are girls and boys who refuse to get married, and the fact that the unmarried girls talk about the possibility of refusing and that some young people actually exercise their agency to have a say in this decision shows how much Garhwali society has changed. I met girls and young women, who repeatedly refused prospective grooms because of their education or because they considered them inappropriate. I also found young men who had refused to get married. It is easier for young men to refuse. Sons usually leave their parents' village to avoid such an unfavourable marriage. Some of them even come back from the cities with a wife, but most come back only when they are ready to get married. Most Garhwalis prefer to marry in agreement with their family because getting married differently could mean that they would lose their family and their identity as well. Marriage is part of becoming a full social person in Garhwal. Such a marriage should therefore be held in the family circle. In contrast to the view on marriage prevalent in or Europe and North America, Indians see themselves as part of a greater social body. Sax notes that, "marriage is associated with wholeness and stability" (1991: 34-35). Through marriage, children become adults. Marriage is also the promise to procreate the lineage. If children refuse to get married, they not only break the bond with their parents, but also with their ancestors, and thus act against their most important *dharma* as sons and daughters. Personal agency is subordinated to collective agency.

3.2 Change, Agency and Gender Performativity

One of the most striking changes in Garhwali society is the change from the bride price to the dowry system. Today, weddings are celebrations that add to the prestige and the honour of the bride's father. This used to be different. Sax (1991) reports that in a bride price wedding the procession goes without the groom to the bride's village and takes the girl in a palanquin to her *sauryas*. The actual wedding ceremony is performed in the groom's house. Often, the ceremony was minimal, because the presence of the bride in her *sauryas* was crucial for a marriage not the wedding ceremony. Fanger (1987) writes that not even the circumambulation of the sacred fire is needed for the validity of the marriage.

Traditionally there were two necessary conditions for the completion of a [...] marriage. The guardians of the bride must be paid a brideprice (dam) and the bride must be taken to the residence of the groom. Feasting and ceremony were probably common (although not required) in the first marriage of the bride, but not in cases of her remarriage (Fanger 1987: 143).

This is confirmed by Lall (1942: 90) who notices that the bride price in Garhwal must be paid and the bride publicly transferred into the husband's house to validate a marriage. Joshi also confirms this, "It is enough that the bride is brought to the house of the husband and the presence of the husband is not necessary." The only necessary "ceremony is the formal entry of the bride into her husband's house" (Joshi 1984: 125, 142). However, this marriage system is not common any more. It is considered highly embarrassing to arrange one's daughter's marriage not only in the bride price style, but also without the groom's presence or in the groom's house instead of in the girl's *mait*. I know of one case, where parents married their children in this style while they were still very young. The bride's father received a bride price and the girl was taken to her *sauryas* in a palanquin. But because she was still very young, she moved back to live with her parents after the wedding. This *bvari* never moved to her *sauryas* after the wedding. When her husband grew older,

he realized what his parents had done with this wedding, forced them to annul this marriage and to arrange a more prestigious dowry wedding for him.

Together with the change from bride price wedding to dowry, people also changed their opinions about children's involvement in the wedding, the children's agency increased. "At that time", said one of my male Dalit informants,

Nobody asked children whether they agreed to the wedding. Sometimes they did not even tell them what was going on. One day the barat came, without the groom, placed the bride in a doli (a covered red palanquin) and carried her home to the sauryas. The wedding rituals happened there. In these days neither sons nor daughters needed to know about the wedding. It is different today. Today we are all educated. The Dalits are also educated. Today, we celebrate the wedding rituals in the girl's home and we give our daughters away with a dowry. We do not accept money for them anymore. And we ask our children's opinion.

Once everybody has agreed on the match, a Brahman is called to see whether the horoscopes of the couple harmonize. This is one of the most important prerequisites for a marriage all over India. The couple's horoscopes have to be compatible. The couple's *janam patri*, the horoscopes written by a Brahman before the name-giving ceremony, have to correspond. Once the Brahman has determined that the horoscopes show sufficient compatibility, the groom's father or elder brother negotiates the dowry. Dowry weddings are relatively new for most castes in Garhwal, and especially for the lower castes. In 1910, Walton wrote that,

wives are always bought, except among a few of the very highest caste, at a price which varies between two hundred rupees and one thousand. The money is paid to the bride's father or nearest male relative by the bridegroom (Walton 1910: 67-68).

Fanger (1987) reported that the beginning of the 20th century was also the beginning of changing marriage traditions among the lower castes and the Rajputs in neighbouring Kumaon. Today, marriage by bride price has almost disappeared in Chamoli. Instead, the more prestigious, Hindu orthodox *kanyadana* and dowry

weddings have become prevalent. Today, bride price weddings are considered backward and uncivilized. According to an informant, the tradition has disappeared as a “result of education, awareness, and exposure to the plains and not due to any campaign. It is due to the change in socio-economic status of the people.” This is consistent with orthodox Hindu ideology. According to Manu, bride price marriage is of the *asura* (demonic) form (III.31) and therefore of very low status, whereas the “gift of the virgin” (*kanyadana*) brings merits to the father (see also Fruzetti 1982a; Sax 1991: 104-105). Similar changes have been observed all over South Asia. Tambiah (1973: 69-71) notes that there is consistent moral pressure to transform bride price into dowry, and Sax (1991: 104) reports that it was extremely difficult to get information about bride price weddings in Garhwal because of the low prestige of the system. However, not all the old traditions have completely disappeared. It is still common, for example that “the groom’s family will provide the bride with a gold necklace, sometimes to the bride’s mother” (Sax 1991: 105). The bride’s transfer from her village to her husband’s house is still considered as one of the most important aspects of a Garhwali marriage. It is not her transformation into her husband’s half-body (see Leslie 1989; Sax 1990, 1991: 109), but the transfer from her natal village to her conjugal village that is at the centre of a wedding. People talk about marriage as a daughter “going to her *sauryas*” (*apni sauriyas jonda*) or moving to a stranger’s house. While in the Hindu orthodox idea, bodily transformation happens during the ritual, in local Garhwali traditions this transformation happens gradually through the bride’s change of residence.

The change from bride price marriage to *kanyadana* weddings is ambivalent in terms of female agency. In the bride price system, a woman can flee from her husband’s house and marry another without risking to dishonour herself or natal family, as long as the new husband gives her old *sauryas* double the bride price (see Sax 1991: 112-114). The confirmation of a marriage in such a system is children, rather than the wedding ceremony. A couple’s children always belong to the husband’s lineage and if a woman flees from her *sauryas*, she must leave her children behind. But in the case of severe abuse a woman can easily flee from her *sauryas* to her *mait* and marry another man (see Fanger 1987: 140-152 ; Sax 1991: 104-115). This can be interpreted as greater female agency because women determine themselves

were they want to live. However it is not that simple. The bride price goes from the husband's father to the bride's father, the bride herself does not receive a share, nor is she entitled to any inheritance from her father's side. That means that women are always dependent on men like father, brother or husband for a place to live and food. This does not cause problems for many rich Rajput women, whose fathers have enough resources to take them back whenever they want, but it is an obvious problem for daughters of poor families, especially after their parents have died. On the other hand, women were always highly valued in Garhwal, because they are the main agricultural labourers. Every house needs women to run the household and care for fields as well as animals. Bride price and the fact that women are highly valued labourers contributed to Garhwali women's and daughters' greater agency as compared to other women in North India and their considerably higher status. However, today the dowry practices from the plains have been adopted in Chamoli. And the Chamoli women connect the dowry wedding today with the rising status of women. In the local understanding, bride price is another word for selling one's daughter. To them, the bride has no honour at all in the bride price wedding. A wedding according to the bride price system devalues women because it is nothing else than a transaction between the bride's father and the groom's father, where women are treated as a commodity. The bride price wedding is also called the two-silver dollar (*do takke*) wedding, indicating that girls were literally "sold" into their *sauryas*. In contrast, so my informants, the dowry system acknowledges the daughter's share of her father's inheritance, as well as her value to her natal kin. She brings with her what she needs to start a new household and therefore has much more agency in her married life. In the local understanding, the only profit a father nowadays has is the merit of giving the *kanyadan* (the gift of a virgin). Instead of taking money, he gives his daughter a share of her inheritance. Dowry, so my informants, ensures that the girl comes to a family in an honourable way. She brings all she needs herself. Her clothes, her furniture, her cooking utensils, everything is given to her and her husband by her family. In this way she does not have to feel ashamed. She can proudly move to her husband's house because she brings her own wealth. The new practice goes along with changes in gender performativity. Because a woman in the bride price system did not bring anything to her *sauryas*,

she had to work even harder to be able to eat from her mother-in-law's hearth. She could not be proud or honourable during the first time in her new house because she had to earn that status first. In the eyes of Garhwali women daughters were carelessly sold in bride price weddings, whereas a dowry is a sign of a father's affection and sophistication. Today's brides are also expected to work hard but they have a source of pride and honour from the start and are thus stronger against their mothers-in-law, as we will see in chapter IV.

There are still some poor Dalit communities who practice bride price, but it seems that such weddings are rapidly disappearing. Usually, the boy's family will demand a dowry, but the dowry demand is different than in the plains. As Sax (1991) writes, many Garhwalis "claim that a marriage should unite two families of equal rank [...] and that when it does so, dowry is neither demanded nor given" (Sax 1991: 107). One of his informants said:

In a Garhwali *kanyadana* wedding, people never mention money. Not explicitly. Whatever he gives, he gives according to his respect, and it is accepted. Some fathers do give expenses for the girl, since they are now freed of economic responsibility for her. A check. Also clothes, jewelry and so forth (Sax 1991: 108).

Among Chamoli people I repeatedly heard and witnessed discussions of dowry. But Garhwali dowry is not so excessive as the kind of dowry observed in the North Indian plains. Chamoli people consider it dishonourable to demand excessive dowries, since the goal of a marriage is the union of two families. The groom's parents are very careful to emphasise that they do not accept money for themselves, supposedly all gifts are for the new couple. However, people increasingly demand money or special items such as refrigerators, scooters or even cars. Today, the dowry, also called *dhuli arghya* (see e.g. Sax 1991: 108-109), in Garhwal is usually similar to what Germans used to call *Aussteuer*. That means a girl's parents will give the newly married couple everything they need to start their own household: a bed and bedding, a cupboard or a trunk, kitchen utensils and cutlery, one or two saris and dhotis for the bride. A dowry in Garhwal is usually restricted to that, but sometimes a young man's parents demand money. I never heard of a case of dowry abuse similar to

what happens in the North Indian plains. High dowry demands are still rare in Chamoli, especially among the Dalits. Most Dalit communities are still poorer than the higher castes, and therefore no family with unreasonable demands could find a bride for its son. Dowry negotiations therefore often happen after the families agreed to marry their children. This, so they say, ensures that parents will not start fighting over the dowry.

The first small ritual that happens among the Dalits after both sides have agreed on a marriage is the application of a *tika* (*pithaim*) on the bride's forehead by her father-in-law or another guardian of her husband. The head of the groom's family performs his role as guardian and invites the new bride into his house. Once the *tika* has been put on the girl's forehead, she will call the groom her husband (*jawaim*). Practice and "naming" thus create a new reality for the new couple. In Butler's sense, this naming creates the couple. The girl ceases to be a *ladaki* and turns into a bride and the boy ceases to be a *ladaka* and turns into a groom. The *tika* is like a contract, the promise that the subsequent rituals of engagement and marriage will take place. The application of *pithaim* on a girl's forehead is a very small ceremony without guests. Only a little food and alcohol are served. If the guest's village is close, the groom's family will not stay over night, but return home straight after the small ceremony. Weeks or months later, depending on the groom's family's wishes and the stars, the two families will set the date for the engagement ceremony (*bhagdan* or *sagai*). The agency in regard to choosing a date for the engagement or the marriage lies with the groom's family.

The engagement has recently become a very important affair in Garhwal. This event certainly does not exist in the same way as it did in earlier times. Many old people say that they did not even know what was happening to them on their wedding day. Not only had groom and bride never seen each other before but they were also not told that their wedding was about to happen. When the groom's family came to pick up the bride, or when her father took her to the groom's house, they did not know why and there had not been an engagement ceremony that would have warned them. Today, daughters and sons not only see their potential partners before they get married, but the celebrations are also much more elaborate and happen over several months, sometimes years.

The engagement ceremony usually lasts a day, sometimes two. It takes place entirely at the bride's house. Days before, her relatives will start coming to her house. It is mostly girls of her age who want to come and help the bride prepare for the engagement: the daughters of her mother's sisters, the daughters of her mother's brothers, sometimes also her father's outmarried sisters or their daughters. The girls usually also have a strong connection to their male cousins, and they sometimes come to accompany their sisters to the bride's village. The practices of the unmarried male and female relatives are a good example of their gendered habitus. While the girls come to help with the preparations of the food and spend the night with the bride to talk and put henna on the bride's and each other's hands, the boys seldom help with the preparations, neither do they sit around with the young girls. Their main job is to accompany the girls from their homes to the bride's home, and they accompany them again on their way back. In between they may help to cook and serve the food for the groom's family but in the house itself, they have no obligatory work. This is strongly connected to gendered practices. If males cook, then they cook on a fire outside of the house in big pots for many people. In public events like engagements male relatives serve the food to the guests. Again, this is naturalised, females would never think about publicly serving food to guests at such events because it is a male job. In contrast, the girls are especially needed to help the bride's mother inside the house to prepare the food and the snacks for all the guests expected on the day of the *bhagdan*. As many guests come days before, there is a lot of work to be done and the bride's mother needs help. Usually, it is her sisters and their daughters who help her. Sisters of a *bvari* have the same duties in her house as the *bvari* herself, and her sister's daughters are categorically her daughters, too and therefore their help is welcome in the house. Not every guest can help. It is, for example, considered highly dishonourable to call outmarried daughters and their children to such an event to help. They are invited as honoured guests and should not help with the work. However, an outmarried woman can also demand that her brother's daughters to come and help her. The practices of mutual aid during such big events thus follow norms of gender performativity and habitus, and are interconnected with practices of honour and kinship. The gender norms that are embodied during such events are complex. Males and females, for example

are engaged in activities related to cooking, but while the women and girls cook only for family members before and after the ceremony, the men and boys cook for the guests and distribute the food publicly. This is, of course related to the relation of males and females to the “outside”. At the same time, it is a collective performance of family honour at a very important occasion.

During the night before the engagement all girls stay in one room. They sing songs and tell each other stories, but most important for them are the red henna symbols on their hands. The most beautiful patterns should be applied on the bride’s hands and feet. The next morning they will proudly present their creations, a sign that they are the bride’s relatives and that they have spent the last night on her side. This night is one of the few occasions when the girls can talk about what awaits the bride during her married life, her sexuality, her dreams, hopes, and her fears. The day of a young woman’s engagement is the beginning of the process that turns her into a *bvari*, ending with the *sasu bhent* ceremony, with which she is welcomed to her in-law’s house. From now on, she is treated like a *bvari* by her in-laws, even though she still lives in her parent’s house. Once the engagement ceremony has happened, the wedding will almost certainly happen. I have only witnessed the annulment of an engagement once. On the day of the engagement the bride’s eldest brother died on his way home. A stone loosened and hit him on the head so that he fell dead immediately. In his grief, the bride’s father called the wedding off and annulled the engagement for fear that they had infuriated their deities with this union. He refused to marry his daughter to a family that, in his opinion, brought misfortune over his family. But this rarely happens, usually people consider a marriage to be certain after the engagement.

The time between the engagement and the wedding is marked by a change of gendered performative practices towards and by the bride. The responsibility for the bride has already been transferred to her in-laws, and she can enjoy herself in her parents’ village. She is already treated like an out married daughter. That is why she is not obliged to help with the work in the house or on the fields. It is also the time when the female relatives visit her at home to give her tips about how she should behave in her new home, how she can appease her mother-in-law, how she should avoid showing face to her father- and elder brother-in-law, how she

should act towards her husband and, most importantly, what she can do to get pregnant as soon as possible after the wedding. In other words, they give her tips how she best, and consciously performs the docile bride in order to have a good relationship with her in-laws, increase her and her family's honour and exercise as much agency as possible as a new bride. This is one of the most important examples where a young woman, her friends, and her older friends reflect about their gender and gendered performative practices. Only this reflection enables young women to actively perform their status and their gender after marriage and therefore to influence their lives.

But the time between the engagement and the wedding is not only a time of reflection. It is also a playful time. The time with which the young bride's childhood ends, as is reflected in the following North Indian folk song:

Only four days to play, O mother,
only four days to play!
After four days, O mother,
your son-in-law will take me away (Joshi 1997: 228).

The engagement starts a process that transforms the girl into a daughter-in-law and therefore she also turns from an innocent young child into a sexual being, a wife. This is most dramatically expressed in her dress. For the first time, she is allowed and expected to wear a sari in public. The colour should not be the auspicious red of a new bride, but it can be something close like pink, lilac, or orange. The sari in Garhwal is the sign of a married, auspicious and sexually active woman. Fashionable and beautiful, it can shield the bride's face from view as well as make her attractive for her groom. Dress is an important nonverbal form of communication. Dress can establish an individual's gendered identity and create expectations of behaviour based on this identity (see e.g. Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1997). The practice that the bride wears a sari on her engagement day starts the process that transforms her into a daughter-in-law and a sexual being and automatically leads to changed gender performativity of the bride and towards the bride in terms of practical kinship.

The engagement day itself is a day where the different kinship connections are very important. It is always clear, for example, who belongs to the bride's

relatives and who belongs to the groom's family because there are practices and kin performativities that clarify the relationship. On the morning of the engagement day, the other guests from the bride's side arrive and are fed with a small breakfast before the groom's party arrives around midday. Every guest and every family in the village is expected to give a small gift to the bride and her family, usually money, sweets, small pieces of jewellery, or clothes.

When the groom and his family arrive, they also bring gifts for the bride and her family: boxes of sweets that are later distributed in the village and among the bride's relatives, but also saris, shawls, or other clothes. Sometimes the new in-laws also bring gifts for the bride's mother. The groom's parents give these gifts to the bride and her parents. There are no gifts for the groom's parents at this stage. These gifts could be interpreted as hidden bride price or bride wealth (see Tambiah and Goody 1973). But they do not outweigh the dowry gifts given to the groom's family on the wedding day, and they are not understood as bride price. They are rather symbols of the mutuality of the two families' future relationship. Most of the time, especially among the Dalits of Chamoli, both families have a similar status and a wedding should establish a relationship between equal partners. This is different from the rest of North India, where brides usually come from a lineage slightly less in status than the groom's. Dowry deaths in this system happen where previously minor differences in status become great differences. The bride's family cannot afford the union, while the groom's family members often behave with disdain toward the bride's family. Such practices are not characteristic for Chamoli, where the two families are equal partners. They rather understand bride wealth as an honourable way to establish a daughter in her new home. While bride price gives the husband and his family the right to a woman's reproductive powers as well as to her work on their fields and in their house, bride wealth (*dhuli arghya*) is a gift given to the bride and her husband as a start for their married life (see Sax 1991: 108-109). Garhwali bride wealth is supposed to be for the newly married couple, it thus enables the bride an honourable transfer from her mother's home to her mother-in-law's home. Local ideology says that she cannot return to her parents' house after the wedding, but she cannot be divorced or given back, either. She will always be part of her husband's family. Even if he marries a second wife, she has the right to stay in his

house and to live off his resources. When her parents call her home for an important ritual, the in-laws have to send her. The gifts given at the engagement ceremony honour this relationship. They acknowledge the value of the girl and the mutual obligations the two families are about to establish.

The engagement ceremony can be a long and boring ritual. The first engagement ceremony I witnessed was in the family temple of a very high-ranking Brahman family and it lasted for more than three hours. Most families usually consider one to two hours to be enough. The most important elements of the ritual are the obligatory Ganesh puja, the *pithaim* that the bride and the groom apply to each other's foreheads and the exchange of rings, which is possibly new and adopted from European practices. During most of the ritual, the hands of bride and groom are touching under the hands of their parents and parents-in-law. It is important that the families are involved and that everybody witnesses the ritual. But even more important is that everybody eats afterwards. As on all big rituals occasions, men⁵ cook the food in large vessels. *Dal* (lentils), *bhat* (rice), and vegetables are served by volunteers from the bride's family. After the ceremony, the groom's party is invited to sit down in the square in front of the house, or in a nearby field and young men hand out plates and water to everybody. Eating at such occasions is a good example of gender performativity. The bride's male relatives serve the food out of big containers. After the groom's family the men and children of the bride's side eat, and women always eat last. While the groom eats with the men from his village, the bride eats in a closed room together with her closest female relatives. Thus, the groom, as a man eats in public where everybody can see him and his new relatives can get to know him, while the bride eats in private, because eating in public is shameful for a woman, especially a young married bride. Nobody should leave before eating. In fact, I often had the feeling that people thought it more important to share food than that anybody pays attention to the ritual. Every guest should share the food and therefore exchange bodily substances with the bride's family and in that ways embody his or her presence at the ceremony. The first question people

⁵Among Dalit people, male relatives cook the food, while Brahmans are invited to cook the food for the higher castes.

ask before anybody leaves is “Have you eaten?”⁶ If somebody should leave without food, it is an offence against the family. Usually, the groom’s party leaves after the food, but not before they have announced either a date for the wedding, or at least make a statement about month and year.

Rupa was lucky. Soon after her family decided that it was time for her to get married, a man arrived at her house, whose older son was already married to another daughter of Rupa’s village. He was looking for a wife for his youngest son and his *bvari* had told his wife about Rupa. The couple did not object to two village sisters living in their house. There would be three *bvaris* and Rupa’s husband was already employed in the army. As soon as he heard of Rupa, her father-in-law came to her village to look at her and talk to her parents and grandparents. The two families quickly agreed on a marriage and within four weeks after his first visit. Rupa’s father-in-law put the *tika* on her forehead. Three months later her *bhagdan* took place and she was waiting for her wedding the last time I saw her. Her father remembered his wedding day with her mother and wrote down the following description to explain what a wedding was like then⁷.

Prema Devi and Rupchand married twenty-two years ago. They were very happy on their wedding day. At the time there were two types of wedding. The one was the two-silver dollar (do takke) wedding (the bride price wedding). The other was the dowry-style wedding (dan ki). Prema’s wedding was a dowry (dan ki) wedding. At the time there was no road from her sauryas to her mait. For this reason the wedding party had to fetch the bride on foot. Prema’s barat⁸ came with at least fifty people. When they left their village, they played the pipes and the drums, and they walked down the hill to the next street. Then, a bus came, and all the people sat down on it. They arrived very comfortably (aram se) at the market near Prema’s mait. Everybody was very happy and the people of the barat started to sing songs

⁶At other occasions, “Have you eaten” is also a form of greeting to show that people care about each other.

⁷This is my translation. The text switches constantly between the first and the third person, which is the way Rupchand talks. I chose not to change this.

⁸*Barat* is the procession of (mostly male) guests and relatives of the groom, who accompany him to the bride’s home to witness the wedding ceremony and bring her to her *sauryas*.

and danced in the street.

Four or five baratis arrived earlier than the rest of us in her mait. They told everybody and the bride that Rupchand was a lame boy (dam lula), they said to her, "One of his legs is crippled, why do you give your own daughter to a person like that?" They said this to everybody and everybody heard it. Prema Devi had heard it, too. She heard that her husband was an ugly and lame fellow. Therefore, she made up her mind that she would never marry a man like that. Instead, she wanted to drown herself in the river. "I will rather die than go with a man like that," she thought to herself. All the people of her village tried to talk sense into her, but she did not believe them. Finally, her uncle came and scolded her. He told Prema that she should not worry. He said, "If that boy is really so bad, then you and I will go and die together, but stay calm until you see him. First have a look at him yourself and then see what you want to do." When the barat arrived, a few people were dancing in front of me. But when the people saw me behind all the other people, they were very happy that Prema's jawaim (husband) was a very good man. Prema had sworn to herself, if her husband were lame, she would run straight to the river and die. She was standing right behind the door, peeking out. When Prema Devi saw me, she was very happy that her husband was fine. The wedding took place in a very happy mood. People were eating and drinking. At night, someone played the drum, someone else sang. Old and young had given their presents and received their share of the feast. When the wedding was over, the barat set out for Prema's sauryas . It was a wonderful day. Everybody was dancing and playing (nac khel) when we reached our home. At Rupchand's home, food and drink were prepared and everybody was waiting for the guests to arrive. Everybody ate and drank and then left for their homes.

After the wedding the hagratt (the first return to the mait after the wedding) took place. At the time my hagratt happened, Prema and her brother went to their village without me. I did not join them because Prema was to stay in her mait very long, they said she would stay for at least ten days. That is why I did not come with Prema to her mait. If I had gone, I would have had to stay there for ten days and what would I have done there? Prema was not supposed to come home with me any faster because whenever a new dulhan (bride) came to a house, she was not to

see the face of her sas until the eighth gati (eighth solar day) of this month. This is twenty-two years ago. This is why I did not come to her mait with them. When Prema had been gone for six to seven days, I went to get her. When I arrived at her village, everybody was very happy. Their jawaim (son/brother-in-law, husband) had come. After we had eaten at night, Prema and her sisters came to my room with their friends and we joked and laughed. We kept on talking for a long time that night. Finally, everybody went to their rooms and we slept. Next morning, Prema and I got ready to leave. We went home. We left her mait and happily arrived at our village.

Rupa's father described his wedding for me so that I should know what to expect. When he told me the story, twenty-two years had passed and a few things, including gendered performative practices had changed. It is clear that Rupchand and Prema had not seen each other before the wedding. When they were young, children were still much more under their parents' control and decisions were made for them and without them. However, most of the things Rupchand described are similar in today's weddings. Usually, both families spend a lot of money for the wedding arrangements. The groom's father hires one or two buses and jeeps for the *barat* as transport to the bride's home. Usually, the *barat* is constituted by the groom's best friends and all the other young men of his village, all his male relatives, some children, and few unmarried girls of his village. Married women never go with the *barat*. It is inappropriate for women to come with the *barat* and unthinkable for most in line with Chamoli women's habitus and gender performativity, as described in chapter two. Instead, they stay behind and prepare the house for the bride and her family who will arrive with the *barat* in the evening of the same day, or by the next day, depending on whether the wedding lasts for one or two days at the bride's place. Many families decide to shorten the wedding to a one-day celebration because that spares them the uncomfortable experience of having hundreds of drunken men in their house at night. Many weddings have ended badly because of too much alcohol and consequent aggressiveness. Therefore, the one-day wedding is often preferred especially among the rather poor Dalits I knew. Of course a one-day wedding celebration is also much cheaper. The long celebrations are more prestigious, but,

because many Dalit people prefer to have an honourable short wedding than a prestigious wedding that ruins them financially and ends in dishonourable fights of drunken men, they are rare among the Dalits.

In both villages, all women work for days to prepare all the food needed for the wedding guests. About two weeks before the wedding, young girls and *bvaris* from all families start visiting the bride's house for an hour a day to help with the work. They come and help processing the rice, making the sweets, grinding grain to flower, clean the house and do all other works that need to be done before the wedding. Every woman of the village contributes something. The working is at the same time part of gender performativity and the performance of village solidarity. It is women who do this work and they understand it as their natural duty as women, men and boys would not even think about doing such work. At the same time they know that they are contributing to village solidarity; help is like a gift. Mutual help expands and contracts bonds between the different family units in one village. This help reaches its climax on the day before the wedding, when all women meet at the bride's or the groom's house to make *rotis* (bread). They form groups who sit around at small fires and share their work. Some mix flower and water, others form the *rotis*, while still others cook them on the fire in their pans. Without the help of the other women, no village family would be able to arrange a marriage and feed such a large gathering. The *rotis* are needed on both sides as breakfast for the *barat*, visiting family members and as part of a snack handed to the *barat* on arrival in the bride's village.

Married women never join the *barat*, but that does not mean that they are not involved in or important for a wedding. It is the male relatives' role to travel to the bride's house to pick her up, and it is the women's role to prepare everything for her arrival. On the bride's side, it is the women's role to make sure that all the guests are satisfied. They prepare food and snacks, and welcome the guests. And they sing the wedding songs to greet the *barat* and to comment on every stage of the wedding. When the square in front of the house is ritually cleaned with cow dung before the ritual bath, for example, the women sing the following song, asking for Lord Brahma's blessing of the place and the occasion,

Listen, Lord Brahma
Decorate the ceremonial chowk
With green gobar (cow dung), flower
Jewels and pearly
Make this occasion successful with your blessings (Capila 2002: 133).

The first ritual on the day of the wedding is the *mangal snan*, or the *ban snan*, the ritual bath in the house of the groom and the bride respectively. To bless the young bride or groom, an uneven number of female relatives dip a small bundle of grass into a pot of tumeric paste and touch the bride's or the groom's feet, knees, arms and forehead with this. Afterwards their whole body is smeared with tumeric paste and then washed off with water. Then the bride gets prepared for the *barat* to come, while the groom dresses to leave for his bride's *mait* with the *barat*. While he dresses, the *baratis* (the members of the *barat*) are served a small snack at the groom's house, before the village women send them off to the *dulhan's* (bride) village. All *baratis* squeeze in a bus or jeeps, some sit on the vehicle's roof and sing loudly. At the same time, the bride has her *mangal snan* in her home. All morning, her relatives and friends of her family come from all directions to witness her wedding and to bring a present. The presents brought by the relatives are part of her dowry. Every relative has to bring a present, and all the present are precisely recorded. Every family of the village and all related families have to give a present. This gift giving is very important in terms of practical kinship, as one of the women explained to me,

There are weddings all over the place at the moment. I have to go to all of them and bring an appropriate present. If I do not go, on the day my boys will get married nobody will come. If I do not go and help, nobody will help me and if I do not give a present, people will be angry with me. It is more difficult with people who have a daughter. If they give a sari for other people's wedding, then, on their daughter's wedding these people will give a sari. If they give one rupee, she will get one rupee back, and if they do not go to other people's wedding at all, then nobody will come to their daughter's wedding. I have to think about that, too. That is very important. If I do not live in peace and friendship together with the other villagers, if I do not

do my work, then what will happen?

Gift giving is therefore a practice that reinforces kinship ties and strengthens the collective agency of the kinship network. In a way this is also a method to avoid being financially ruined by dowry demands. Fanger (1987) writes that the bride's family is not only expected to pay for the feast, but also for the dowry. His claim centres on the argument that bride price and dowry in North India are in fact not opposing principles. He argues that in the transitional phase between bride price and dowry system, Kumaonis used to take help from the groom's family in form of grain or money to arrange the feast needed for a *kanyadana* wedding. This, so he goes on, was not longer acceptable after a while. The help of the groom's parents was considered to be like bride price and a man should be able to pay for his daughter's wedding and for her dowry on his own. If a father wanted a wedding to add to his prestige, he could not accept anything from the groom's side. This is true in principle. However, the bride's family does not have to raise the means for the feast and the dowry alone. Every family of the village not only helps the bride's mother to prepare for the wedding, but also gives a small gift and small amounts of rice or lentils or some other food for the feast. The mother's brother usually gives a bed or a trunk, the most expensive items of the dowry⁹, and in that way, the wedding feast as well as the bride wealth are a product of a bride's village's and her relatives' collective agency. All gifts are displayed in the entrance of the courtyard (*chowk*) so that the *baratis* can inspect everything when they come and carry it all away with the bride when they leave.

Once the *barat* reaches the bride's village, loud music is played and the young men start dancing in the street. Unfortunately, the flutes and the drums that were beautifully played on Premas and Rupchand's wedding have been replaced by a "western style" combo that plays loud music with a strong beat over loudspeakers. But this music is very popular among young Garhwali men, and they dance wildly to the sounds of the combo. Like everything else in the wedding ceremony a wedding celebration exemplifies the differences of gender performativity between male and

⁹This is a practice wide spread all over North India. The mother's brother always gives the most expensive gift or bears a large share of the expenses.

female. The wild dancing, for example is a male practice on festivities into which young boys are involved as soon as they can walk. Young girls also learn to dance. But because there are never any older girls who join the dancing at such occasion, girls also learn that it is inappropriate to dance in public after a certain age. The dancing of young women is associated with their sexuality and therefore considered to be shameful. Young women embody the sense of honour and shame and would never think about dancing in public. Similarly, the groom should not dance or drink, because he should “perform” the deity he embodies on that day. During most weddings, the groom’s family organizes a horse for the groom. He wears a modern, western- style suit and a “crown” with golden strings hanging down in front of his face. Nobody, so my informants, should see the groom’s face before the bride on that day. The young men of the *barat* dance happily in front of the horse and lead the groom on his horse into the bride’s village. Once they have arrived, the village women sing a song like the following to welcome them,

They have arrived!

They have arrived, from Dev lok

Lord Shiva, has arrived to wed Parvati.

Lord Vishnu to wed Lakshmi

And Lord Brahma to wed Savitri (Capila 2002: 133).

The singing at weddings is a performance not only of gender but also of age and status. The text of the song at same time welcomes the guests and signifies that the bride and the groom are considered to embody the great deities on the day of their wedding. While the singing is a performance, the way the women sit and dress and relate to the groom is part of their gendered habitus.

After everybody sat down in the courtyard (*chowk*), the *baratis* are served water and juice, later alcohol is given to the adult men in private. The bride’s male relatives distribute small envelopes with money, usually five or ten rupees, to all the guests and somebody offers a small snack. When everybody has received a share, the groom is officially welcomed into the family, the bride’s parents wash the dust from his feet, and the father speaks the vow (*samkalpa*) to give him his daughter as his wife. All the while, the village women sing their songs. The following song,

for example, is sung before the bride enters the square to be brought to her groom's side by her mother's brother,

Open up, open up! This curtain
And see the beauty of the bride
Our daughter is beautiful like Gauri (Parvati),
And you Krishna like are black like a chamar¹⁰ (Capila 2002: 137).

Today, Garhwalis also often exchange *malas* (garland, necklace, or string of beads) during the wedding, but that is not the core of the ceremony, but rather part of the grooms welcome. After this, a Brahman performs Ganesh puja and the actual wedding ritual the core of which is a circumambulation of the sacred fire. Tied together, the couple has to circumambulate the sacred fire, which has been lit at an especially auspicious place under a palm leaf-roof. The Brahman asks the couple to stop several times during the circumambulation. As a symbol of unity the husband has to grind grain, seeds and spices with her feet on the grinding stone. This is a Garhwali addition to the ritual of circumambulation that, in orthodox Hinduism transforms the bride into her husband's half-body (see Sax 1991: 78-79), exemplified by the following song:

¹⁰chamars are leatherworkers, tanners and form a low caste group in North India. This remark refers to the common notion of Garhwali and other North Indian people that low caste people have a darker skin because they are the native people of the country

As you take the first round of the sacred fire
You are a kunwari
As you take the second round of the sacred fire
You are a kunwari
When you take the third round of the sacred fire
You are mother's loved one
When you take the fourth round of the sacred fire
You are your father's beloved little girl
When you take the fifth round of the sacred fire
You are your brother's beloved sister
As you take the sixth round of the sacred fire
You are about to become somebody else's
As you complete the seventh round of the sacred fire
You have become your mother-in-law's beloved daughter-in-law (Capila
2002: 140).

Garhwalis today practice their weddings in a style that has become similar to orthodox Hindu weddings. However, they do not take them over as they are. I think that the orthodox practices are mixed with local symbolism. In Garhwal, a bride becomes a daughter-in-law through residence in her *sauryas* and through the work she does there. The grains and seeds they grind together are symbols of the food and the resources the couple will share and the work the daughter-in-law will do in her *sauryas*.

After the circumambulation, the groom puts the red powder on the parting of her hair. As in many parts of North India, this is an important sign of a married woman. After this day, she is supposed to put the red powder on the parting of her hair every morning. In the weddings I have seen among the Dalits in Chamoli, an unmarried sister of the groom, or any other unmarried girl of his natal village, then gives the groom nailpolish that he has to put on her nails, a brush with which he brushes her hair, lipstick to put on her lips, and whatever she could think of as a game after the ritual. The small game is supposed to help the couple to get acquainted with each other and is a symbol of the groom taking care of his wife's needs from now on. Then, the groom's sister gives both of them a piece of sweet to

feed to each other. In the end, all guests are served food again. The bride and the groom sit in a room usually together with their parents and eat. This is the first, and for many the only time when they eat together, because a wife usually eats after she served her husband. After the food, the *baratis* start playing music again, sing and dance. If it is a one-day wedding, they will leave soon after that. The bride's father will carry her out of the house into the *doli*, the palanquin in which she will be taken to her *sauryas*. She should not touch her *mait's* earth anymore before she enters the palanquin. Therefore she has to be carried. This is usually the most dramatic moment of a wedding. The bride starts to wail loudly and all the married women of the village cry, too. She clings to her father's neck, refusing to let go, until he finally loosens her grip, saying goodbye. Then the *baratis* pick up the *doli* and carry her away, followed by her dowry goods. The bride is expected to cry all the way to the *sauryas*. However, if the village is far away, today's brides usually stop crying as soon as they are out of their mothers' earshot.

Crying on the wedding day is one of most important gendered practices for young brides. It is the girl's expression of grief to leave her mother and father, her siblings and her friends behind, a separation that is usually depicted as traumatic (see Sax 1991). The weeping performs her connection to the beloved people of her *mait*. In that sense weeping is an embodied expression of loyalty towards her father. Young married women always cry when they leave the *mait* for their *sauryas* for years after that first time. The sound of crying women will probably be familiar to any visitor of North Indian villages. If a woman does not weep on her wedding day, people will say that she is cold and heartless or that her parents must have treated her badly. That is why the weeping of the bride, as an expression of her love to her parents, is one of her many duties. This is not exactly gender performativity in Judith Butler's sense because most young bride's today are well aware of their duty to weep. It is the performance of gender, love and kinship. But some girls may not be aware of this. The weeping is a practice that is neither totally unconscious nor totally conscious or strategic, it belongs to the wedding day and is part of the parting. The weeping embodies the two performative selves of the women, the daughter and the daughter-in-law and exemplifies her deep connection to her *mait*. For some villages, a weeping *bvari* is also the prerequisite for a deity

following her for her protection. For some *dhyani* s, the deity will come with them if they are still crying while passing a particular place. One married woman told me,

The devta always comes with his dhyanis on the day of her wedding. He comes with her in the doli. If someone does not want the devta to come, then we should not cry at that particular place. A dhyani should not cry at that place. I probably cried there while passing to go to my sauryas. There were tears and the devta came with his dhyani. He also came with my sister, another sister, my taoji's daughter, and many of my village sisters.

When the *bvari* arrives in her *sauryas* for the first time, she has to change her performance again. She should stop crying when she is greeted by her mother-in-law and the other married women of her new family and village. When she leaves the palanquin, her mother-in-law greets her with the *sasu bhent* (the mother-in-law's gift). In this ritual her mother-in-law washes the bride's feet while a priest chants mantras. The guests and the villagers are fed again and all the women of the village come to greet the bride while the young men keep on dancing in the courtyard. The bride now has to perform the newcomer, new daughter-in-law, new "sister" and new wife. This is another example where it is not clear whether bride is actively and consciously performing her status and her gender or whether her behaviour is part of unconscious gendered performative practices. In any case, she is able to act appropriate only because she has seen the arrival of new brides in their *sauryas* so often in her own *mait*. She knows exactly what people expect her to do, but at the same time most brides feel so self-conscious and insecure that their tranquillity also becomes "natural". She is neither purely performing, nor is she purely subject to automatic gender performativity. She is acting according to the gender she embodies as part of her habitus, and partly consciously performs her gender and her status.

The new bride is expected to sit in a room and talk to every woman who comes. This custom is widespread in the Himalayan region. Bennett (1983) describes a similar practice in Nepal as,

[...] the customary viewing of the bride. All the family members and

village neighbour women pay a rupee or two for the privilege of looking at the new bride's face, which had remained covered during most of the wedding ceremonies. For that small price they buy license to minutely examine and criticize the bride, her features, and the gifts sent with her by her parents (Bennett 1983: 171).

The women in Chamoli neither have to pay to see the bride, nor do they excessively criticize her at this first meeting. Most women merely stare at the young woman. Only some of the older women ask her questions. In contrast to the criticism Bennett describes in Nepal, Garhwali women say that this is done to comfort the bride. It is better, if there are constantly people around her, who ask her questions and keep her busy, than leaving her alone. Alone, she would cry more and long for her home. This first meeting with the village women is a kind of welcome into their circle. While the men keep on dancing outside, the women inside comfort the young bride, give her food, and eventually put her to sleep.

On the morning after the wedding the bride gets water from the village well for the first time. She takes the brass water pot, puts it on her head and walks, accompanied by her in-laws and some village women, to the village centre, fills the pot with water, and carries it back to her house. The villagers in Chamoli consider this the beginning of her transformation into becoming a full member of the village. Getting the water on this first day is a symbolic performance of her future role in her new household. From now on, she will contribute to her husband's household with her work and therefore transform into a "proper" wife. Like every other young woman of the village, she will go her way to the well every morning. And because she lives in the village, eats food that grew on her family's fields, and drinks the water from the village well, she will become a villager. I mentioned in the previous chapter that water is very important for Garhwali villagers. For them, water of a certain place changes the body and the character of any person. People from one village are said to be similar in character and appearance because they drink the same water. The neighbouring village, for example, was said to have black water (*kali pani*) that makes people's character bad. A new daughter-in-law slowly changes and becomes like the other villagers through eating the same food and drinking the same water.

After breakfast, the bride and her relatives ritually return to her natal village (*hagrat*). The husband is usually expected to accompany them and to stay in her village for a few days. In some villages, they have to give a sacrifice to the village deity, in others the visit is simply a chance for her family to get to know their new *jawaim*. Especially the bride's younger sisters want to get to know their *jija* (older sister's husband). As Rupchand said, the young women make the young groom sit with them long until the sun has set and ask him all sorts of questions, joke with him, and tease him. It is the beginning of their practical kin relationship. Sisters, especially younger, unmarried sisters, can have a special relationship with a woman's husband. When he invites them to his house for the first time, they can expect a generous gift, usually a sari or a new *salwar kamiz*. In his house, they are not treated like usual guests, but more like their sister, like the *bvari* herself. Unlike the visiting outmarried daughters, the sisters of a *bvari* work in her household. She can call them to help her with her work on the fields, they have to be invited to come to any festivity, and her children are like their children. This also becomes clear through kinship terms used in Garhwal. The mother's older sister is the *badi ma* (big mother), the younger sister the *choti ma* or *mausi* (little mother). Often, an unmarried woman's *jija* helps her and her family with her education or her marriage arrangements. Sometimes the younger sister even stays at his house. It is not a taboo relationship, although it is a potential sexual relationship. It is not uncommon to marry a younger sister as a second wife, if the first wife cannot have children or if she had children and died before they were grown up. In fact, both sides often favour such an alliance. And they have a joking relationship that is established during his first visit.

3.3 Conclusion

Changes in practices concerning marriage arrangements and marriage practices happen in line with changes of agency, gendered dispositions, performativity and local understandings of honour. Whereas a generation ago, it was unthinkable, even shameful for a daughter to articulate her opinion about her own marriage and her prospective groom today it is considered sophisticated if children are involved in the

decision and can add to parents' honour. However while the modern discourses that come into Chamoli through media and education have led to a change of practices, ideas and gendered performative practices slowly follow. While it is a performance of sophistication and modernity to arrange a meeting between a prospective bride and groom before the families come to a decision, the individuals involved often feel uncomfortable in such a situation because it feels inappropriate to them.

During the practices connected with arranging a marriage and during the ceremonies of engagement and marriage habitus and gendered performative practices are easily identified. They play a major role in the success of these occasions as "naturalised" systems of norms and expectations. However performance and performativity are not always easily distinguished. Performance presupposes the existence of a consciously acting agent who does that performance and should not be confused with performativity that contests the very notion of the subject (Butler 1993). To Butler, all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence, and

gender proves to be performative that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed (Butler 1991: 25).

According to Butler, a person cannot simply choose his or her gender as if it were merely a role to play. Gender performativity creates identities and are is therefore unconscious and part of people's identity. I agree with that to a certain extent. However, I argue that people are well aware of some of their society's constraining normative frames that determine the gender of a person. At times, this knowledge can lead to the performance of gender through practices such as weeping or docility. These self-interested strategies are most often misrecognized as moral systems in the Bourdieuan sense, however sometimes morals system and self-interested strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This, however becomes most obvious in the strategies of young brides to gain control over their own lives during the first years in their *sauryas* with which I will deal in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Taking over Responsibility

Times are changing in Garhwal, and perhaps many young daughters-in-law who get married these days do not believe in the power of her mother-in-law anymore and therefore do not even perform the docile and polite daughter-in-law. But most of my informants were middle-aged women married at a time when it was still an “objectified” practice that daughters-in-law accepted their mothers-in-law’s power over them. And while Garhwali society, too, is in flux and constantly changing, the lives of today’s women are only understandable if we understand the lives they were leading when they first came into their homes. Many married people in Garhwal understand their lives to have started with marriage. Childhood was seen as a happy time, but it was also insignificant. Only after marriage, so they said, did they turn into significant persons because most women identify with the responsibility and the search for honour in the *sauryas* they suffered. The first years directly after marriage are the most turbulent years in a woman’s life. Because all the changes described in this chapter usually happen simultaneously, I decided to include them all in one chapter. This time of suffering is the most significant time for Chamoli women that determines their honour, status, and well being later in their life. Because this time takes up most of the space when women talk about their own lives, it is also the biggest chapter of this work. Most women had to solve a lot of problems. They had to fight for their positions within village and family. They had to struggle with loneliness. They had to deal with their in-law’s pressure regarding their ability to work and the fertility of their bodies. They had to find new friends and allies in the

new villages, and they had to handle their new relationship with their husbands. They assumed responsibility for themselves and their family. That is why this chapter tells their stories. The stories they told me about their first years in their new homes, their conflicts, and their friendships. But most of all, this chapter is about those women's honour, how they build it, how they maintain it, and how it changes their sense of identity. With the change of residence from the *mait* to the *sauryas*, a significant change in gendered performative practices happens in the lives of young women. As new brides they undergo a transformation that also changes their sense of self through these changed gender performativities. A new *bvari* is no longer a daughter and her parents' patient, instead she has become a daughter-in-law and struggles with her position as her mother-in-law's patient and the expected display of obedience and submission.

Prema was married when she was fifteen. Her natal family was very poor, and her father had died years before her marriage. Her father's elder brother had arranged her wedding into a family where the men were customary ritual specialists of the main deity of Prema's natal family. Prema's family was from the *lohar jati*, blacksmiths, who manufactured tools and sickles. She was married into the *mistari jati*, carpenters, who claim that their forefathers built the famous temple of Badrinath. Both belong to lowest castes, the *choti jati*, as many local people call them. The *lohars* claim to have a slightly higher status than the *mistaris*, but the *jatis* of *tamota*, *lohar* and *mistari* (they prefer the term *rajmistari*, which literally means the "royal carpenters") had been intermarrying for a few generations. In fact, Prema claimed to be of a *lohar* family, whereas her uncle's son called himself *tamota*. Prema's marriage was typically non-hypergameous. It was a marriage between two families and *jatis* that were considered to have a similar status. The village that became her *sauryas* was an exceptional village in the sense that only people of one *jati*, the *mistari jati*, lived there. In her *mait*, the dominant caste were rajput *jatis*, but most of the lower caste people avoided contact with them. The *lohars* and *tamotas*, who were the priests of the local deity Bhairav, had moved down to the riverside a few generations before. The land that had been bought by their ancestors was fertile, and they claim to have never been labourers for the higher *jatis*. Most men in Prema's natal village were well educated. Many older men were employed in

the Indian army or as teachers for the Indian government, and many young people at least held a B.A. and were even more educated than that, and most families at least had one man who had a permanent position. People of this village were better off than other low-caste villagers in the region. In Prema's *sauryas*, for example, the men were much less educated, many were unemployed, and only a few had worked or were working in the Indian army. Prema herself had only gone to school for five years and was fifteen years old when she moved to her *sauryas*.

After marriage, a young bride should move to the house of her husband's parents. The wedding did not only change her life, but also the life of her marital family, especially its married female members. The arrival of a new bride usually involves a change in the female hierarchies and responsibilities of a household. During the first time after her marriage, a new bride is not primarily considered to be a son's sexual partner, or under his control in any other way, but should rather gradually take over responsibilities in the household from her mother-in-law or other elder married women of the household. The authority over a new bride usually lies in the mother-in-law's hands and not in her husband's. In fact, young husbands should never stay with their wives during the first years of their marriage and often their fathers have organized them a job outside of the village, so that they can only spend a few weeks per year with their wives.

In theory, Garhwalis believe in the laws of Manu. The following quote of Manu is well known, not only among anthropologists, but also among the villagers of Garhwal.

She should do nothing independently, even in her own house.
In childhood subjected to her father, in youth to her husband,
And when her husband is dead, to her sons, she should never enjoy
independence
Though he be uncouth and prone to pleasure,
Though he have no good points at all,
The virtuous wife should ever
Worship her lord as a god (Basham 1959: 180-181).

However, in practice, it is not the husband who controls the new wife, but his

mother. A wife knows that she should worship her husband as a god, but as Fuller (1984) made clear, women do not consider their husband to be deities. In addition during her first years of marriage it is usually her mother-in-law, who decides what she does, when she sleeps, what and when she eats.

When Prema Devi, Rupa's mother arrived in her *sauryas*, she was the first *bvari* to come into her mother-in-law's house. She was fifteen years old. She was married to the oldest son of the family. At the time of their marriage, her mother-in-law's household was big. Prema's *sas* and *sasur* had six children. One daughter was already married, but two sisters and three brothers still lived in the house. As the first and the eldest daughter-in-law, she was soon expected to take over most responsibilities of the household. Her mother-in-law remained in control of her and the resources. She had the key to the house, to the kitchen, and to the storeroom. It was the mother-in-law who told her what kind of work to do, when she should do it, how she should do it, and how much she was supposed to do. Prema's mother-in-law scolded her when she did not get up in time in the morning, and she decided when Prema was allowed to go to bed at night.

4.1 Residence: Between *Sauryas* and *Mait*

I was still sleeping. It was the day after a big festival that had lasted for ten days. I woke up because I heard distant and unfamiliar sounds. At first I thought it was babies crying. But the sounds were too loud and very unfamiliar. Eventually, I got up to see where they came from. What I saw surprised me even more. The street was filled with women. Young women were lying in the arms of older ones crying their eyes out. The *banyat* (festival) was over and all the *dhyanis* (outmarried daughters/ daughters of the village) who had come to get the goddesses' blessing and to assure the success of the ritual had to leave again and return to their homes. I never entirely understood this loud wailing until some young women told me that this was also part of Garhwali tradition. The girls feel sad every time they have to leave their parents. It is expected that they weep whenever they leave their *mait*, to express their love for it and for their parents. Weeping is one of the things they have to do to add to their parents' prestige and uphold their honour. Like weeping

on the wedding day, the weeping of departing *dhyanis* is a practice at the border between gender performativity and performance. On the one hand, it is a female practice so deeply incorporated by most Garhwali women that they do not perform the weeping consciously. Weeping is simply a practice that is part of a young and recently married daughter's life and an expression of her grief. Many young women automatically weep when they leave their parents' village simply because it is part of leaving the *mait*. But sometimes weeping can be performed as "daughterness", as therefore it is attached to the natal family's honour. Weeping is therefore to a certain extent a misrecognised strategy, but not misrecognized enough, because every young woman exactly knows what she does when she wails.

In the previous chapters performative practices were presented as an important aspect of the process of acquiring gender roles, whereby children, in learning the cultural ideas and values that shape the 'female' and the 'male', are produced as gendered subjects. But this view easily reduces people to passive subjects, who merely absorb and internalise cultural scripts. Instead, I argue that females and males of all generations have a creative influence on their society and on their own lives. In anthropological literature, female agency has been discussed either along lines of resistance or victimization, direct access to structures of power, or in terms of indirect agency and manipulative strategies, or even in terms of how consent' to existing arrangements itself could provide a basis for resistance (see e.g. Bartholomew 1990; Raheja and Gold 1994; Raheja 2003; Gold 2003). But female agency is much more complex. It cannot be reduced to resistance, but should be seen as part of the dynamics of practical human cultural life in all societies. In Garhwali society, concepts of shame (*sharam*) and honour (*izzat*) are central to those dynamics, and are closely linked to understandings of space, place, and residency.

In this section, I will concentrate on female performative practices and performances of gender in spatial contexts. The contradictory and interlinked locations of *mait* (natal village) and *sauryas* (marital village), practices of movement of women between the villages, the relations between the two places and women's relations within them are central to Garhwali culture (see also Sax 1991, 1992). Women are often central to the delineation of group boundaries, exactly because they, in contrast to their male kinsmen, are always part of two groups. Discussions of agency

must therefore acknowledge the resulting multiple identities.

Marriage arrangements in Garhwal are fundamentally different from practices in other parts of North India. First of all, most rural Garhwalis, and especially the Dalits, see marriage not as an exchange between hierarchically organized families, but between more or less equal partners. Secondly, the relationship between daughters and their parents remains strong in many respects after her marriage. The kin relationships established between the two families are maintained through gendered performative practices, such as moving from one village to the other, gift-exchange, and mutual support which all contribute to official kinship bonds turning into practical kinship. In most parts of Northern India, descent and inheritance are usually traced through men, not women, it is sets of related males who ideally reside together and share property. Thus, in contrast to my understanding of practical kinship in Garhwal where women play a crucial role, it has been argued (see for example Seymour 1999: 55) that men are structurally central in family and kinship systems, and women are peripheral; as daughters, their residence in their father's household is transitory; as wives, they are consanguineal outsiders – they are descended from some other patrilineal extended family and lineage and join their husband's extended family and lineage only through marriage. Daughters, according to these accounts of kinship, leave their parents after marriage and move to their husband's village. Supposedly, a daughter's help for her mother and the natal family's support for her end with marriage. Jeffery, Jeffery, and Lyon, for example, observed for Bijnor, "An unmarried daughter is often described as a guest in her parents' house to be fed and clothed, and trained at her parents' expense for the benefit of her future husband's family" (1989: 25). This notion of the daughter as her parents' guest until her marriage unites her with her rightful family is widespread all over North India and is also common in Garhwal. But patri-, or virilocality is often said to be the main factor for the weak position of daughters and wives in India. The new wife is said to be part of a different family and belongs to a different village than her parents, brothers, and sisters. She is depicted as a guest in her parents' house until marriage and a stranger when she moves to her husband's home. In her *sasural*, a Hindu woman is at the same time dangerous and auspicious, needed for the procreation of the line as well as dangerous for the unity of the family. Because of

the spatial distance between a married daughter and her parents, visits to her natal village are rare. In addition, most North Indian Hindus arrange marriages hypergameously. That means that the bride and her family have a lower status (within a marriageable caste) than the groom and his family. As a result, parents seldom visit their daughter at her marital home (see Wadley 1992: 161). This is fundamentally different in Chamoli. The residence rule that the young bride moves to her husband's house and natal village after marriage does not automatically mean that she ceases to be a member of her father's family and becomes exclusively a member of her husband's lineage. A Chamoli marriage starts a new set of relations, which is not above all a hierarchical relationship, but practical kinship that is established and maintained through gendered performative practices. Young women often visit their natal families and the connection to the *mait* is more than a sentimental one. In Chamoli, a woman never ceases to belong to her *mait*, the relationship established through her residence at this place from her birth until marriage lasts for life, and she is an important participant in numerous rituals and family occasions. The equal relationship between a woman's two families is signified in obligatory gift exchanges. Whenever a woman visits her natal family after marriage, she wears her best clothes, and she brings sweets from her household to her parents. When she leaves again, she will take a basket of sweets and sometimes clothes for her and her children. Whenever one of her sisters visits her, her husband gifts her sister a sari, a shawl or other clothes. Every time a family holds a big ritual, the in-laws are usually invited. If the relations between the families are good, there will be many mutual visits, exchanges of goods, and most importantly mutual support in times of need. Their kinship relation has become practical kinship through practices of help, exchange, and celebration. The two family units at times join their agencies and become one unit. But even if the relations between a woman's marital and natal families are bad and their kin relationship is weak in terms of collective agency, there will still be certain ritual exchanges and visits that are unavoidable because of the ritual importance of the *dhyanis*, the outmarried village daughters. In orthodox Hindu understanding, a woman is transformed to her husband's half-body in a *kanyadana* wedding. From then on, she is part of his lineage, she changed her gotra to that of her husband and she became part of her mother-in-law's household. This

transformation and dislocation of the young wife in North India has often been described as complete. However, in Garhwal, many links with a young woman's natal home, her *mait*, remain (see also Sax 1990). She has ritual responsibilities towards her father's and brothers' families and she has affective bonds with the people of her natal village that become explicit in gendered performative practices, like her frequent visits to her *mait*.

Sax, for example, postulates that the life of Garhwali women is reflected in the myths, songs, and rituals around the processions of Nanda Devi, a local form of Parvati, the great god Shiva's wife. Large parts of her songs and processions circle around the theme of a homecoming daughter, or a married woman's visit to her *mait*, her natal home. He argues that Garhwali women maintain a strong relationship with their natal homes. "A woman is thought to have a natural affinity for her *mait*; people say that it would be evil to try and stop her from going there" (Sax 1991: 118). Women's connection to the *mait* is thus "naturalized" and becomes part of her identity through performative practices.

During the first years after marriage, for example, young Garhwali women are expected to miss their parents and especially their mothers. The connection to the *mait* is not only expressed in the famous songs of Nanda Devi, but also in Garhwali women's everyday songs. These songs are no formal folksongs with a fixed text. The women improvise the song's lines every day anew. The songs are a form of communication between women working in the fields, cutting grass on the hills, or collecting firewood in the forest. In these songs they communicate their thoughts and sorrows to each other. At the same time, the gendered performative practices of work and singing constitute them as daughters-in-law. It is the combination of the songs' content and the sheer practice of singing together with other *bvaris* in a female space of the *sauryas*. Many of the songs are about mothers, the relationship between daughters and their mothers, and the *bvari's* longing for them. The following lines collected and translated by me during my fieldwork are only a small sample:

Mailai ka ban jala yad karyia meri.

Oh lucky friend, if you go to the forest remember me.

*Ja bhagvani mait tum, bai ma bolliya meri:
malai ka ban jala yad karyia meri.*

Oh lucky one you are going to your natal place, convey my message to my mother:

if you go to my Malai's forest, remember me.

Band bali nag bali halkali bulaka kanbali lagade.

Your nose is wonderful, your ears are pretty
and your bulak is moving beautifully.

Meru mait ku mulaka

*Ja bhagvani mait tum, bai ma boliya
meri malai ka ban jala yad karyia meri.*

Ja bhagvani mait tum, bai ma boliya.

If you meet anybody from my *mait*, convey my message to my mother.

If you go to my Mailai's forest remember me there.

If you go to my *mait*, convey my message to my mother.

*Laguli ku pati maji, laguli ku pati maji,
roti khali bhat majo, gadya meri yad maji gadya meri yad.*

Leaves of the creeper, mother, the leaf of the creeper.

When you eat roti or rice, you remember me, oh mother, remember me.

Dhobi ko raukara maji, Dhobi ko raukara.

Meru banta ko bhat maji.

almari rakhana almari rakhana.

The dhobi's washing place, mother, the dhobi's washing place.

Keep my share of rice in the cupboard, mother,

keep it in the cupboard.

Timali ko pat maji, timali ko pat.

Kabhi din sachi kolu ma ko dinyu bhat,

maji ma ko dinyu bhat?

Fig leaves, mother, the leaf of the fig.

Will I ever eat rice from my mother's hands again?

Boti jala gainda maji, boti jala gainda.

sauryas ka log maji ni te renda baund.

Cut the rhinoceros into pieces, maji cut the rhinoceros into pieces.

The people in my *sauryas* do not allow me to stay in the upper stories of the house.

In many songs and many interviews I conducted with women of all ages, food was a major symbol to express relationships. Food sharing is an important gendered performative practice in the sense that there are places, where food is given freely, and others, where food has to be earned. Many young women said that the first thing they did when they entered their mother's house was to ask her for food. None of them would dare doing that in a stranger's house or even in their *sauryas*. This is so because the same woman is a daughter in the one place and a daughter-in-law in the other place, and practices of food sharing differ accordingly. Gendered performative practices change not only with age and status of these young women, but also depend on places and the people they relate to. As a young woman moves from her *sauryas* to her *mait* she changes, ceases to be primarily a daughter-in-law and becomes primarily a daughter again. It is difficult to say how much this change which I was able to observe through changes in gender related practices such as body postures, laughing, the way the young women move within the different households and the way they relate to other people in the village, is a conscious performance or part of gendered performative practices. It is probably a mixture of both, as the sense for honour and shame which is strongly connected to eating, movement in the village and the relationship with other villagers and strangers is part of the gendered habitus. At the same time, the question for food in the *mait* is a performance of "daughterness". In the lines above, the rice from the mother's hand stands for the young girl's position in her natal family and her natal village. It also expresses a specific gendered performative practice; in her *mait*, a young woman can eat as much as she wants without feeling ashamed.

The line “keep my share of rice in the cupboard” shows that for Garhwali people the bond between a daughter and her parents never ceases. There will always be food for her in her mother’s house. In the beginning of her time in her *sauryas*, a young woman does not only miss her mother and her father, but she also often feels ashamed eating in the house of strangers. In this sense, eating is a gendered performative practices that not only creates a female body but also distinguishes between a daughter and a daughter-in-law. This is also reflected in the different ways, young daughters and young daughters-in-law greet the women of their mait or the women of their sauryas, or more specifically, their mothers and their mothers-in-law. A young *bvari* bows down deep and touches the feet of her mother-in-law to greet her and her mother-in-law then holds her right hand over her daughter-in-law’s head. A daughter also greets her mother with a deep bow and touches her feet, but her mother will then embrace her and pull her head towards her breast so that her daughter’s gesture of respect is answered by a gesture of caring. A young woman rarely likes her new life in her *sauryas*, and it takes a while until she gets used to it exactly because the people there are strangers for her and the social norms and practices that ruled her life up to then taught her to embody shame before strangers. One of my informants, Jainti, said:

Yes, I was afraid to move to my sauryas. Everybody is afraid, when we have to leave our mait and move to the sauryas. Who likes the sauryas right away? I like my mait a lot. I love my mother and my father. I do not like it that well here.

And her *saheli* Lakshmi told me:

In the beginning it was really strange, but it isn’t any more. I am used to it now, now it seems normal. Now I also have a daughter. Now dadaji¹ plays with my daughter, he tells her to come and look at things. In the beginning I cried a lot in my sauryas. I kept on thinking, “Whom did my mother give me to?” Whenever I went to my mait, the first thing I said to my mother was to give me food, and whenever I had to leave my mait to come here, I cried a lot.

¹Lit. father’s father, but here she means her daughter’s paternal grandfather.

During the first years after a woman's wedding, she frequently visits her *mait*. Sangita, a recently married, twenty-two-year old Dalit woman, said that she lives in her *sauryas* for one month and then goes to her *mait* to stay there for one month. This is typical. Like the child-brides one or two generations ago, the "re-location" of a young bride happens gradually. Most young, recently married women spend as much time in their *mait* as they spend in the *sauryas*. The attachment to the natal place and natal family is not broken, and the women are given time to get used to life in their marital place and to embody their new role. When a young woman goes for a visit to her *mait*, she will be spoiled, fed nice food, and treated with lots of affection by her mother, her father, her siblings, and the other villagers. Now real guests in their mother's house, *dhyanis* have all sorts of privileges against unmarried sisters and the in-married sisters-in-law. In her *mait*, a married woman should never work, neither in the fields nor in the household. She has rights and obligations towards her parents. These rights and obligations are mostly linked with practices that uphold her father's and mother's honour in her *sauryas*. It is, for example, considered highly shameful, if an outmarried woman's parents would let their daughter work in their house. Even if there are extensive family occasions, like a wedding or a big family ritual, or if there are no daughters-in-law to help the mother with the harvest, a woman should never work in her *mait*. The gendered performative practices in Chamoli are therefore also deeply connected with kinship positions. With marriage a daughter has been given to another family with all her productive powers, and she should never be productive in her father's house after that. She can, however, request a sister or her brother's daughters to come with her to help her with her work in her *sauryas*. Even though she does not work in her *mait*, she never has to feel ashamed to eat in her parents' house. But as a *bvari*, she has to work in order to be able to eat.

During the first years of her married life, a woman should always be allowed to come back to her *mait*. (Sax 1991: 118) writes that people consider it a crime not to allow the young women to visit their *mait*s. Lakshmi told me, "In the year I got married, I went to my Maika every two weeks. I stayed for ten or fifteen days and sometimes I stayed for a month." And her friend Jainti said that she

did the same. After two weeks, she missed her *mait* a lot and then, “I started crying. When that happened, my *sasurji* sent me to my *mait*.” Garhwali people acknowledge that mother and father are important figures in a young woman’s life and that she needs time to adjust to her new situation. Weeping – as an expression of missing the *mait* – is one of the practices that are at the same time performative practices and strategic performances of communication with their parents-in-law. Young daughters-in-law should never openly say that they want to visit their *mait*, so the weeping officially places the agency over her in her in-laws hands. In this sense it is a performance which communicates that it is time for another visit. The importance of the *mait* for the *dhyanis*, the outmarried daughters, is sung about in many songs all over Garhwal. A woman without a *mait* is considered a lonely woman. In her natal home, she gets nice food, receives love and affection and can be happy, as the following song, that I taped while being in the fields with my informants, illustrates.

Hvai janu hvai janu choryon ka maiti.
Hvai janu hvai janu choryon ka maiti.
Jyun dhiyani ka maiti hola, maiti bulala
ni maiti dhiyani ku mait bulalu.
Hvai janu hvai janu choryon ka maiti.
Hvai janu hvai janu choryon ka maiti.
Jyun dhyani ka bhai hola, oh dhyani ta mait bulala.
Jyun dhyani ka bhai ni chan va ni maiti hvegi.
Jyun dhyani ka maiti hola va dhyani mait auni holi.
Jyun dhyani ka maiti ni hola, va banu-banu roni holi.
Jyun dhyani ka maiti hola va dhyani kir khani holi.
Jyun dhyani ka maiti ni hola va ruku-sukhu khani holi.
Jyun dhyani ka maiti hola va dhyani hansikushi boi me jani holi
ni maiti dhyani bonu me roni holi.

I wish orphans had *maitis*.

I wish orphans had *maitis*.

The *dhyanis* with *maitis* are invited to their *mait*.

Who invites those without *maitis*?
I wish orphans had *maitis*.
I wish orphans had *maitis*.
The *dhyani* who has a brother, will be invited to her *mait*.
The *dhyani* who has no brother does not have any *maitis*.
The *dhyani* with *maitis* will be taken to her *mait*.
The *dhyani* without *maitis* will weep in the forest.
The *dhyani* with *maitis* will eat khir.
The *dhyani* without *maitis* will only eat dry and dull food.
The *dhyani* with *maitis* will visit her mother happily.
The *dhyani* without *maiti* will weep in the forest.

This song does not only reflect the love and affection a *dhyani* finds in her *mait*, but also hints at the lack not only of love, but also of company and food in a woman's *sauryas*. Many middle-aged women told me how badly their mothers-in-law treated them, that they were struck, never given enough food, and often scolded. There is only a very weak emotional connection to the *sauryas* in the early years of a *dhyani's* married life and most of this connection is linked to her parents' honour. The power of the connection with the *mait* should therefore not be underemphasized. Sax (1991) and Fanger (1987) interpreted the role of the *mait* for a young married women above all as a place of refuge. In their understanding, *dhyanis* flee to their *mait* when the situation in their marital homes becomes unbearable. This might have been true in former times, when the brideprice wedding was still a common practice. Today, however, it is considered highly shameful for a woman to flee to her *mait*. The *mait* is in fact a refuge from the hard work a married woman is expected to do in her *sauryas*, from the tensions between her and her mother-in-law and the other married women in the household, and from the loneliness she feels in the first months and years in her marital home. But a woman should not flee to her *mait*. First of all, it would mean that she has to travel between the two places on her own. Secondly, it would seriously damage the honour of her parents' family. A woman who has been given as *dan* (gift) should not return to the giver. A young *bvari* should therefore never leave her village without her marital family's consent, nor plan to live in her *mait*. Kamala, one of my older female informants, whose

daughter was of marriageable age, said:

After we arranged a marriage for a girl in Garhwal, the mait is not the girl's business anymore (mait me haq kuch nahim hai). People say that parents have to build a house for the sons and to give dan for the girls. Of course, parents' love will never stop. As long as a girl's parents are alive, the daughter will come and visit their house. They will come to meet their parents, because of love, once a year, once a month, every six months, whatever they can. Daughters will always come to see their parents. But they will never come back to live with their parents. It is not their business any more (haq jaham ka nahim hai). They are invited and sent to their mait for love. Now my daughter will soon move to her sasural and after two or three months she will miss us (khud lag gai hogi) and then she will be sent here for a visit.

A young wife should be sent and invited, but never flee to her parents' place. Once married, a woman has to deal with the situation in her *sauryas*, there is no honourable way for her back into a life in her *mait*. And honour (*izzat*) is the highest good a woman has, so my informants. Therefore, she is expected to reduce her visits to her *mait* gradually. At the same time, she should take over responsibilities in her new home, which will eventually keep her from visiting her *mait*. These practices are part of the long process of her transformation from daughter to daughter-in-law and eventually mother and mother-in-law. The more responsibility she takes over, the higher her agency, the greater her honour. Her connection to the places of *sauryas* and *mait* and the movement between the two places play a major role in this process and exemplify again how place and movement are part of gendered performative practices in Garhwal.

4.1.1 Inside and Outside

As a visit to the *mait* is always official family business, a young woman never takes the decision herself to go to her *mait*, nor is she sent to go there on her own. A male relative will always escort a woman on her way from one village to another (see

also Sax 1991: 124). When a woman leaves her village to go to her “other” village, she has to pass through alien land. In her *sauryas* or her *mait*, a woman can move freely and alone without fear. The household, the fields, and the forests surrounding the villages, although all having different qualities, are all considered to be a place inside, the working place of women and girls. In this place, a woman moves daily, she does not necessarily need company there, but when she leaves this place on her own, she will feel uncomfortable. Everyday matters such as work, family, behaviour, and interaction with the other villagers happen within this “inside” and are often described with spatial vocabulary. *Ghar*, literally meaning house or home, is used to refer to the village area, including the fields and the forest surrounding it. *Ghar* usually refers to a woman’s *sauryas*, her home where her main responsibilities lie. But the term *mait* is a similarly spatial term. It does not only mean family and people, but also a woman’s natal place. A woman’s *mait* is the place which physically and spiritually influenced her during the first years of her life and on which she has had some influence during this time, too. In her *mait* and her *ghar*, she is at home, she can move freely and knows her way. But women do not feel comfortable moving from the one safe place to the other, because outside, *bahar*, she does not know her way, she does not know the dangers, and she does not have the courage (*himmat*) to move through this “outside” on her own. Or rather, a woman should not have the courage to move *bahar* on her own, because to do so is also highly shameful. One of my male informants once said that this was also the reason why women and girls vomit so often, when they are travelling in cars and buses. They do that, he said, because they are not used to travelling and because they feel highly uncomfortable. They are ashamed as they should be because they are outside. They should not be in this “outside” space. All these practices are gender performativities and as such create female bodies in Chamoli. The sense for places, inside and outside as well as the uncomfortable feeling of travelling in female become part of their gendered habitus. For Garhwali people, courage (*himmat*) is one of the central characteristics that distinguish males and females. The courage needed for this outside space, to talk to strangers, to sit down in a bus, to drive a car, jeep, or motorcycle, to be alone among strangers and so on is a male quality. According to my informants, young children and females do not possess this quality, and for females and young

children to be able to move through and in the outside sphere, they need company. This company does not necessarily need to be male, more senior women are accept to move in female company. But young, recently married women, see male company not only as reassuring, but also as prestigious. One of my informants said:

Of course, we could go with another woman, with a friend or a sister-in-law. But if we do that, people will think that our family does not care for us. They will say, "Look at her, she needs to travel with a female friend, her husband does not like her!" We will feel shamed leaving the village without a male relative. It is good when our husband accompanies us wherever we go, or at least his brother or his father. When they come with us, they show that we are important to them, that we are part of their family. If they don't, then they show that we are not important to them and everybody can see that.

The distinction between the *ghar* or the *mait* as the inside and the outside (*bahar*) is not the same as Rosaldo's (1974) distinction between domestic and public. There are many public events happening in the *ghar* and the outside is not necessarily a public sphere. The spatial ideas around *ghar* and *bahar* are rather gender performativities which are strongly embedded in the perceptual schemes of people and emerge as principles orienting daily practices, and the movement between places. They are the axes along which the world is ordered into one's own or other, female and male, good and bad, familiar and strange. The good, the familiar, the group, all belong to the *ghar* and the *mait*, whereas the outside is a sphere of danger in which a person is unprotected on her or his own. This is true for males and females, but because the discourse that creates females, to use Butler's term, also created females as more open, and therefore more vulnerable, they also lack the courage (*himmat*) to be alone in the outside sphere.

That means that all visits to a woman's *mait* are most often also short visits of her husband or any other male in-law to his wife's natal village and when she comes back to her *sauryas*, her father or brother visits her *mait*. Men usually only accompany their wives, sisters, or daughters-in-law, have a cup of tea and some food before they leave again. Sometimes they stay overnight, but they prefer to leave the women alone in their *mait* or *sauryas* respectively. A woman's *mait* is an inside for

her, but an outside for marital male kin, such as her husband, her husband's brothers or her father-in-law. While married women usually belong to two places, men only belong to one. Their *sauryas* does not become an "inside" for them. Through marriage, men establish a relationship with their parents-in-law, but they have no more connection to their wives' natal place than they have to their mothers' *mait* or their sisters' *sauryas*. Accordingly, their gendered performative practice is that they do not spend much time in their wife's *mait*. In the last chapter Rupchand told us why he did not come home with his new wife after his wedding. He did not want to stay there for a week, because there was nothing to do for him. Most men feel much more comfortable in their villages, or the teashops surrounding them, than in their wives' villages. This is especially so among the Dalits as the practical kinship between a husband's and a wife's family is not hierarchical. In the *sauryas*, the *jawaim* (a man married to a village daughter) is lower in status than his mother- and father-in-law, because he has a similar status as his wife- their daughter- and he cannot move freely or behave in the same way he does in his own village. Men do not feel ashamed eating food from other people's hands or in public, but many still feel uncomfortable eating as a guest in other people's houses. It is fine to stay for a day or so, but many do not like to stay longer. As Sax (1991) made clear, a son-in-law who comes to live in his wife's village (*ghar jawaim*) is rare. The low status such a man has in his *sauryas* is exemplified in the following song:

A far son-in-law is like a God,
 A near one, only half.
 Load what you will on the house son-in-law,
 For he is but an ass (Sax 1991: 82).

Sax writes about high caste villagers, but this is also true for the Dalits of Chamoli district. A son-in-law does not become a son in the sense that he has to follow the orders of his father-in-law, but he still has to behave in a respectful manner. He has to embody the son-in-law. If his father-in-law does not like him drinking in his house, then he should not; he can smoke, but only after his father-in-law has lit a cigarette himself and so on. Women transfer to their *sauryas* after marriage and therefore, according to my informants, undergo an embodied transformation

through gendered performative practices such as their daily interaction with the people and the land, as well as through eating the food produced on the land and drinking the water from the soil. Therefore women and female bodies always belong and are physically linked to two places, whereas men have a strong connection to only one place: their natal home. Of course, the relationship with a Garhwali man's in-laws is full of obligations, but he does not have a strong connection with the village, with the place itself. His wife, on the contrary, has a strong connection to both places, and during the first years of her marriage she constantly moves back and forth between them.

4.1.2 Sexuality and Shame

This process of transition, of constantly moving between the two places, can last up to several years, depending on the in-law's family situation and whether a woman becomes pregnant or not. Many young women reduce their visits to their *mait* during the last months of pregnancy. Pregnancy makes their sexuality visible. The understandings of a female body differ greatly between her *mait* and her *sauryas*. While sexuality is a shameful matter in any context, usually women do not try to actively hide a pregnancy in their *sauryas*. Bearing children is one of women's most important duties in the marital village, and women tend to happily tell each other about their pregnancies. During her reproductive years, a woman is always seen as a sexual being in her *sauryas*. All her relations with male villagers are determined by her sexuality. A married girl or woman cannot interact with male villagers in her *sauryas* with the same freedom as she interacts with the male inhabitants of her *mait*. Especially during the first years after her wedding, she must not show her face to her husband's older male relatives and any other older men in the village. Young and sexually active women are hot (*garam*), and this heat is also a potential danger to her husband's older male relatives. She should therefore avoid contact with them because doing otherwise could lead to sexual contact with these men. The relationship with her male *maitis*, in contrast, is not determined by a woman's sexuality. In fact, for her *mait*, she is not above all a sexual being, but a daughter and sister with whom one has a ritual relationship (see Sax 1991; Bennett 1983).

Because of this different character of her relationship with her *mait*, a pregnancy as an obvious sign of her sexuality makes her ashamed in front of the people of their natal village. Many women told me that the baby-belly should be hidden from natal families. However, this does not prevent women from giving birth to their children in their natal homes. In fact, many women give birth in their mother's houses, especially when the relationship with the people in the *sauryas* is troubled. Comfort and support in this critical phase are more important than the sense of shame in these cases.

4.1.3 She is like a Devi

Once a married woman has children and her workload and responsibilities in the household, the fields, and for the animals increase, her visits to her parents become less frequent (see also Sax 1991: 118-125). But this does not mean that her connection to the *mait* ceases to be strong. The less frequent visits to her *mait* are above all a sign of her growing responsibilities and rising status in her own village. However, during the first years people expect young women to feel a strong longing for her mother and the natal village. In addition, women have ritual responsibilities as outmarried daughters. Sax (1990, 1991) makes it clear that the anthropologist's obsession with agnation resulted in a blindness towards women's importance in the natal families. This importance stems from more than simple "affective ties" (Gould 1961: 299) because a woman's relation with her *mait* is substantial and embodied. There are several important connections between *mait* and *sauryas*, and certain village rituals can only be successful if all the *dhyanis* are invited.

This substantial relationship with her *mait* requires ritual practices. In most villages of Chamoli district, an outmarried daughter's husband is expected to give a sacrifice to the village deity of his wife's natal home. Sometimes this is done during the *hagrat* – the ritual return to a new bride's *mait* during the week after her wedding – but today it is more common among the Dalits that the couple returns about a year after the wedding for the sacrifice to ask the deity for a blessing and children. In some places, especially common among the Dalits of Chamoli, this sacrifice has to be repeated every few years. If this sacrifice is not given and the blessing of her

natal home's deity therefore not received, the family might suffer from sickness, bad luck, childlessness and so on. In particular, a devata called Bhairav Nath is often worshipped by the low caste villagers of Chamoli district. This devata is considered to be very powerful and, as every Hindu deity, has many forms and names. But all villagers agree that he loves his *dhyanis*. Sometimes he follows them to their *sauryas* to protect them and help their families to flourish. More often, however, he demands worship by the *dhyani's* family. The practices vary. Prema, for example, came from a village where Bhairav was supposed to be very powerful. All her male relatives were convinced that only their regular worship of their deity had helped them to prosper in the way they had. All villagers considered themselves to be the *pujaris* (priests) of this deity, and, so they said: a *dhyani* and her husband should come back to worship him at least once after marriage. It was better to come back and worship every two years, but most of the time, the devata would not get angry if he was given a proper sacrifice at least once after a *dhyanis* marriage. Rupchand and his father, despite being the ritual specialists for the dancing² of this particular devata had forgotten to give her *mait's* devata his sacrifice. Prema had just lost her second son when they visited an oracle and found out what had happened. She said:

In my mait, girls never, ever get afflicted by evil spirits. The girls bring goats in Bhairav's name and give him puja, then they will be fine. But they forgot to give him a sacrifice after my wedding. When my second son died, too, I started to think that something must have afflicted me. Therefore we finally went to an oracle to find out. The oracle told us that I had been afflicted by Bhairav and Kachya of my mait. My husband became very angry and said "how can it be that we are afflicted by a deity who eats my children? In the whole world", he said: "all he wants is to get goats and my children?" Then we took two goats and went to my mait to

²There are many different ritual specialists all over Garhwal. There are *pujaris* (priests) of devatas who regularly worship them in temples or their dwelling places, there are healers who heal with mantras and smaller rituals and there are ritual specialists who make the devata "dance", with the help of their singing and playing a special drum- the *hudaki*. They are needed for the family rituals of Bhairav, where individual families ask for the devata's blessing. During these spectacles the devata dances along with many others. For more information on the worship of Bhairav see Sax (2003b, 2004a,b).

worship Bhairav and Kachya. Now our hearts are relieved, we feel that everything has turned fine. Now I can only think that we have given my mait's deity a puja, now everything will be fine. My people there also say that now that I have given the puja, the devata will be with me. Last year, we went with two goats, and, one or two years later, we will bring a goat again. Only when my heart's desire is fulfilled, I will go again and give a puja. Should there be another wish in my mind, I will say. "Oh Bhairav, if my wish is fulfilled, I will come back and give you a goat." If my wish is fulfilled, then we promise that in this certain month we will come and bring you a goat.

This sacrificial relationship with the deity of the wife's natal village is consequently beneficial for the husband's family. Many do not do so – unless problems occur – because such a ritual is necessarily expensive. However, there are also occasions when the *dhyani's* presence is necessary for a successful ritual in her natal village. Apart from Nanda Devi's great procession described by Sax (1991), one of the most spectacular examples is the *banyat*, a festivity, held after a devi's six-month long procession. There are many devi (female goddess) temples all over Chamoli, and most of the devis residing in the area go on a procession every three, six, nine or twelve years. When it is time to go on a procession again, the devi will take possession of an oracle and inform her guardians, the people from her *sauryas*. The temple of the devi is understood to be her marital home. The villages responsible for the temple and the people who constitute the temple committee all think of themselves as the devi's in-laws, as coming from her *sauryas*. Together, they organize her procession, and the Rajput and Brahman men from these villages accompany her. Usually, they travel for six months, visiting all the villages that are understood to belong to the area of their marital residence and ending with the area that is understood to be the area of their *mait*, their natal home. When the six months are over, she returns to her temple. Her return is celebrated for two to seven days. This celebration is called *banyat*. For the *banyat*, all outmarried daughters from all *jatis* are called. A local man, who was involved in the organization of one of these processions, explained to me that the *dhyanis* are necessary for the successful return of the devi. As for any other *puja* or *yagya* (a sacrificial offering with a fire, that can last from

30 minutes to six days, depending on the ritual occasion), he said: daughters are needed to complete the family, or the village³. As blood- and place- relatives, they are as much a product of the village and their family as sons are. They can never be forgotten and have to be invited to every important family event. *They are like the devi*, he said.

We give her offerings and if we want to lead a happy life, we also have to offer things to our daughters. If a dhyani does not come to the celebration after she has received an invitation and does not even send an offering to the devi, her village and her family may suffer from the devi's wrath.

The devi, so my informants, wants her *dhyanis* to be treated well and, if they are not invited on such occasions or do not respond, it means that they have not been treated well. This is true for other deities, as well. As such the invitation of a *dhyani* is also a matter of honour. The *dhyanis* are always special for their natal villages and their deities. Another example of this is the celebration of the bhumial devata, the devata of the land. It happens more seldom than a *banyat* and involves a buffalo sacrifice, and I witnessed it once in a Dalit village. Rupchand had arranged it months before, all the villagers had organized a huge amount of money, many goats, and a male buffalo to sacrifice. Rupchand was playing a *dhol* – a large two headed drum played with one stick - to call the deities. The villagers and their guests danced for three days and three nights with their deities. The ritual's high point and ending was the sacrifice of the buffalo. Many relatives were invited for this occasion, most importantly of course, all the *dhyanis*, who either came or sent an offering to the deity. Here, too, the *dhyani's* participation was considered important. Therefore, it seems incomprehensible that the connection to the natal home should remain strong only in the women's point of view, as Sax (1990, 1991) postulates for the same region. He writes,

the utter transformation and continuing subordination of a wife appears to local males to be both inevitable and proper. However, there is another interpretation of what happens to a woman after marriage, an in-

³For an extensive discussion of ritual connections between *dhyani* and *mait*, see Sax 1990, 1991.

terpretation from a woman's point of view. Most women say that links to the *mait* can never be completely erased, and that after marriage a wife longs to return to her natal place. According to the popular wisdom, quarrels between husband and wife often erupt over the women's desire to return there, and her husband's reluctance to allow her to do so (Sax 1991: 84).

In contrast to Sax's view, I argue that a woman's connection to her *mait* is in practice recognised all over Garhwal by both men and women. It is orthodox Hindu ideology that tells us, and the educated Garhwali husbands, that a woman's bond to her natal home is broken with the marriage ceremony. Local practices in Garhwal reflect clearly that this is not true and that the status of women is different than in orthodox Hinduism and in the North Indian plains. The affectionate connection to the *mait* remains strong as long as the mother is alive, and often there is a strong relationship even after the parents' death. A good relationship with outmarried daughters and sisters adds to family honour, and practical kinship – that means kinship that is alive and plays a role in people's lives, following Bourdieu's definition discussed in chapter three – is useful in several ways. A *dhyani's* substantial connection to her place of birth is revealed in ritual practices and will always remain special, and even her children, especially daughters, will have a relationship with their *nanihal*, the place their mother was born.

A woman's wish to return to her *mait* for a visit is always in conflict with her responsibilities towards her new household. The older she gets, the more children she has, the more animals to take care of, and the more she feels in charge for her work, the less easy it is for her to get away. In fact, most older women I knew hardly ever left their *sauryas* because they did not want to leave their animals in the care of other people and were generally too worried about their own household to be able to leave this behind for long. These women embodied their role as daughter-in-law and mothers, and their gendered performative practices had changed accordingly. Some husbands try to convince their wives to come back in the evening, if they have to visit their natal kin for a ritual or a marriage. But the reasons for this seems to be more the husband's emotional attachment to his wife than the wish to control her. The following song was explained to me in these terms. The husband found

reasons for her not to leave because he did not want to be without her. In fact, his reference to all the work that has to be done in the household would made every real woman I met put off her wish to visit her *mait*.

Husband: *Janu tu jaile hui har janu tu jaile hve ghar bhar.*

If you want to go you can go to your home.

Wife: *Mi jolu swami ji hve ghar bhar dui char din mi tora jolu.*

I will go, swami ji, I will go for two or four days.

Husband: *Janu tu jaile buali ku dharali ghoru.*

If you want to go, go, but who will look after the cow?

Wife: *Mi jolu swamiji ghoru guali darik.*

I will go, I will arrange for the cow.

Wife: *Mera mait bal dhan paki cha mera mait bal dhani paki cha.*

In my *mait* the corn is ripe, the corn is ripe in my *mait*.

Husband: *Janu tu jaile, dhana ko kya holu?*

If you want to go, but what will happen to the paddy here?

Wife: *Mai jolu swami ji dhana banaria darik.*

I will go, I will arrange for the harvest.

Wife: *Khud swami ji mait jaise khud swami ji. Mait ki khud, mait jaise khud swami ji.*

Bai bhulliyon ki khud me lagi cha swami ji.

I long for them so much, my husband, I miss my *mait* a lot, my husband, oh I miss them so much, my brothers and my younger sisters.

Husband: *Janu tu jaile bhaiswara kya holu.*

If you want to go, but what about the buffalos?

Wife: *Mai jolu swamiji bhaiswara darik.*

Mera mait ki laai swami ji kya pingali hui cha, kya pingali hui cha.

I will go, I will arrange for the buffalos.

The mustard crop in my *mait* has turned yellow, my husband, it has

turned yellow.

Husband: *Janu tu jaile, janu tu jaile lai kya khali, kya lali.*

If you want to go, go, but what will you eat and what will you bring?

Wife: *Mi to laipati lolu, mi to laipati lolu.*

Dudh khai bate, dudh khai bhate.

Mi lagi swami ji bhaiyon ki khud, meri bhaiyon ki khud.

I will bring mustard leaves. I will bring mustard leaves.

I will eat rice and milk. I will eat rice and milk.

My husband, I miss my brothers, I miss my brothers.

4.2 Work and Honour

Work soon becomes not only a major part of a married woman's life, but also a source of honour, connected with feelings of power and responsibility. However, the way to honour is hard and full of conflicts. Prema's situation, when she first arrived in her *sauryas* is a typical situation for a young *bvari* in a Garhwali household. Especially the wife of the eldest son is expected to take over much of the work in the house. Many Garhwali people say that most families see the *bvari* more as a worker than as a family member. The more a young *bvari* works, the more she increases the honour of her natal family. Later, this honour will also extend to her and her marital family. But in the first years, so my informants, it is still their parents' honour that is at stake. Prema repeatedly told me that a young woman has to work. If she does not do her work satisfactorily, her parents-in-law will not only abuse her and reduce the amount of food for her, but most importantly and most horrible for the young woman, they will start talking badly about her parents. In Prema's words,

At the time I got married, we were afraid, we had to look at their faces all day and all night, they would tell us all day what we were supposed to do. If I did not know how to work she might say, "Whose daughter is this? She cannot even work, she is very lazy." Then they would also talk bad about my parents.

In-laws talk bad about a *bvari*'s parents to abuse her and this insult to her parents is the worst threat to a young married woman. Her performance in her *sauryas* directly affects her mother's and father's honour. It can affect her younger sisters' and her brothers' marriage arrangements, her father's finances, his good name, and her mother's reputation. Usually, parents-in-law are never satisfied with their *bvari*'s work and often complain about her. When a new *bvari* joins her *sauryas*, she changes from daughter to daughter-in-law, and the gendered performative practices of new *bvaris* all centre around her work, her obedience, and her submission to her in-laws.

At the time she got married Kamala was convinced that a more extensive education with the possibility to get paid employment would be more valuable for her marital family than "the old way," where work on the family land and for the household was considered the only possible way for a married woman to lead an honourable life. But Kamala was too early with her aspirations. Instead of seeking employment she had to subordinate herself to her parents-in-laws' wishes and follow the "old way". She was well aware of a *bvari*'s position in her *sauryas* and she knew that new *bvaris* had to perform their obedience in order to survive and eventually become an honourable woman. She said:

Yes, that is how it was when we were young. When a bvari did not do her work to her mother-in-law's satisfaction, they used to say to their son, "Leave her (cor do usko), she is worthless. She does not do any work. Marry another! She is no good, she does not do good work." In these days, they did not care about her character. The people only needed someone to do the work. And even if she did her work, they would say, "She did not do anything, she never does anything!" In the evening they would scold her, "You have not done this, you have not done that. This work has not been done!" Even if the young women worked the whole day, they were still not satisfied (pura santushti nahim hui). Some people liked their bvari and treated her like a daughter, but that was seldom. The others treated her as I just said. Somebody has to do the work. Somebody has to sort and husk the lentils, cut the grass, look after the animals and do all the other work. They work in the fields, even if they

can never produce enough to fill everybody's stomach. But they have to do all the work, and in the end others eat what they produce. If there is not enough food in the house, they have to stay hungry.

A young *bvari* should never be angry or answer back when scolded. Even if she thinks that she is unfairly abused, she should never talk back to her parents-in-law or her husband. If she does, she increases the danger of dishonouring her own parents. Work is a way to maintain her and her parents' honour, but it is also the only way to make her own life comfortable in her *sauryas*.

Most of the time young *bvaris* feel ashamed in their *sauryas*. They feel ashamed in front of their male in-laws, older women make them feel uncomfortable, and they are embarrassed to eat. Young *bvaris* do not like eating the food in their *sauryas* at first because it is like eating at a stranger's table. The food, they feel, is not theirs and therefore it is shameful to eat it. While the food in their *mait* is rightfully theirs, they have to earn what they eat in the *sauryas*. For a Garhwali woman it is not enough to be the sexual companion of a family's son and to bear his children to earn the food she eats. This is even more important for landless Dalit people in Chamoli. Women have to work on the landowner's, mostly Rajputs' fields, and thus directly earn the food to eat that day. As Radha, a young woman, told me:

We have to work on other people's fields. Then they give us some food. We go to the Brahmans and the Rajputs to do their work and they give us grains, lentils, and rice. That is how we eat and how we feed our children. For one day's work, they give us some wheat, some manduwa, and some rice. When there is no one in the house to earn money, then there is no money in this house. Then we go to the forest and collect firewood and sell this wood in the market. That way we can earn at least some money.

It is important for most women to work for their own food and for their family. They could not eat food from anybody without having worked for it because they felt that this was shameless behaviour. Prema could not understand how I could eat at stranger's houses all the time because, on that day, I had eaten with another

family, my neighbours in the village. The room I lived in was in the old house of Prema's family. They had built a new house a few years before and since then the rooms they owned in the old family building had been empty. When I came, I took one of the empty rooms and for them, I had somehow become part of their family. It was fine to eat with them because, with my rent, I contributed to their family income, but for Prema it was very unusual behaviour for a woman to eat in strangers' houses. She said:

Women are ashamed to eat at other people's houses or in front of strange men. That is also why a bvari works so hard in the beginning. She feels ashamed to eat in their in-law's house. A bvari who cannot work will always be ashamed eating!

However, the *sauryas* is not only a place of shame, distress, and subordination. Especially the gendered performative practice "work" is a source of honour and pride for Garhwali women. It is not unusual to see village women coming back from a day of hard work, joking with each other, showing off about the amount of work they have done. They show their huge bundle of firewood or grass to the other women, hand it over to another woman to show how heavy it is, jokingly putting it on the back of a little girl, only to tell her that she is not a woman yet, and therefore she cannot carry such a heavy load. Such a scene happens almost every day in some part of the village, and village women repeatedly stressed how proud they were of their ability to work and eat only the food they have earned,

Look around and see how many women are working here. Wherever you go, it is the women who do the work. They do everything! We are not lazy like the women in the plains! We call them names (ham plainsom ki mahilaaum ko nam rakhte haim). We say, "What kind of women is she who does nothing all day. She eats sitting (bait-baitkar), she eats without having worked for it." We do not like them so well. And we do not like sitting around ourselves, either. We do not like to let the day pass by like this. We would rather work and rest a little bit. Then we start to worry about the next thing we have to do. We need our work. Day and night that is what we think about.

Work is the most central gendered performative practice for the women of Garhwal. It is connected with morality, and it is a practice without which the economic and agricultural system of Garhwal would break down as it functions today. One might say that work is just work and necessary to feed the family. And this is, of course true, to a certain extent. But, following Bourdieu, I see more in women's work than a simple functionality. The direct product gained by agricultural activity, the crops harvested are worth a lot less than the amount of work put into it. Among the Dalit families, agricultural products make up about a third of a family's yearly needs. That means that all Dalit families, whether poor or rich, need to buy most of their stocks at the market. Nevertheless the women of poor and rich families engage in extensive agricultural labour. This situation is comparable to the Kabyle peasants' situation observed by Bourdieu (1977). "If the peasant counted, he would not sow", Bourdieu (1977: 176) writes. The explanation Bourdieu provides for this apparently irrational behaviour is twofold. On the one hand, people engaged in such agricultural activities consider the value of their time as lower than it is for the Western observer,

[...]perhaps we should say that the relationship between work and its product is in reality not unknown, but socially repressed; that the productivity of labour is so low that the peasant must refrain from counting his time, in order to preserve the meaningfulness of his work; or – and this is only an apparent contradiction – that in a world in which time is so plentiful and goods are so scarce, his best and indeed only course is to spend his time without counting it, to squander the one thing which exists in abundance (Bourdieu 1977: 176).

On the other hand agricultural labour should be seen within a local "economical" logic. In this logic people are not only interested in the material produced through their labour, but also the gain in symbolic capital. In the case of Garhwali women their work adds to their "capital of honour". Therefore, I argue with Bourdieu, that the engagement in agricultural labour of this form is not to be understood as irrational, but should be seen in the context of interconvertibilities of economic and

symbolic capital, in which

the economic calculation directing the agents' strategies takes indissociably into account profits and losses which the narrow definition of economy unconsciously rejects as unthinkable and unnamable, i.e. as economically irrational (Bourdieu 1977: 177).

For the women of Chamoli, their "capital of honour" is very important because it has direct impacts on their position within the family and the village, their relation with their mothers-in-law and their husbands, and because this "capital of honour" can lead to status and power. For this symbolic exchange, they must not only invest time but also physical efforts, many women even risk their health. This is what gives their labour value and what makes aid, like the aid given at weddings to other families, precious and enables people to engage in the exchange of capital.

But, of course, the high expectations with regard to work are not easily fulfilled by the young girls who have just moved out of their mother's arms into the harsh reality of the *sauryas*. Therefore the first years in a woman's *sauryas* are years of struggle. The young woman has not yet earned her reputation as a good worker, and usually she cannot work as hard as the older village women, who have done this sort of work for years longer than she has done. Prema, for example, remembered that the first years in her *sauryas* were very hard for her. She did not get along well with her mother-in-law, who expected her to work more and more every day. Even then, when I knew her, she was still a very shy daughter-in-law. She never spoke back to her mother-in-law or her husband, even though she was frequently verbally and physically abused. She hardly ever talked to me about her problems with her mother-in-law. But one winter day, when we were on the way to buy fodder grass for her water-buffalo in a Rajput village about two hours away from our village, she told me about a memory that was especially vivid in her mind,

At that time, my legs never stopped moving, not for a single moment. I went wherever she (my mother-in-law) sent me. Once I went to the forest to collect grass and firewood for five days in a row. On the sixth day, I was very tired. But she came and said: "Everybody went to get grass but you. Why did you not go?" I said that I was

tired and that I did not want to go. Then she screamed at me, “You lazy bitch! All you want to do is to sit around all day and do nothing! You are useless!” She scolded me so loud that I thought, “If I stay here, I will have to listen to her all day.” Therefore I went to catch up with the others. It was right here, in the forest up there, where the red tree stands. I started to cut wood and my sickle broke. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to cut grass without my sickle. I sat there for a while and cried and cried. I was very desperate. I knew, if I came home without grass, I would be in trouble. Finally, I got up and started cutting grass with the broken half of the sickle. I was so angry and afraid that my hands started bleeding, but I worked so fast that I had done my work before the others. I remember this day, and my fear, often.

As in most families in North India, a new daughter-in-law has to fulfil certain expectations. In Garhwal, a good *bvari* is a good worker. If she works hard in her *sauryas*, she does not have to feel ashamed (*sharam*) to eat at a strange family’s table. She earns her food and, at the same time keeps up her own her parents’ honour.

It is well established that in India women and a family’s honour are closely connected. Wadley (1994), for example, observed that all villagers in Karimpur, Uttar Pradesh constantly work to gain and maintain honour (*ijjat*⁴) (Wadley 1994: 96). Being of high caste or wealthy are ways to gain honour in Karimpur. But proper behaviour, concern for others, and having virtuous women were most important for the sort of honour that extends to the whole family, village and *jati* (Wadley 1994: 96). Most importantly, “families can lose honor through their women [...] by having daughters or daughters-in-law who elope, become pregnant prior to marriage, or are seen outside too often” (Wadley 1994: 99). All over North India, immodest behaviour of women leads to loss of honour for the woman, her family, her village and her parents. Immodest behaviour is everywhere interpreted in slightly different ways. In Garhwal, there is dishonourable behaviour for women that is connected to their sexuality and there is dishonourable behaviour that is connected to their work. In everyday life, it is dishonourable not to work in the house of the in-laws, or to give a lazy impression. As one informant said: “People want work. Most

⁴Wadley spells honour, *ijjat* instead of *izzat* because it is pronounced that way in Karimpur.

do not even care about the *bvari's* character. They want somebody who works and that is it." But more importantly, Garhwali women can actively work on their reputation. For them work is a way to lead an honourable life. It is the female way of life. Other than the virtuous women in Karimpur described by Wadley (1994), or "the perfect wife" in orthodox Hinduism described by Leslie (1989), women in Garhwali maintain the family honour mostly through the gendered performative practice "work". Virtues like chastity, obedience, and subordination to the husband and his family are also important, but if a woman has all these virtues and cannot work, she will still dishonour her parents and herself.

Work can also become a performance. Prema tried to solve the tensions between her and her mother-in-law by performing the most perfect daughter-in-law. She worked harder and harder. She never talked back to her mother-in-law in public, and she tried to obey to her wishes. In that sense, she always behaved in what people nowadays call "the old way". Kamala, who was married to Prema's cousin, the son of her father's older brother, never wanted to live this "old way". But she, too, was working to uphold her own and her family's honour and was therefore forced to live the "old way" because there was no way out. These gendered performative practices are strong norms that constitute and create Chamoli women's reality; acting against them is unthinkable for them.

When Kamala came to her *sasural*⁵, she was highly educated for a young low caste woman at the time. Her father had arranged the marriage of her younger sister six months before her; so she could graduate from inter college. She knew that she could be unlucky after the wedding, just as her sister had been. She said:

My elder sister died after she had got married. She was married in my mother-in-law's maika (parental home). Her in-laws were not good to her. They did not live in peace. In earlier times, who lived in peace with their bahu? At those times, people used to say, the bahu was somebody else's daughter, she was there to work. Therefore they said to her, "Do your work!" And that was it. They did not give her

⁵She spoke Hindi to me and therefore used the Hindi words for marital home – *sasural* –, natal home – *maika* – and daughter-in-law – *bahu*. Her ability to speak Hindi was a sign of her education of which she was very proud. I therefore transliterate the Hindi words here, when quoting Kamala.

enough food, either. She died shortly after her wedding in her sasural. She became ill, we call it “dadara” (small pox) here in Garhwal, in Hindi, I don’t know the right word – it is fever and you get big sores all over the body. Everybody gets this once in a lifetime. Anyway, she had this disease, she was young, her in-laws did not look after her, she did not get enough food, so she died.

As Kamala was so highly educated, she expected to be allowed to look for employment after her wedding. She thought that she would not have to work in the house and the fields and thus be spared her sister’s fate. But when she moved to her *sasural*, she found out that her mother- and father-in-law had changed their mind about her employment.

*My wedding took place and I came here, to my sasural. At first, my in-laws said: “We have a literate and educated daughter-in-law, let her do service⁶.” However, when the wedding was over and I had come to my sasural, they said that I should do house- and fieldwork. “We have fields, so she should work with the other women in the fields.” At the time, my fate (*kismat*) was like this and I became pregnant very soon, too. How should I have done service with my little children? Therefore I did not look for service, nor did I study further. I had my children instead.*

Kamala’s education did not spare her the same fate all daughters-in-law in rural Chamoli had at the time. She had to work in the fields for her mother-in-law, bring fodder for the animals, and collect firewood so that her mother-in-law could prepare the food. She did not have a choice. Once married, a woman has to obey to the wishes of her new family. She has to subordinate herself to the well-being of her husband and his family.

At the time I got married all the girls cried. We were afraid. We thought, “I am going to leave my home, how will I live in the sasural? What are they doing there, will my in-laws hit me and shout at me? Will they make me work a lot?” Those days, sas and sasur were different everywhere, they regarded their daughters-

⁶“Service” in Garhwal means a paid government job.

in-law as strangers. Nobody liked her. It was the bahu, who had to do all the work. Her sas used to hit her, too. Sometimes it was the sas who hit them, sometimes the sasur, sometimes the devar. So the girls were afraid of what awaited them in their sasural, working in the fields, collecting firewood, getting grass, going to the forest, not enough food. If we did not bring enough grass, we were told off. If the firewood was not enough, they would say we were lazy. Sas and sasur would shout, "That is it? That is all the grass you could collect, all the firewood that was possible? What did you do all day?" Then the fight started in the family. Earlier, the bahus had a very hard life, full of sorrow. Today, the girls are better off. They are educated and not so afraid of their sas and sasur. Now it is different. At the time I got married, we were afraid, we had to look at their faces all day and all night, they told us all day what we were supposed to do. We were like slaves. If they said: "Go to the forest!", or "Get grass!", we had to do so. My sas was like that. No matter how much I brought, she always said: "Whose daughter is this? She cannot even work, she is very lazy." They used to talk badly about my parents. Where do people still do that today? Nowhere! Today it is good for the girls. Those days it was like this. Until her children had not grown up, she was under control. When a daughter-in-law came, she had to do what her sas and sasur told her until her children had grown up, and that was it.

Women could not walk around that free, either. We had to cover our heads. If we walked around as we do today, people in the sasural would think you were a shameless woman. We always had to have the dhoti in front of our faces, especially in front of the sasur. That was the tradition of all the people at that time. If you did not do that, you got told off, shouted at. Sas and sasur were only interested in the work to be done. When they wanted the bahu to get grass, then it was expected that she brought a lot of grass, when they wanted her to get firewood, she did not dare to come back unless she had a huge pile. She was busy all day. She ate, when her sas gave her food. That is how it was.

This subordination to the wishes of the marital family is common all over South Asia. Seymour (1999: 70) argues that the subordination to group membership and interdependent behaviour is something that people in Orissa learn from early

childhood onwards. Families try to produce people “who will be interdependent in both identity and behavior, who will identify with the family as a whole, and who will seek to behave in ways that are compatible with extended family interests” (Seymour 1999: 71). This subordination to collective agency is also considered important in Garhwal. Gender performativity and identity are tightly connected to this understanding of group membership and interdependence. For young women in Chamoli, it is work that marks this subordination and that is, at the same time, the way to honour. Whenever I asked a young woman what the major change in her life was after she got married, the standard answer I got was: work. In the *mait*, they learned to work, but in the *sauryas*, they had to work.

Work, Friendship, and Female Places

Rina, Kamala’s daughter, who was of marriageable age, sat in the kitchen and prepared *capattis* (bread) for the family when I reached the house that morning. I sat down beside her in the small shed they used as a kitchen and warmed my hands at the fire. *Girls have to work a lot*, she said.

Boys never have to do that. Boys will always stay at home. If they want to work, they can, but they never have to. We, the girls, we have to learn early how to do this work properly. Otherwise, we would never be able to survive in the sauryas. Women have a very hard life here in Garhwal. There is not much fun in a woman’s life here.

“What would happen if a girl did not work in her *sauryas*?” I asked her.

People will look at her and think badly of her (bure nazar se dekhte haim). Nobody likes a girl like that. People will say, “Look at her, how lazy she is. She does not do any work, but wanders around freely. She does not have any shame!”

Kamala, Rina’s mother, came back from milking her buffalo, overheard us, stuck her head in the small room, and said:

Yes, girls have to move into a stranger's house. If they do not know how to work there, people will treat them badly. Nobody will like them, if they do not know how to do any work. It is a matter of honour (izzat). A woman who works is a good woman, and a woman or a girl who does not work goes astray (bikare jate).

Work is one of the most important duties of a married woman, and through work she can maintain her honour, her status in the family, and give her natal family a good reputation. Life in her *sauryas* is above all conditioned by hard work, whereas the *mait* is the refuge where women should not work, where they are always welcome, and where their share of rice is waiting for them, whenever they come.

Garhwali women and girls often talk about the amount of work females have to do in the same way Rina did. They say that women have no happiness, but only work in their lives. Women and work are the same, they belong together, they say. For them work is not an option, it is a duty. It is part of their lives, and a good woman should become one with her responsibilities. This statement was made by a middle-aged woman, a mother of four children who was well established in her own village, and all my other informants said similar things about women and work:

Women have to work. That is how we are. How many women died cutting grass? They climb around in the forest on their own, look up the steep mountains and all they see is grass! Then they climb up and fall. And some die! All for their work! A woman will always think that she can work more than all the others. They understand their work as their responsibility. And they want to do a good job. They cut as much grass as they can, and they don't care about falling or about how heavy the load will be in the end. The only thing they can think about is to finish their work for the day. If they bring a lot of grass, then the animals can eat for two or three days. Their heads are full of work. They never find peace. Most women do not find any peace until they die. And when they have turned old and can't work anymore, they do not find peace, either. They still do not think that they have done their share of work and lean back.

Garhwali women feel strong and useful because of their ability to work hard. In Garhwal, it is the woman who does most of the agricultural work, she runs the

household and rears the children, takes care of the animals as well as the crops. In every meal women cook, they know there is a piece of their own hard labour. And even though it sometimes seems that they complain about their situation, they say that they are proud of their own abilities to take over responsibilities for their own households and they perform their pride, too. Many of the women's songs are, for example, about Garhwali women's work, such as the following two songs:

I wake up early in the morning
And gather cow-dung.
Not a drop of tea do they give me.
I grind Basmati rice, in the Chakki, for them.
While they give me coarse Manduwa to eat!
During Sawan-Bhadon (when it rains)
I walk barefoot to the forest.

Who brings grass from the jungle?
Who fetches water from the spring?
When the house is full of guests,
Who will give them comfort?
Who looks after the house?
Who gives fodder and water to the buffalo?
Who will clean the grain and
Who will grind it?
It's the daughter-in-law, who looks after
All that is to do in this house!
(Capila 2002: 197).

My dhoti is torn,
I have no scarf to cover my head.
I bring water in a heavy vessel
With no support on my head.

I bring heavy loads of grass
On my bare head.
Can you see my plight, dear father!
(Capila 2002: 197-198).

Garhwali people say that women need these songs. Singing the songs in the forest is another example of gendered performative practice. It is shameful to complain openly about their situation in the new household. They should not speak up against their mother-in-law or otherwise openly complain about her to anybody. Therefore, my informants say, they sing these songs while working with their friends in the fields or in the forest. Far away from their in-laws or anybody who could overhear them, they communicate their feelings to each other. These songs could easily be interpreted as pure complaints, sung by women who feel sorry for themselves. However, we have to see these songs in the light of the social setting where they are sung. Women would never sing these songs in front of male relatives or older women, especially not in front of any in-law. Women sing these songs while they are alone, or among their female village friends. They sing these songs to the same people with whom they will play their games in the evening again, each claiming that she is able to work more than all the others. In this sense, these songs should also be understood as a sign of pride and the performance of honour. Women work a lot, but without them the household could not function, without them the animals would not be fed, without them there would be no water in the house, without them, there would be no food.

But certainly, the field and the forest are female places where women meet and talk about their sorrows. It is the place where young daughters-in-law are free to talk to their friends about their problems with family members because this is the space where they do not have to fear anybody overhearing them. In this place they perform their friendship. I often saw women sitting together in the fields, talking while helping each other weeding the fields, harvesting, cutting grass and so on. Embarrassing news or events are exchanged with the heads stuck together in the fields. It was always in the fields, that a woman confessed that her husband had sexual relations with other women, that people were worried about young girl's

sexual relations with men of the neighbouring villages, that women told each other about their pregnancies and the latest wrong-doing of a family member. In the fields and in the forest, women sing and talk about everything. Many songs are created about the parental village or relationships with the in-laws. In some of these songs, women tell each other their stories, in some they tell the story of others. Among the most popular songs there are sad stories about women who died or met a particularly horrible fate. The following song that travelled through several districts in Garhwal is a good example of this practice. I cite a version recorded by Capila (2002) in Tehri, which is very similar to a version I heard women sing in the forests of Chamoli, but unfortunately I was not able to record this version.

One night he came home at midnight,
I was cooking chapattis.
But he wanted to have rice.
He took off his watch, put it away
And entered the next room.
He came back with a darati (sickle) in his hand.
I thought he was joking and
I smiled at him
He cut me twice with the darati,
I fell, blood streaming from my head.
My devar cried in vain
When he saw my head fall off
(Capila 2002: 160).

Some of these songs are very old and sung again and again as a warning to the women and especially the mothers to take care of their daughters when arranging their marriages. But most of the time young women make up their songs. They create each line spontaneously as they go. There is a special genre, sung while working in the forest. It is like a game, two lines are sung by one of the friends and the other answers with another two-liner. Only the second line carries meaning while the first line is there to keep the rhythm.

Alu phuli dholo maji alu phuli dholo.

Vyakuni vaqt maji kya boj li jolu maji, kya boj li joli.

Potato blossoms are white, oh mother, potato blossoms are white.

What I will have in the bundle of fodder in the evening?

Laguli ku pati maji, laguli ku pati maji.

roti khali bhat maji, gadya meri yad maji, gadya meri yad.

Leafs of the creeper, mother, the leaves of the creeper.

When you eat roti or rice, please remember me, mother, remember me!

Dhobi ko raukara maji, Dhobi ko raukara.

meru banta ko bhat maji, almari rakhana almari rakhana.

The dhobi's washing place, mother, the dhobi's washing place

Keep my share of rice in the cupboard, mother, keep it in the cupboard
for me.

Kati te kapara maji, kati te kapara.

Birna videsh maji koi ni cha apara maji, koi ni cha apara.

Cloth is cut, oh mother, the cloth is cut.

Nobody is mine in the alien land, oh mother, nobody here is mine.

Gundi jalu atu maji, gundi jalu atu.

Mait ruthi meri maji chutti gai batu.

Oh my mother, the flour is ground, the flour is ground

My *mait* is angry with me, The path home is gone.

Gundi jali atu maji, gundi jalu atu.

Mait ruthi meri maji hitani ku batu.

Oh my mother, the flour is ground, the flour is ground.

My *mait* has turned away from me, Now which path should I take? ⁷

Unlike the songs of Rajasthan collected and translated by Raheja and Gold

⁷The songs were collected by R. Deshpande in Chamoli district during 1986, and transliterated and translated by me.

(1994), Garhwali songs are not songs that invert social relations and mock husbands, they are rather songs about women's everyday lives and worries. In the songs, because they are songs only for the ears of women, women express their anger about cruelty and unaccepted behaviour, they sing about their longing for the *mait* and their mother, they sing about their fears and wishes, they sing about their work, and they can tell each other jokes, sing songs simply to amuse each other while working.

Work opens a place for female action and interaction. It enables women to get away from life in the family and the village where young women constantly have to subordinate themselves, where mothers- and sisters-in-law, fathers- and brothers-in-law and sometimes the husbands also control most of their movements. Usually, women go to collect firewood and grass with a group of friends, unmarried women go with a group of unmarried women or with their mothers, young recently married women go together, and the older women form other groups. Networks of trust and friendship became evident to me when I finally started to pay attention to who went off to the forest with whom. I realized that the same women always went together, and these groups of women were the same who helped each other out in their fields in the busy times of harvesting and ploughing. Friendships among married women are important not only for emotional support, but also for the work to be done. Sometimes, when there were only two or three women in one family, they needed the help of others to get all their work done in time. And help was readily given to friends. As one village women said:

Yes, the bahus help each other. They go together to the forest and the fields. They share their work. They collect firewood together and cut grass. They take cow dung to the fields together and help each other out with the weeding. They do all this out of love (apna prem bal se).

This is different from other parts of North India where a friendship between and among females was only thought to be possible in this form before marriage (see e.g. Bennett 1983; Narayan 1986; Seymore 1999; Wadley 1992), as mentioned in the chapter two and three. Garhwali women have friends in the village. This friendship is very important for them. Kamala told me,

Everybody needs sahelis. We sing songs and dance when we are alone together. We go to collect grass only with our real friends because we have time to talk there, and we can sing. This, too, is changing now. People have got rich (samppann ho gai sabhi log), but when I was a young bahu it was like this: the friends told each other everything there. They talked about what the sas did to them, that she beat them, that she did not give them any food. The women went up into the forest together and told each other about their sorrows (dukh). The women told each other what was happening at their houses, some cried. They could never do that in the village. They did not have the time and they were too ashamed to do that there. The real friendships were only visible in the forest. They did not even have the time for that in the village. And if the sas knew, she would say, "Do not go with her! Why do you always go with her? What did you tell her?" That is how it was. And there in the forest, we made our songs about our sorrows and our happiness, and then we sang them.

In most villages, the forest in which the Dalit women are allowed to collect wood is far away from the village. Therefore, on the days the women go to collect a pile of firewood, they stay away all day. They take a few *capattis* as a snack and set off early in the morning to come back with heavy loads of wood late in the evening. During the walk up the mountain and deeper into the forest, the women change with every step that takes them further away from their village. They pull up their *dhotis* (short sari), sometimes up to their knees and enjoy the cool air around their legs. Here, deep, in the forest they have no restrictions, there is nobody to be ashamed of or to whom they have to show their respect. Once they have reached the place in the forest, where they want to collect their firewood, they all climb onto different trees and cut off the branches, singing and making up songs with each other, one of the women starts with a line and the others add theirs. They cut the branches, let them fall down to the ground, and later distribute the wood and the collected grass among them so that each member of the group has the same amount when they return home. When the work is done, the women rest and dance, singing popular songs before carrying their heavy loads back down to their duties in the village.

The working place of the young daughters-in-law is therefore also a place to perform friendships with other women of the village, while at the same time strengthening their position within the household and upholding their own and their parents' honour. To me, this is another example where the border between performance and performativity is very thin. When they walk deeper into the forest the women change, their body postures, their sense of honour and shame is different and they express an intimacy amongst each other that is not possible in the village. However, this is not a performance, it is a naturalized practice. The forest is the place where women become different persons, where they perform a different identity. Their behaviour changes completely. In comparison to the docile daughters-in-law in the village, these girlfriends are totally different persons. Women have fun in the forest, and they form alliances with other women of the village. But still, the core of their gender performativity, and their gendered identity created by practices, is work. They still work hard and never return empty-handed. A young, powerless daughter-in-law has no other choice than to subordinate herself to the wishes of her marital family. And it is unthinkable to act against the family, to act against their duty, mainly because of the result: shame and dishonour for the girl's natal family. But a young daughter-in-law knows that she can slowly improve her position in the family hierarchy by performing her position and performing docility, in other words by performing the good daughter-in-law who works hard and has children, preferably male.

4.3 Separation and the Economy of Kinship

Performative practices like work add to a married woman's honour, and eventually this and the children she bears will strengthen her position in her *sauryas* and give her, or rather her nuclear family unit, more agency. One of the more peculiar things one notices when looking at the agricultural work patterns in Chamoli is that women actually do most of the work. Very different from the situation in the plains, *pahari* (hill) women's work is not restricted to the house. Chamoli women are also responsible for most of the agricultural work. They cook, raise children, gather firewood, cut grass for fodder, care for livestock, are responsible for planting, weeding and

harvesting crops, processing the grain and so on. The men of the villages do the ploughing twice a year, they do occasional repairs on the walls of the fields, and they should earn money. Women and adolescent girls are responsible for the work within the village. That means that their day starts early, before everybody else begins to work and ends late, after everybody else went to bed. Most women are proud of their strength and their ability to work. There are always conflicts in a joint family, as Shakuntala, a young married woman with three young children, who had just moved back into the village and now lived with her in-laws again, said:

It is normal to have problems when a woman has to live with her sas and her sasur. Then everything is difficult. When you see how others live, you always think: "If I could just live as they do, that would be good." Everybody thinks like that. Everybody wants everything great for himself or herself. I also want to live well. I do not have other problems.

Today, most young Dalit daughters-in-law exercise agency through separating from their mother-in-law's *culha* (hearth), which means that she, her husband, and her children form a separate unit that controls its own resources and takes decisions concerning this nuclear family like to allow a woman to visit her *mait* or her children to go to school alone. Practical kinship – to use Bourdieu's term – and especially the relationship of the woman with her *mait* and the networks established with her *maitis* are extremely important to support the nuclear family's separation from the extended family unit. Kinship networks in practice exercise joint agency to support the *dhyanis*. However, such a separation is neither planned nor does it happen straight after marriage, the separation is a process that develops together with the woman's rise in honour and agency.

Generally, a daughter-in-law in North India is depicted as completely integrated into her in-law's family and place and detached from her natal family and place. To a certain extent, this is true for Chamoli as well. As discussed on the last pages, during the first years of her married life, a woman should embody the subordination to her mother-in-law, and she usually does. On the day of her wedding, a young wife hopes to get along well with her in-laws. Usually, she desires for a life of peace within

an extended family. On her in-law's side, the *bvari* is a symbol of the prosperity of her husband's lineage, of fertility and good fortune on the day of her wedding. She brings with her powers for procreation along with the hope for offspring as well as her physical powers to work for the family. Supposedly, in a *kanyadana* wedding, a woman's body is transformed through the wedding ceremony. A new bride is auspicious. She is dressed in auspicious red wedding clothes, and the rituals during the wedding ceremony and those greeting the bride in her new house treat her like a goddess (and her husband like a god). However, during the first years after her wedding, her husband's family also sees her as a danger to family unity. It is feared that the relationship with her husband will lead to estrangement between him and his parents and ultimately separation of the family (Sax 1991: 110-122). Bennett describes a very similar situation for the daughters-in-law of Nepal,

To the groom's family the bride is viewed as an outsider', an affine who is somehow dangerous to the central patrifocal value of agnatic solidarity [...].It is at this stage that she may be held responsible for any misfortunes that befall her in-laws, and it is at this time that her behaviour will be most critically watched and controlled by them (Bennett 1983: 169-170).

This minimization of the husband-wife relationship makes it impossible for the couple to establish joint or collective agency happens in the same way in Garhwal as it happens in most of North India. In Garhwal, this is often enforced by the absence of a young *bvari's* husband. Because of male work migration, many husbands cannot spend much time in the village with their wives. Often, husbands only stay at the village for a few weeks after the wedding before they leave to work. At that time of my research in Chamoli, the young villagers looked for work all over India. At my first village one son had even moved to London for work. Young men usually work in the army, as taxi drivers in Delhi, or as factory workers in Bombay, but sometimes they just live with a relative in the city, looking for work. The rate of unemployment among men is very high in Chamoli. However, young men often stay outside the village in the hope to find their fortune somewhere in the big city. As the education for Dalits does not follow very high standards, however, most return, unemployed and without hope, after a few years. If a villager is in the army, he tries

to serve for seven years. After seven years of army service, he is entitled to a government pension. That means that most young married women live alone in their *sauryas* with their mother- and father-in-law. To counter the threat to family unity, parents-in-law try to control their daughter-in-law very strictly. The old mothers-in-law claim the same respect they showed their mother-in-law when they first came to their *sauryas*. In the old days, this respect was claimed through an open demonstration of her power, power over the resources and power over the daughter-in-law's body. When the first phase is over, a daughter-in-law should subordinate herself to her mother-in-law's rule. I have never seen a young *bvari* perform services for her mother-in-law, such as massaging her arms and legs, as reported for other parts of North India (see e.g. Jacobson and Wadley 1992: 68). But many women reported to have felt "like slaves" in their mothers-in-law's house. From the mothers-in-law's point of view, they have the right to claim their *bvari's* work because she is their property, just as they were their mothers-in-law's property when they were young. Performative practices thus depend not only on gender, but also on age and status. The son and the daughter-in-law are further controlled by minimizing their relationship with each other. Even if a new bride's husband lives in his village, it is considered shameful if the couple has an intimate public relationship. Like in many parts of North India, a newly wed couple should not talk to each other in public; often they do not even sleep in the same room together for the first months. During the first years of their marriage, a husband has little power to influence the treatment his wife receives. This is also changing today, but the women who were my informants were middle-aged *bvaris*, and when they were young, they could hardly rely on their husbands for support. Kamala said:

Those days, where was the husband? You sometimes saw him at night. Otherwise he was gone. During the day he was away because he was afraid of his parents.

This practice of keeping wife and husband apart does not only affect the young wife, but also indicates that a young husband is just as much under the control of the family and has to subordinate himself to family unity as his young wife. Many parents consider their sons to be their source of income. Like an investment, their

education should bear fruits. All sons are expected to contribute to their parent's income. For Chamoli people, it is a son's duty to serve and obey his parents. As a result, parents not only have decisive agency concerning the subjects of study and the duration of their sons' education, but also about the career they should take. In Chamoli, most parents would like to see their sons as government employees in one of the regional offices as clerks or something similar or as teachers at a government school. But as I said, employment is not easy to find, and many families fight over their sons' inability to find work and earn money. Today, most parents expect their sons to be able to feed themselves and their wives. Married sons are thus often caught between two opposing obligations. The obligation towards their partners, their wives and sometimes lovers, whom they know to be alone and in need of their support on the one hand, and the strong obligation towards their parents and brothers on the other hand. Rupchand, Prema's husband, remembers the time when his wife was so utterly unhappy in his house, and he was unable to help her for fear of his parents, especially his mother,

When Prema arrived at her home, she was the only bvari there. She had small devars and her sas was doing the work. But her health was not so good, and therefore most of the work-load was shifted onto Prema's shoulders. At that time, we had a cow and a water buffalo. All day Prema was busy doing her work. She got up in the morning and prepared breakfast for the family. Then, after having breakfast, she went to cut grass. After that she went to the forest to collect firewood. When she returned from the forest in the evening she told her husband about her sorrows and hardships (apne dukh batati thi). Her husband listened to her and put everything in his mind, but he did not dare to say anything to his mother and father because he was very ashamed. How could he have talked about this, his wife's stuff, to his mother and father? Since the day Prema arrived at her house, she had done all the work of the household, she was busy all day, everyday, ever since she had arrived. She made the breakfast in the morning, lunch at midday, washed the cutlery and the plates, prepared dinner at night. And on Sunday she had even more work than on the other days because that day she also had to wash the clothes of her devars (husband's younger brothers) and nanads (husband's sisters). She was busy all day with

this work and ate very little in the evening. Sometimes she ate two sometimes one roti, Sometimes she left her stomach completely empty. After a while I found work and left home. The day I left the house, she followed me half the way down into the valley and when she finally let me go, she stood until I had long left from her sight. She cried because from then on there was no one with her. She was completely alone.

Family unity and the extended family's collective agency have a great importance in Garhwal, especially for parents-in-law. Family unity ensures them a comfortable life in old age. It can also make the lives of daughters-in-law more comfortable because the women of one household not only share their resources, but also their work. Shared work also means shared responsibility and thus not only eases childcare and the visits to the natal home, but also agricultural work, housework, and childbearing. Nevertheless, today this family unity is seldom found amongst the Dalits of Chamoli. All extended Dalit families whom I know had at least separated their hearths (*culha*). Nuclear families as economically independent units are preferred to the life of increasing tension in the joint family.

For men, separation from parents and brothers means escape from those nets of obligations that forced them to take on jobs they could not do, go for education without a future, and give all their earnings to their parents. But while they want to become economically independent, most men remain attached to their parents and brothers in the sense that the deities are still jointly worshipped, parents can eat at a son's house at any time, and the grandchildren are usually welcome at paternal grandparents' house. Unless there had been a very big fight, the families would stay strongly attached to each other, but the relationship is freed of the tensions and the economic dependency. I have heard many such stories, but one of the most revealing story for me, in terms of economic resources, changes in gender performative practices and habitus, conflicts over agency and patency, is the story of Kamala and Anil who say that they were literally forced into separation by his parents. Here is the story as Kamala told it to me:

Finally, my wedding took place, too, and I came here, to my sasural. At first, my in-laws said: "We have a literate and educated daughter-in-law, let her do service."

However, when the wedding was over and I had come to my sasural, they said that I should do house- and fieldwork. "We have fields, therefore she should work with the other women in the fields." At that time, my fate (kismat) was like this and I became pregnant very soon, too. How should I have done service with my little children? For that reason I did not look for service, nor did I study further, so I had my children. First I had the twins. For a year I had so much work with both of them. Twins are like this, if one starts crying, they both cry. If one is hungry, the other will get hungry, too. At that time I used to cry a lot because I did not know how to handle the situation. I did not sleep at night. I worked a lot. My sas and sasur did not live in peace with us at that time, either. So they were no help. My husband used to work in the building business. At that time, the government did not give them many projects; they had to fire quite a few men. Therefore my husband decided to quit working there. When the government said that there was not enough space for all, he decided to leave. But where to go? He tried at different places, but at that time you needed money to get a good job. The people there said: "If you want to get a job, you have to give me thirty-thousand or fifty-thousand rupees, then you will get a job." At that time we did not have the money for that. He wrote the applications anyway, but people told him to give money. He tried and tried, but had to give up after a while. "Now I will not do that kind of job, from now on I will do the work of a thekedar (contractor)." Therefore he started doing this and he used to travel around a lot, here and there, he went to earn money. And I was alone with the small children.

We went on and on like that, our sas and sasur did not help, either. Nor did they want to give us our share of the land. Now we have our own land, but at that time they refused to give us our share. They were two brothers. And my parents-in-law said: "You want to live apart from us, fine, but we will not give you the land. Until your younger brother's wedding has not been celebrated, we will not divide the land." He also had another younger sister, you saw her, when she came for the ritual, they also said they wanted to get her married before they would give us our share. "We will not have any money, that is why we can not give you the land, we might need it for her wedding." We said: "Fine, if that is what they want to do, let them do so." We tried to earn our own living. We went here and there,

did work everywhere and earned money. Like this, we slowly worked for what we have today. We did not want to live with my sas and sasur, and we did not want to give in to their blackmail, either. For that reason we had to work very hard. We bought this land here. At that time, my father was still alive, he also helped us, he did all the arrangements with the land. He used to work at a Karanprayag office, so he knew all about the land. He did all the work. He helped us, gave us money, did the arrangements for the land and so on. He helped a lot. This land is ours. It has nothing to do with my sas and sasur, we bought it new. We gave up their fields and their house. He (my husband) said: "We are two brothers, and one day we will inherit the land anyway. Until they want to give it to us, let them go." Why did they not give it to us? I don't know. We said: "Our children are small, so you earn, you eat, the land will not go anywhere." So my sas was alone. In the fields she was alone, too. She had to do all the work by herself in the fields. I said: "Do your work, you don't give us anything, so you earn, you work. Where will the land go?" They went on like that for years. Finally, the boy's marriage was arranged. Then they said to my husband's younger brother, "You do everything, take all the land. You take your inheritance." We invited the whole village, we call it panch, all the village men came and decided what to do. We said: "It is the inheritance of two brothers." The village men always do this, for all the families. If land is divided, you always have to invite all the villagers to decide. Then they make the decision. His father would not have given us anything by himself. The village people looked after it. They divided the land in two equal parts. If there are four brothers, then the father has to give four equal parts of inheritance to all the brothers. The fields, the house, the cutlery and so on, everything has to be divided into equal parts. After my devar's wedding had taken place, they did this. So we got our share. This was when Joti (her youngest daughter) had already started high school. Until then, we had to live from our own work, we earned money and food here and there and ate like this. We did not eat a single grain from their fields. I did not have any fields to work in. Whose fields should I have worked in? When sas and sasur did not give us our share, we just said: "Leave it, you earn, you eat. We will get our food from somewhere." And we did. We bought this land, and then we got help from the government. They gave us some money so that we could build two rooms. We built two rooms and

the money was granted. We did the work with our own hands. We built this house ourselves. We worked and worked. We did all the work alone. The children were small, but Rina (the eldest daughter) used to look after them, Pankaj, Sibbu, and Joti. Sas and sasur did not talk to us and they did not help us. When they saw that we had managed to get the land, they became very jealous. We worked and worked. We continued to work very hard, and finally we had our house. We hired a mistari (carpenter) to help us with the walls. All the other work, we did ourselves. We only got eight thousand rupees, nothing comes from eight thousand rupees, and for that reason we decided to do all the work ourselves and to pay the cement and the mistri from the money. We collected the stones ourselves from the river. We got the wood from the forest and made two rooms. We used to go in the forest at night to cut the wood. It was illegal to do this, but what were we to do? Night after night, we went into the forest in the dark and cut the wood. He was on the one side of the tree and me on the other. This is how we carried it down here. This is how we managed to build the first two rooms properly. We got the stones from the ground. There are nice stones up there on our land near our cowshed and from the river. We broke them into small peaces for the walls. Then ten or twelve years later, we got some more money from the local government, then we made the ceiling properly. Again, we worked day and night. We were busy all the time, we were never without work, we had to go here and there, and we worked day and night. We were very busy with our work, did not sit with anybody, talk with anybody, or even drink tea with anybody. How else should we have raised our kids? Finally, when the younger brother's wedding had taken place, we decided to ask for our share. We ate from our own hands' work, we never asked them for anything. Therefore we said: "It is time to get our share!" We had never asked them for anything. They had always wanted us to ask them for help, they had blackmailed us to try and get us back into their household. If we had asked them for help, they would have said: "Come back into our house and work for us, and we will help you." They had always thought that we would come and ask for their help, but we never did. We separated because my sas and sasur always fought with me, they always said that I was not working enough and so on. I had to do all the work, and it was not enough yet. In the beginning, I had the twins. There was so much to do, and my sas and sasur kept on complaining,

“She does not do the work, she never does the work, nothing is done!” In the end, my husband said: “Fine, if the work is not done, we will live separately.” Then we lived separately, we cooked separately and we ate separately. If their work was not done, we decided to tell them to do their work themselves, and we would do our work ourselves. Work and eat, that is how we got separated. How should I have learned to do so much work? I had always been at school, from early childhood on. I did learn how to work. But when I came to my sasural, they should not have expected me to be able to run the whole household at once. So we separated. They did not understand that they got an educated daughter-in law, and that I could do other work, too, and that my sas should have done some work, too. They did not have enough brains for that. They just thought, “This is the daughter of other people. Therefore she should go and work!” And I worked and worked, but it was never enough. Then my husband became angry and said: “If the work is not done by her properly, then you go and do it!” It was good that he said this to them, but this is also how fights start. That is why we got separated and we never lived together thereafter. Ever since then, I have never talked much with them, either. I did not work enough in their eyes. Therefore they fought me again and again. Even after we had separated they tried to fight. They never looked after our children. It was only after the brother’s wedding that they said: “Fine, then take your inheritance.” I said: “Of course, we will take our inheritance, there was nothing you could have done against this, my husband is your son, after all.” Since then, we have got some fields to work in. That was about eight years ago, after my devar’s marriage happened. Today, my sas and sasur come every now and then, but I do not talk to them very often. We still have fights every now and then, I can’t see the point in fighting with them, we have our own house, I say, “If you come to fight, then go straight back home to your house.” Since then we have lived here in peace. It is only the past two-three years that we have started living a comfortable life.

In my Maika it was perfect, we had enough food, a good family and I could study, my father did not drink. My mother comes here quite often. Her sons don’t like when she goes here and there too often, they tell her off, “Why do you live in your daughter’s house? This is your home!” That is why she does not live here for long, but she comes every now and then, when she misses me (khud lagti hai). When

we separated from his parents' house, my father used to come often, he brought us things like food, flour, rice, and money. He gave us all we needed. He said: "My daughter should have enough to eat." He used to come here in the morning and left in the evening, he never stayed over night. He came, had tea and he left again. My father helped us a lot, with food and drink and everything we needed. Now, my mother tries to come, but my brothers do not like this, they tell her off. We sometimes invite her and then she comes. My father died when Joti was three years old, now she is fifteen. He was sixty or seventy years old. He was very sick. He had to quit his job and died. He was the last of three brothers to die, even his younger brother died before him.

Kamala's and Anil's story is typical and exemplifies not only process and reasons of the separation from parents and parents-in-law, but also how important the relations to the wife's natal kin are for separation. Kamala said that her father helped to buy the land, and he also helped out with food, clothing, and money. This is not unusual in Garhwal. Many women whose parents can afford it receive continuous financial help from their *maits*. The interesting thing about this is that it is not shameful for a woman or her husband to accept this help from a married woman's natal kin, and it is not unusual, either. The bond between Dalit families and between husband and wife to the woman's natal kin seems to be much stronger than usually accounted for. And it is exactly this aid by a woman's parents that enables her and her husband to solve a difficult situation with his parents. Separation without the financial aid of Kamala's parents might have been impossible, and I have met many more families who were in a similar situation. A young Rajput woman from Kamala's village, for example, told me that since her husband had gone crazy after she had got her third son, and her parents-in-law had refused to help her and her children because they had separated from them a few years earlier, her own father supported her and her three boys. She said that her father always said, "Don't worry, my daughter, as long as I am alive I will make sure that you will be fine!" So she received money, clothing and food from him regularly. Many young Dalit couples in Chamoli rely on the wife's natal kin in times of financial need. In Kamala's case, it was her father who gave them the money to buy their own land

and build a house. I know of many other cases where a wife's natal kin, her father, her brothers, but most often her sister's husbands have considerably contributed to their finances. During the time of my field research, I often wondered where people acquired money, especially when men were unemployed and seemingly doing everything except earning money. The cash economy among the Dalits in Chamoli follows its own rules and these are closely connected to what Bourdieu calls social and symbolic capital. While the female performative practices that gain the most honour for the woman and her natal family centre around work, male performative practices that gain honour centre on financial responsibility for wife and children. It is not possible for everybody to earn money directly through employment, but there are other channels to acquire money, and these are practical kinship networks. This system is best explained by invoking Bourdieu. He suggests that practical kinship units "exist only through and for the particular functions in pursuance of which they have been effectively mobilized"; and they are kept alive by continuous exchanges and continue to exist "because they rest on a communion of dispositions (*habitus*) and interests" (Bourdieu 1977: 35, brackets in original). In Chamoli, a man's relationship with his patrilineal kin is very hierarchical and characterized by many obligations. The patriline's relations are regulated by a strict code of practices such as the exchange of women's work power, gifts at certain special occasions like marriage and engagement, food exchange and so on. It is therefore considered shameful to borrow money from one's patrilineal kin. However, in accordance with the change from brideprice to bridewealth wedding, it adds to a woman's natal family's honour to support her and her nuclear family. Economic capital is exchanged for a symbolic capital of honour and at the same time strengthens the women's ties to her natal family. As Bourdieu postulates, economic theories need to be expanded "to all goods, material and symbolic, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after" (Bourdieu 1977: 178). At times, a daughter's, sister's or wife's sister's happiness and economic well being is worth more in terms of honour than the material resources given to her and her husband. This exchange system is not restricted to the separation of couples from the man's parents. It is rather a fact of daily life. One day, Prema explained it to me. I was in an embarrassing situation because her father-in-law had just asked me to give him money to pay for a ritual

specialist. He had performed a three-day puja for the family, they had sacrificed five goats and three chickens, had feasted with the whole village and all visitors. The ritual specialist had played his *hudaki* (drum) for three nights and three days and had made the deities dance in the courtyard to bless the family and every visitor. When the spectacle (*tamasha*) was over, Prema's father-in-law asked me to pay for the ritual specialist. I was very surprised and slightly shocked. I had never shown any sign that I was rich, and apart from the small rent and salary I paid Prema, I had never spent much money in the village. Nor did I have much money with me. I had left most of my cash with a good friend in a nearby NGO. I had never needed much money at the village, nor had I expected to need it. I had to tell him that I was unable to give him the money to pay for the ritual specialist. I said that he should have told me beforehand so that I could have arranged the money. I could not help them: I did not have the money, and I could not organize it quickly enough so that they would be able to pay the ritual specialist. When I told him that I did not have the money, he got quiet. He did not talk to me again in a friendly manner for more than a year. But he somehow organized the money; to me it was a miracle. I was very irritated and did not understand how he could have possibly expected me to pay his ritual specialist. Their daughter-in-law, Prema, explained to me later that they had, in fact, expected me to pay for most of the ritual. I was the ideal person to do so. I was not related to them, I was no member of their patriline. That made it less tricky for them to ask me because asking money from me was not a shameful matter. I was obviously rich, as I was a white, western woman, living alone in the mountains. And I had lived in their house like a family member. I should have known that they would be asking me for money, Prema told me. She said:

That is how it works here. Nobody could ever afford such a big ritual. If people with money would not share with us poor people, how could we do that? It works like this. We know that it is time for the spectacle (tamasha) again. And we start asking our relatives for money. Sometimes we buy a goat and a chicken, and then we need five more chicken and five more goats. How could a single family afford that? For this reason people ask their wives' parents and siblings. They prefer to ask the

husbands of their wives' sisters because some day they will do the same. Sometimes they also ask their brothers and sons to contribute, but they will only do that if the ritual is also done in their name, and sometimes the deity does not like that. If a deity has said: "You have to give me a ritual!" then that is what we have to do. It is my natal kin who helps us, or my mother-in-law's natal kin and so on. You have seen my husband's mami-ji? Her husband has a very good job. He is employed as a teacher and he paid for some goats. My brother came, and they bought a chicken together. That is how it works here.

Most families utilise their kinship ties throughout the region not only to finance the various ritual occasions, but also organize a considerable amount of money for their daily lives. On another day, for example, I had just moved to Prema's *mait*, when she, her husband, and her youngest daughter came for a visit. They had not even had their tea, when they had already asked three people for money and received it. They said that they did not have the money for the trip back home, asked three people for money and received the full amount from all of them. They all knew that they had asked several people, but they still gave them the money. Much later, a Dalit man explained to me,

You know, there are some relatives who earn money, and if they have so much money, they should share. It is not good to keep everything. When we organize a ritual, we do it for everybody. They are always invited, that is why they can also support us. I give money, too. It is very difficult if a relative asks you for money and you turn him or her down. It is a shameful thing not to share what you have with those in need.

This type of economy exists in this form only among the Dalits of the region. Rajputs say that they would rather starve than to "eat the money" of another family. I have never seen a similar exchange among Brahmans, either. The connection of *dhyanis* to their *mait* is strong all over Garhwal, but the practical kinship networks that are created with a wife's natal kin are strongest among the Dalits. As the interviews show, this is not only restricted to their financial support, but also extents

to the practice that a wife's and daughter-in-law's natal kin have to be invited to all family and village rituals. There is thus not only a ritual connection between the wife and her natal kin and place, but a marriage alliance also creates a ritual connection between the two family units and villages. That does not automatically lead to a unity that exercises collective agency, but it might. Parents' loyalty, however, always lies with the daughter and not with her parents-in-law. Thus, in times of conflict the daughter and nuclear family unit can temporarily form a collective agent with her parents and brothers to help her to solve the conflicts in her *sauryas*.

Why is the connection between a *dhyani* and her husband and her natal family stronger amongst Dalit people than amongst higher castes? One could argue that the Dalits are still closer to the old social and cultural practices of Garhwal than the higher castes who have been involved in processes of sankritization much longer than the Dalits. The old customs are related to the bride price systems where strong relations with the *maitis* were even more important for a *dhyani* because her *mait* was always the place to return to. The *mait* always remained her home. However, it is difficult to prove this because there exist no historical ethnographic records and because such an explanation unsatisfactorily explains current practices in Chamoli. I suggest rather that the Dalit practices are a direct effect of modernity. Just as girl's agency is enhanced by education and other modern influences, so is a young couple's agency. In the cases I have witnessed and been told about by my informants, it was not so much education and the possibility of employment itself that eased the path to separation, but rather processes connected to modernity and products of modern technology that made it possible to have an independent household with only one woman. The change from the bride price to the bride wealth system and the changing ritual practices also lead to changes concerning the understandings of marriage. In the brideprice system the family unit "bought" the rights to a woman's productive and reproductive powers, and therefore her loyalty was expected to lie with this family unit. If she had problems and could not live with these particular people, however, she could and was expected to flee to her *mait*. An old woman told me how she fled from her *sauryas*:

In my sauryas there was a girl from my mait, we were friends and helped each

other. But I was in great trouble. When my husband beat me, my mother-in-law would say, "Beat her more", and he would close the door and beat me more. One day the sinner made me inhale the smoke of burning chillies. Only when I was about to die, the other villagers came and saved my life. Then I resolved in my heart that I would not live with him any more. He said that I was no good for him and that I was not worthy of him. For that reason I decided, "I won't stay with him, I'll marry again." I had made my decision to leave that place. The next evening, both my friend and I ate our rotis and left. In the middle of the night we reached our mait. When I opened the door of my caci (father's younger brother's wife), she got up and asked us, "From where are you two coming in the middle of the night?" After coming inside we began to weep and told them about our difficulties. Then she said: "You go to your mother and leave him behind."

Today, however, *bvaris* should not leave their *sauryas*, they need to find a solution within their marriage. Most of them do that by turning their attention to their nuclear families and their husbands. With changing ritual practices, ideas of orthodox Hinduism also entered the Dalit communities in Chamoli. Today, *bvaris* see their loyalty primarily to their husbands and not to their parents-in-law. For the Dalits of Chamoli, marriage has over the last four generations been transformed from a practice of economic exchange to a sacred union. As for all Hindu women, the wedding is the most auspicious and important *samskar* (life-cycle ritual, see e.g. Stevenson 1971) and for most Hindus it is unthinkable not to get married (see, e.g. Fruzetti 1982: 108; Leslie 1991; Jacobsen 1992: 41-43). According to Leslie (1997: 198), Tryambaka's (also called Sankha) complex manual on the duties, appearance, and rules of behaviour for Hindu women from the mid-eighteenth century provides a "set of norms for women [...] internally valid for the orthodox Hindu. Indeed, while these rulings may not hold for all Hindu women in India today, a surprising number of them are still praised or adhered to in traditional areas even now" (Leslie 1997: 198). The rules for the Hindu wife include that she "should always wake before her husband". Before sunset she should prepare the food for the day and clean the house (Leslie 1989: 52, 58-59). A "good wife should think only of her husband, worshipping him as her god" (Leslie 1997: 199). Leslie lists many more duties and

rules for the “good wife” all of which seem to be accepted and lived in daily practice by Garhwali women, even though they are certainly not aware of Tryambaka’s manual. The relationship between a wife and her husband has become crucial for many women in Chamoli. The following Chamoli folk song ⁸ illustrates nicely what is expected from a wife and what happens if a woman does not fulfil her duties as a good wife,

*Parvati Devi, kani nari chai, pati vrata nish din rahegi.
Pati ki seva aur sabhi kara aurat jat ko nam dhara seva.
Saman kuch chiz ni cha dharam, Saman kuch chiz ni cha dharam.
Vritant mi lanu abhi tak lagai ka tum sunana sabhi hola.
Sarabi ar pi ke daru gaon ma jal phailala daru gaon ma phirla
ni pala bhik mulak phirla chimta lik.
Ab jali aurat Si holi jo ki beman santan holi auki dhoti lagauli.
Ghas ka dhar kamar hiloendi deshi ka char daru gopeli aur
Mag bindi log bolela si chana randi bara prasud jo kar di.
Adhi narag ma ralu tanar bas narag ma
rana si ma ka put torna pran e baraj lek.*

⁸The song was collected by R. Deshpande in Chamoli in 1986, transliterated and translated by me.

What a loyal lady was Parvati Devi, she upheld her chastity day and night.

She served her husband (and therefore god), all women are now called Pati vrata.

Nothing is equal to dharma, nothing is equal to dharma.

I am telling the whole story you all listen carefully what happens now!

Today husbands drink and form a group of drunkards in the village.

They walk all around the village.

They may wander the whole region, holding the tongs in their hands, but they will not be able to get even alms.

Unfaithful women will do dishonest deeds and in the end they will weep.

Such women go to cut grass, but they are more interested in fashion and wear their west just like a lady from the plains. And they drink alcohol.

For those women, people will say they are prostitutes and they will go to hell,

and their men will also go to hell and will die a pathetic death.

This song is ambivalent because it does not only refer to women's duties as wives, but also to many men's alcohol problem in the hills. The message is that a good wife will also be able to influence her husband in a good way. It is the wife's duty to be like Parvati and, if she behaves carelessly and shamelessly, her husband will also go astray. Most Chamoli women today understand their marriage and the spouse they have as part of their fate. A separation from a husband becomes increasingly unthinkable. Women and men increasingly count on a strong relationship with each other. For both the unity of their extended family has become less important than the unity of their own nuclear family. As one informant said: "Today, if a girl's husband is fine, then everything is fine. Young people do not believe in their sas and sasur so much any more."

The conflict between Anil, Kamala and Anil's parents clearly centred on issues of agency. Kamala did not want to perform the obedient daughter-in-law, but she had to submit to her parents-in-law's wishes when they said that they did not wish to seek employment for her. At the same time, Anil came under pressure when he

lost his job and could not find any other paid employment. In the parents-in-laws' view, they had earned the right to a daughter-in-law who worked for them and a son who earned money for them. But times have changed, and resentment against mothers and fathers and in-laws grows in such situations. Parents' power over their sons and daughters-in-law is based on their ownership of the family land. The land belongs to a father until he decides to divide it between his sons, or until he dies. Until then, the wives of all sons work together with their mother-in-law on the same land, the produce of the land is shared as well as the work. The new daughter-in-law is expected to work hard to uphold her own and her natal family's honour. The constant threat to her family's honour makes her a patient of her parents-in-law. However, while the Dalit of Chamoli are not landless labourers as most low caste people in the plains are, they do not own much land. The land and its products supply around twenty, sometimes thirty percent of the family's annual need. The work in the fields has become more important for the production of a "capital of honour" than the production of agricultural product in the sense that the land is considered substantially a part of the lineage and should be cared for. But Dalit households of today are heavily dependent on supplies of groceries such as spices, lentils and even rice from the market, and other household basics such as soap, petrol, and gas from the shops. Therefore, today's families are more dependent on the income of a male relative than on the land.

Separation is favourable for women today because in a separate household the threat to their natal family's honour nearly disappears. If she leaves her parents-in-law's household and runs her own, she and her children will only eat what she and her husbands have earned, as discussed earlier, this adds to her capital of honour. When a young women separates her *culha* from her mother-in-law's, she can place more importance on identifying with her role as wife and mother, instead of her role as daughter-in-law. Today the way to an honourable life is still work. But as long as a woman is a good wife to her husband and a good mother for her children, she can be an honourable woman. She does not need to perform the docile daughter-in-law as long as she has her own resources and as long as she does not idle. Mothers do not want their sons to leave their household. They wish for the family to stay together so that they can finally share their work and responsibility with a younger woman

and they have someone to care for them in old age. But the more they try to control the young people, the more likely is it that they will separate their *culhas* one day. This is also made possible by the increasing use of modern technologies in Chamoli households. Modernity has entered Garhwal in the form of petrol and gas stoves, mills, rice husking machines, machines to make butter and ghee and so on. The work in a household has therefore become much easier. If there is a gas stove, she does not have to collect firewood anymore, which means that she has more time for other activities. Because of the mills, she does not have to grind the grain anymore in the mornings, and so on. One woman alone might not have been able to run a household on her own a few generations before. Today, she can. However, for all the modern machines money is needed.

One of the most important factors that make separation possible is therefore the financial situation of the couple. At first, my impression was that in daily life, men were dependent on their wives. The emphasis of work in women's lives is overwhelmingly strong and many Garhwali people, including men, underlined this view. Men in Chamoli readily acknowledge that they are dependent on their wives. "Without a wife, a man would not survive", say many people. It seems that women do all the work, they care for their husbands and children, and they can make a man prosper. However, women rarely earn cash. Acquiring cash is the men's responsibility and their source of honour. However, it is difficult to find permanent paid work in Chamoli. For their daily needs people rely heavily on cash inflow from outside the village. Formerly, cash came from traditional occupations. The *mistaris* were travelling around the area, looking for work, the *lohar* and *tamota* men sold their products. The craft was handed down from father to son, and the sons accompanied their fathers to their working places to learn. But today, the *mistaris* have stopped doing most of their traditional craft. Some of the very poor men still build houses and work as carpenters, manufacturing windows and doors out of wood. But they would not build roads any more, or break stones for other people's roofs. Today, men and women migrating from Nepal into the region do this work. They build the roads, break the stones, carry heavy loads in the markets, and so on. The *lohars* and *tamotas* have stopped making tools for sale. Some still produce them, but only for private use, as for example a gift to outmarried

daughters or their wives. Today the tools for sale on the markets of Chamoli are nearly without exception manufactured by nomads from Rajasthan. The Nepali workers and the Rajasthani immigrants are considered lower in the caste hierarchy of Chamoli than the *mistaris*, *tamotas*, and *lohars*. The *lohar*, *tamota*, and *mistari* men have therefore mostly stopped doing this work.

Young Dalit men consider their traditional caste occupations, such as carpenter or blacksmith, as unworthy. The higher their education, so many people think, the less young men want to do physical work. An old man, Kamala's father-in-law, considered this situation highly embarrassing for young men. One afternoon, we sat around a small fire warming our hands, while watching the carpenters cut the wood for the new school that was built below the house where we were sitting.

Back then, when I was young, men were always occupied. They worked in the fields, ploughing or repairing them, they built houses, they worked as carpenters or did whatever to keep busy and to earn money. Then, suddenly the young men stopped doing their work. They could not earn money, nor was work considered prestigious any more,

he said, turning around the coils in the fire. The carpenter, a middle-aged man, had overheard us, turned around and said:

It has been like this for a long time. Today, a man will not work in the fields any more. Today, if a man works in the fields, he feels ashamed. A man who works in the fields fears other people. They will laugh about him and say, "What kind of woman do you have at home that you have to do this work yourself? Did she send you? In your house, it is your woman who tells you what to do!" They will say all sorts of things like that, and therefore nobody works in the fields anymore. Today, many boys get a good education, too, that is why nobody wants to work in the fields. Because of the education they got, the young men do not want to work with their hands. They are afraid that their hands could get dirty while working. None of them would do my work. It is too dirty for them.

In full agreement with the carpenter, the old man imitated a gesture of a typical young man, whipping dirt off his pants. On his face there was the mock refinement of somebody who thinks he is better than everybody else.

Yes, all they want today is a nicely ironed shirt and pants which show the iron mark in the front! They have turned crazy, all of them. They have no sense of honour (izzat). They would rather sit around at home and do nothing, they are too afraid to get their hands dirty while working. They think that their wives will do the work. Some of them even prefer sitting at home, looking after the children while their wives earn money! They have no shame! They do nothing, they earn no money, and they leave everything to be done to their wives, but they still do not feel ashamed. They are ashamed to do women's work. They would never work in the fields. If they washed their clothes, they would be afraid that people laughed about them. But they think it fine to live like a small child. They are not ashamed to sit around at home and do nothing. And in the evenings, they have to have their alcohol (daru). The queue in the Bhotia village in front of the liquor shop gets longer from night to night. You should go and have a look. It is unbelievable! Heaven knows where they get the money for it. But to them, this is masculine. Work makes them go red in their faces from shame, but this is mannish.

This conversation should be read as a typical account of a person from an older generation complaining about the young generation. But it also gives us some clues about changes of male performative practices, male honour and agency. According to the old man, an honourable man was a man who did not stand still, who constantly worked, who was not lazy and was also involved in agricultural work. Today, an honourable man is educated and able to provide his family with the necessary cash to finance life. But this is a change of male performative practices among the Dalits that is not necessarily linked to separation, but to a change in life-style practices that are linked to education and the introduction of cash economy. The pressure resulting from this can become reasons for a separation, as Anil's story exemplifies. While most men received a school education, it is nearly impossible to

find a permanent position. With a growing number of educated men, permanent jobs have become very scarce. The government schools that most Dalit children and youths attend are mostly desolate, and children barely get a good education. Most adult Dalit men have a high school or inter college degree, but their education has been all in Hindi, and when I was in Chamoli, the only chance to get a good job was either good English or a lot of money, which was available to none of the low caste men. Competition was fierce, and only the best or those who had enough money to bribe the person responsible for allotting jobs, stood a chance to find paid employment. The chance to get employed in the army has also decreased considerably due to the increase in qualified applicants. As a result, many Dalit men in Chamoli are unemployed. They can no longer work in their traditional occupations, nor can they help their wives with agricultural work, as both are considered shameful today. On the other hand, they are responsible for organising the money to feed their families. Many young men are therefore highly pressured by their parents. Often, the father is no longer employed and does not receive a pension, and therefore parents rely on their sons for cash. Many young married men rebel against this pressure by separating from their parents. After separation they need less cash to feed their families because there are fewer stomachs to fill, and they have the freedom to do whatever they think is best.

However, even after they separated their *culhas* from their parents, they need cash. To get this cash, Dalit men of Chamoli usually get involved in complicated practices of exchange and mutual aid. Male practices of honour have become centred on economic, social, and symbolic exchanges within kinship networks. In practice that means that Dalit men spend a lot of time travelling and visiting different family members. The families they visit are their mother's natal kin, their outmarried sisters' husbands and, most importantly, their wives' outmarried sisters' husbands. During these visits, they establish a trusting relationship and, what Bourdieu called practical kinship, with which he means nothing else than kinship that is alive and used in everyday practice. During these visits the men find out about the problems and sorrows in these families and help them out with time, labour, knowledge and money, if they can. If they know that these families have sons or daughters in marriageable age, for example, they may establish contacts with suitable families.

If they hear that their sisters need help during the harvest or with any other agricultural activity, they may send their own daughters to help them. If they know that a family is planning a big family ritual, they may send their sons to help with the organisation of this event. And, if one of the men asks them for financial aid, they will give it, if they can. In this way, the Dalit men establish a network of mutual trust and aid that is not based on obligations – which mark the relationship between brothers and men of the same village – but on reciprocity. In turn, when they are in need for money or other support they can ask for it and will most probably receive it. In this way, money, time, work and even prestige is shared in a way profitable to all members of this network. It is important to note that while female honour in connection to chastity and especially work cuts across castes, the reliance on the wife's kin in the case of separation as well as the utilisation of kinship networks established through wives, sisters and daughters is a Dalit phenomena. It is connected to a different understanding of male honour, especially among Rajput men. While Dalit men use their wives' kin and their outmarried sisters' families to establish this system of mutual trust, help and exchange to be honourable and support their families, Rajput men emphasise their strength and pride to be able to feed wives and children without the aid of outside agents. To them, it is dishonourable to ask any "outsider", that is, anybody who does not belong to the patriline, for help, and especially financial support. In fact, they consider the Dalit's system as highly dishonourable and because they consider Dalits to be shamelessly asking anybody for financial and material support, it is enough to hold out a hand in a begging gesture among higher caste people to indicate one is talking about low caste people. Among the Dalits, however it is not dishonourable to establish this network of mutual support and exchange. On the contrary, the bigger the network is the greater is the honour of the family and eventually also the prestige of the father, the *kartta*.

A wife's parents play a special role in these networks, because they usually provide financial, material as well as emotional support without necessarily expecting reciprocity. The support of daughters is rather a matter of honour. If a father, like Kamala's father is comparably well off and can afford to financially support his daughter, he will do so. This is not only the effect of an emotional bond between

daughters and parents, but is also another example of the preservation of family honour. I mentioned in the introduction that it is more honourable to marry a daughter to a respectable family in which she is treated well, then to marry her to a rich family with a big celebration if this family is less respectable. The same logic applies in the case of the daughter's separation from her in-laws. It is dishonourable for parents to live well and in relative financial security, while their daughter lives in poverty and despair. For that reason, many married daughters are supported by their parents and thus enabled to separate from their mother-in-law's *culha*.

Early separation from the in-laws produced a generation of powerful and strong women, who were able to work self-responsibly, free from their mother-in-law's control and feed their own families without the in-law's support. The responsibility they have over their children and their own household is a source of pride for these women, as a form of fulfilling their duty as wife and mother. One of my female informants commented,

No woman thinks that she is great because she works. Women should work here and that is what we do. Whatever there is to be done in one's own household, we want to do. We want to bring everything we started to an end. For us, women have to work. That is how it is. All work is our responsibility. It is good. Some women are so much used to their work that they get nervous if they have not finished everything on one day. They won't stop until it is done. They constantly think, "This is still undone. I have not done that. Another thing is still missing, but what can I do? It is dark already? It is all my responsibility!" The women here understand their work as their responsibility. And this is true. Men wander around. They have to organize money. Whatever problems there are to be solved at home, we have to solve them ourselves, alone.

In contrast to that, many young men are frustrated and feel powerless. Because of their connections to their wives' natal kin and the husbands of their wives' sisters they are often able to uphold their honour and provide the basic finances for their family. But to rely only on the kinship resources is highly unsatisfactory for them. First, they are expected to give back what they are given, not in the sense that the

financial support was a loan, but in the sense that it is embarrassing and shameful not to be able to help others when they ask. The changes in Chamoli society in this stage of transformation seem to favour the women in terms of improvements in their lives. However, there are still many more restrictions, expectations and pressures on young women in their reproductive years. Not only work and responsibilities, for example, add to a woman's honour, but also things she has little or no influence on, like the birth of sons and daughters.

4.4 Wombs, Spirits and Male Offspring

Above and beyond her work-power, a young daughter-in-law's first duty is to have children. Like marriage, children are seen as part of the natural course of life for a couple. Marriages are arranged so that the husband's patriline has offspring. At the time when child-marriage was still common, people usually waited until after menarche before the couple began their sexual relationship. When a girl is married long after the onset of menstruation, however, people expect daughters-in-law to become pregnant within the first two or three years of marriage. It is commonly asserted that motherhood raises the status of an Indian woman significantly. Kakar, for example, writes,

Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or region, whether she is a fresh young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infancies already, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant born and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and a redemption (Kakar 1981: 56).

And this is true, to a certain extent for Chamoli people as well. Only children create complete men and women. It is thought of as inevitable for a Garhwali couple to have children. It is the duty of a man to produce offspring with his wife, and a woman knows since childhood that she will become a mother one day. For Garhwali people, marriage marks adulthood, and parenthood is the fulfilment of life's duty.

When a woman bears heirs for her marital family, especially sons, she brings honour to it and to her natal family. As Seymore observes for North Indian women in general,

from a structural perspective, then, motherhood increases a woman's security in her in-laws' home and represents the beginning of her transformation from the potentially lowly status of new daughter-in-law to the highly respected statuses of mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother (Seymour 1999: 97).

To decide against children is unthinkable for a Garhwali woman, and to be unable to conceive is among the most unfortunate fates a woman can have. Only widowhood is worse than childlessness. Not only do women often exhaust their bodies with many pregnancies – frequently because they are still waiting for a son – but also do women who cannot have children, or whose children die, often find themselves in difficult situations.

4.4.1 Female Sexuality and Male Duty

The focus on reproduction is one of the most important effects of the naturalisation of sex and the construction of gendered subjects and bodies through gender performativity. Often, this construction of gendered bodies also produces ideas of how children are conceived. In Europe and Northern America, for example, the idea of the female passive egg and the male active sperms in the process of fertilisation pervades (Martin 1991), which also attributes an active role to men and a passive role to women in conception. In a similar, but different way, Garhwali men and women are also attributed agentive roles in the conception and production of children. Because children play a major role in the process of becoming a complete social person in Garhwal, it is also important to understand who is seen as responsible for the successful conception of children and who is blamed when a couple produces no children. A man without children and sons is as incomplete as a childless woman. While women are often blamed for childlessness, men are considered responsible for producing heirs. Therefore it is legitimate for young married

women to demand that an absent husband comes back to the village at least once a year. Prema's husband remembered that his wife started a big fight with his parents when, after she had lost her first son, her husband did not come home for a long time:

Exactly a year later, Prema had a big fight with her sas and her sasur about me - her husband and their son - never coming home. "What I am doing here all alone? Get your son here, or I will go and live in my mait," she told them. Therefore, Prema's sasur came to Delhi to get me. I came home and listened to my wife's sorrows (dukh) again. Our life was fine then, the family lived well together. A year went by like this and Prema became pregnant. Then I went to Delhi again.

Leaving a young, childless woman behind in her *sauryas* for too long is considered cruel. This is so, not primarily because the woman remains sexually unsatisfied but because her husband's absence deprives her of the possibility to get pregnant. If her husband is absent, a woman should always remain chaste and perform her duty as a wife, but it is considered bad for a husband to leave his young wife behind childless. In these cases, he is blamed for her health deteriorating. A young woman is considered especially hot and open (see also Lamb 2000; Marriott 1976) and the Dalits in Chamoli say that such a woman will become seriously ill if her heat is not channelled. And the best way to channel a young woman's sexual heat is pregnancy. There is a famous song about a young wife, Rami, whose husband left his village straight after their marriage to live the life of a *jogi*⁹. He left her alone in her *sauryas* with his parents. Years later, he comes back and tests her virtue and sense of duty towards him, and towards her marital family. The song starts with a dialogue between the woman and her disguised husband, whom she does not recognize after all these years. He tries to test her faithfulness and seduce her into intimacy with him, a stranger.

Jogi: "Oh young lady, working in the field, what is your name?"

Tell me, oh baurani (daughter-in-law) where is your village?"

⁹A local folk singer, Narendar Singh Negi, included this song in his repertoire, but in his version, the husband returns home after a long military service and tests his wife's fidelity. However, the long absence of the woman's husband is central in both versions.

Rami: “Oh wandering jogi, you keep on walking. Don’t make me angry.
Oh wandering jogi, you keep on walking. Don’t make me angry.
My husband is far away. He left his home and has forgotten me.
My mother-in-law is cooking at home. My father-in-law is in the house.
My brother-in-law has gone to some village.
My sister-in-law is back at home.
Oh wandering saint, you keep on walking. Don’t make me angry.”

The woman so strongly demonstrates her purity and fidelity towards her husband that the *jogi* trembles from fear, according to the song. The *jogi* has come to test his wife and finds her as strong and dutiful as she could be. She stood the test, but still, he keeps trying to seduce her.

Jogi: “Oh young lady, pruning on the field,
let us go and sit in the shade of the tree. It is hot.”

Rami: “Oh, wandering jogi. Your elder and younger sisters
will sit with you in the shade of a tree,
your mother and your sisters will sit with you.”

She thinks to herself, “The wicked saint asks me my name, he asks where my mother- and father-in-law are and where all have gone, leaving me alone. He asks me what work I, the lonely lady, am doing”, wondering about his intentions. After a while the *jogi* gives up, sees that she will not be seduced by him and asks her to take him home with her to give him some food. When they reach her house, he sits down in the courtyard. He demands food on her husband’s plate and her husband’s bed to sleep in. At this, Rami gets very angry and scolds the *jogi* for his immoral talk. The dispute goes on for a while when the *jogi* finally discloses that he is her husband. He tells her that he was only playing with her, trying to find out whether she would recognize him and whether she was still his faithful wife. When he reveals himself and Rami realises that her husband has finally come home, she happily washes his feet, dusts his

clothes and brings him water and food.

Women often cite this song, not to demonstrate the purity and innocence of Garhwali women, but to compare themselves with Rami, whose husband deserted her unrightfully in her *sauryas*. Most women in Chamoli accept that their husbands have to leave Garhwal to earn money, but they also demand that they fulfil their duties as husbands, which includes making sure that she gets pregnant.

Many men and women in Chamoli made it clear that it is a woman's right that her sexual appetites are not only controlled and satisfied, but also channelled into pregnancy. In fact, if a man does not fulfil his duties as a husband, his wife might get sick. While too much sexual contact with a woman is considered hazardous to a man's health (see also Sax 1991: 30-35), a woman's health is in danger if her sexual appetite is not fulfilled. Men's virility in Chamoli is considered the strongest when a man concentrates his sexual energy on his wife and when he is able to control his sexual energy. Men should not have too many sexual contacts, they should not waste their semen, because loss of semen also means loss of strength and virility. A married man should therefore not get too engaged in sexual contacts with his wife. Sexuality is especially problematic in a marital relationship, one husband once told me, because women's sexual appetite is so great, while men do not have enough semen to satisfy her. Nevertheless, a husband should always try to do so, because no sexual contact at all is very dangerous for a woman's health. "They can get serious brain damage if they have no sexual contacts for a while", he claimed, looking thoughtfully at me. Then he declared, "You must be very sick by now. Women go crazy when they do not have sex for a long time, and your husband has not been here for over six months now. Your brain must have already started dissolving. Do you want me to help you?"

Men and women in Garhwal share this view of female sexuality. However, sexual heat and appetite are conceptualized as bodily functions. Just as menstruation, women do not think that they are able to control their own sexual heat. It is something in their bodies that sexually attracts and worries men because it can overpower them, but they think of themselves as having little agency in this matter. In everyday life, female power and sexuality need to be channelled to meet the

needs of the patriline, the family, the lineage, and the *jati* or sub caste. Female sexual heat has to be controlled and the reproductive capacities directed towards the right patrilines. Female sexual appetites also have to be satisfied for a woman's own health. If her husband does not have enough sexual contact with her, her own sexual heat can make her sick.

4.4.2 Pregancy, Motherhood and Shame

When Kamala was pregnant for the first time, she did not know whether she should be happy or not. She was still young and had hoped to be able to find employment after her marriage. But it was all very well, as her parents-in-law had told her that she would have to work in the house, anyway. She had become pregnant very soon after the wedding. Therefore nobody had looked at her with those anxious glances that she had seen them cast at other *bvaris*, who had been married longer than her, but not become pregnant yet. Pregnancy is yet another stage in a woman's life during which her performative practices change. After a few months, during which she never stopped cooking, took her purifying bath, or slept apart from her husband, he knew that they were expecting a child. Her mother-in-law was very happy and told her to go on doing good work because that would be good for the child. Everyone agreed that hard physical work was good for a young pregnant woman and her child. "A woman who works hard will have many healthy children," an old lady once said to me. Only the woman who works hard will have a healthy child. A lazy woman will not have good children, people told me, because the child will be born unhealthy and it will learn from the start to be lazy. Hard work also eases conception and childbirth, as one of my informants pointed out to me,

When a daughter-in-law becomes pregnant (pet mem bacca rah gaya), we tell her that she should work hard. She should keep on working here and there. Then she will have no problems when the child comes. A pregnant woman who only sits around and does nothing will have a very difficult childbirth. That is how it is.

Everywhere in India, pregnancy is both good news and a difficult time for women.

On the one hand, a young daughter-in-law is always carefully watched by the older women in the village, whether a “child has settled in her stomach yet” and it is happy news if she becomes pregnant. On the other hand, a woman should never display her happiness, much less her pride, about pregnancy openly. This has at least two reasons. Firstly, everything connected to a young woman’s sexuality is shameful for her and potentially dangerous for others. Menstrual blood is considered to be especially dangerous for men, as one woman put it, “Men are afraid of us during this time. Our husbands do not dare to come near us when we are bleeding or when we have given birth. They are afraid that they will become impotent or die.”

While pregnancy is not in itself a polluted state, it is an obvious sign of a woman’s sexuality and therefore a cause of shame for most women. Gendered performative practices, which include other people’s expectation, are different for pregnant women. Pregnancy should, for example, never be a reason for a woman to become the centre of attention. In Chamoli, pregnant women are not treated in a special way, nobody considers her to be more auspicious because she is pregnant. This became clear to me, when I started asking questions about pregnancy. As a twenty-seven-year-old woman from Germany where pregnant women are always more than happy to talk about their own pregnancies, their bodies and their difficulties during the first months, I first asked many pregnant women frankly about their pregnancies, thinking that they would like to talk about it. I soon found out that I embarrassed them a lot by doing so. Many only blushed, smiled shyly, and said nothing, but after I had behaved in such a bad way a few times, Prema told me to stop, as I was not only embarrassing them, but also her. I was not acting as a woman should. I was not familiar with those naturalized ways of being a woman, that prevented Chamoli women from asking questions about pregnancy and that produced their reaction to my shameless questions, which were physical as well as psychological. With my questions I put them in an unusual situation, and they did not know how to react. In Chamoli, women are expected to hide the female sign of agency, the foetus. And they embody these expectations as part of their habitus. There are places and times when women would talk about their pregnancies with their friends, for example while working on the fields or in the forest, but they would

try to hide it from everybody else as long as they could. In their family, they would not talk about it openly, but communicate their pregnancy through changing their practices, such as not stopping to cook. It is difficult for most Dalit women in the villages to hide their pregnancy because most of their everyday work is outside of the house. However, they said, it was fine as long as they did not have to leave the village and expose their “big stomach” to strangers. That was also the reason, the local *dai* (midwife) told me, why the women came for a check-up to her house in the first three or four months of their pregnancies, but after that, after everybody could see their belly, she came to look after them in their own houses. That way they did not have to expose themselves to strangers.

Another reason why I should not ask women openly about their pregnancies, the village women explained to me, is that children are god-given. While women ascribe agency to themselves and their bodies regarding the health of their child during pregnancy in the sense that work and modest eating will be good for the foetus, they ascribe most of the agency regarding conception to a divine agent. As a local *dai* (midwife) told me, children are believed to be god-given. “It’s all in god’s hands” is a sentence I have heard again and again from mothers, especially those whose children had died, who had no sons or who had handicapped children and difficult conceptions or labour. They clearly place the agency of conception in the hands of fate and not of personal accomplishment, and therefore a pregnant woman should never single herself out. Just as she should not display pride in her state, so she should not demand special treatment, rest, or food during the time of her pregnancy, either. This behaviour is also naturalized and part of a woman’s gendered habitus, embodied through gendered performative practices as a sense of shame and modesty. To eat large amounts of food during pregnancy is considered highly shameful, so shameful indeed that other women in the household might refuse to give her any more food, if they think that she is eating too much and not working enough. Women should not only continue to work hard during pregnancy, they should also restrain from eating more than usual. However, with new health programmes and increased education, especially women’s health programmes, these practices have also started changing, and many women now demand nutritious food of good quality for their foetus’ health. In a sense, this demand can be understood as the performance of

modernity and a good education, as the following story illustrates. One woman told me that she was always very hungry when she was pregnant. Because she ate so much, her *jethani* (husband's elder brother's wife) decided to give her food only when everybody else had eaten. And she deliberately gave her very small amounts of food as, so she said: she considered it highly shameful of her *devarani* (husband's younger brother's wife) to eat so much. Because of that, she said, her last son was very weak ever since birth. Therefore, the woman said, her husband finally decided to separate his and his wife's *culha* from the joint family's hearth. A local *dai* told me that these practices have changed rapidly during the last decade. Chamoli, she claimed, has become very educated in this sense, and all the health workers inform women that nutritious food is good for the child. Together with many other practices associated with modernity and education, nutritional practices during pregnancy have therefore changed drastically. Other gendered performative practices like work, however, are still considered to be good for the child and the mother.

Usually, Dalit women in Chamoli do not go for regular check-ups with a biomedical practitioner. When they first suspect that they might be pregnant, they sometimes consult the local INAM (abbreviation for the Institute of Nursing and Midwifery which refers to a government health worker trained in allopathy as a midwife), but more often the traditional *dai*. If they have the money, they might have an ultrasound, also to find out about the sex of the child, but because an ultrasound check up involves a trip to the bigger market and is very expensive, this is not common practice. In joint family units with several women in one household, the women set up a bed and a fireplace for the pregnant woman in the cowshed during the last days of her pregnancy. The women clean the cowshed and make it comfortable for the delivery and the new mother's stay there during the first days after delivery. Nowadays, this special room might not be the cowshed anymore, but a room reserved for her and her newborn child for the next month. However, because of the position of the cow as pure and sacred, and the usage of cow dung and urine in local rituals as purifying substances, the cowshed is considered to be the purest place for a childbearing woman, where she is protected from ghosts and spirits, the evil eye, and any curses that might afflict her during these highly vulnerable days. Many women move to the cowshed a few days before the delivery to wait there in peace.

The last days, so they told me, are the most shameful because the belly is so big that it looks as if it will burst at any moment, and men start to be afraid of her because of the dangerous pollution of childbirth. Women feel much better in their separate, clean and purified room and usually do not leave it anymore during daytime. They rarely give birth at a hospital. The hospital is only there for emergencies. As in many places in the developing world, a hospital is a place to die, not to give birth. Traditional places are therefore preferred by many women for giving birth to their children. If they do not live in a joint family household, many women spend the last month of pregnancy in their *mait* with their mother and unmarried sisters. They do this in spite of the shame they feel in front of their male natal kin, but they need the help of other females during childbirth and the following days. It is very difficult for a woman to manage childbirth and the time after her delivery alone because of practices of pollution and purity.

As in the rest of South Asia, childbirth is considered to be highly polluting. Men do not dare to come close to a woman after childbirth for at least seven days. If it is her first child the time of child pollution can last up to twenty-one days. The women assisting the new mother also get polluted. Usually, it is the mother-in-law and other married women of the household who keep the new mother company, bring her food, and assist her with her first bath three days after the birth. For this bath, the women leave the shed or the house very early in the morning. A woman who has just given birth should not be seen by anybody, for fear that she might be afflicted by the evil eye, nor should she, in her polluted state, expose herself to the sun as the sun might get offended and harm the woman or her child. The woman assisting the young mother carries a pot, in which she can warm up the water, and some firewood, while the young mother follows her with her fresh clothes on her head. They have to bathe in a special place, near the river or near a ditch, so that the water does not pollute the village grounds. When they have reached the place, they warm up the water, and the young mother can have her first bath. The woman assisting her slowly pours the water over her, holding the pot high, to reduce her own pollution during the procedure. Later, she has a bath herself. Because this assistance is highly polluting for the woman assisting her, many mothers-in-law would not help their daughter-in-law after the family had separated. It is very shameful

to ask a woman from another family to help with childbirth. Therefore, many Dalit women give birth in their father's house. This is fine and common practice, but a goat has to be sacrificed afterwards to pacify the village deity. Maheshwari, whose daughter had accidentally given birth in her *mait*, explained to me,

She had come to our village while she was pregnant. She came here around Diwali and gave birth to her child in our house. It is a tradition here. If a girl gives birth to a child in her mait, we have to sacrifice a goat to the village devata. We have to purify the village devata. My daughter gave birth to my granddaughter here. She came here on her sister's wedding. She had only planned to stay for three or four days. And she gave birth to a daughter. When the water broke, it was clear that they had to give a goat to the village deity. It does not matter whether it is a boy or a girl. When a girl gives birth in her mait, she pollutes the village devata, and this is not our own pollution (chut), it belongs to others. The deity has to be purified again after something like this has happened. That is why it is necessary to sacrifice a goat.

When labour pains start, the *dai* is called and other village women come together to take care of the woman. When the birth comes nearer, more women gather in the room. The woman delivering a child is never left alone. There will always be some friends and relatives at her side. There is much coming and going in the room, because no single woman can stay long before she has to return to her own duties, but they usually make sure that someone is there all the time. Giving birth should not take too long, and if it does, the women say that the woman must have been lazy because she has a difficult birth. Giving birth in that sense can also become a performance of strength, pride and honour. In fact, for example, many women proudly tell stories about their easy childbirth, that they never bothered anybody with their childbirth, and the best stories are always those that happened just like this, while they were still working. During childbirth, a woman should not show her pain, she should not display that she suffers, and it should be quick. The character of childbirth as performance became clear to me when I heard stories like the one Rajmati, a young married Dalit woman, told me:

My sas, some other women of the village, and I had all gone to the forest. On the way back, I started to have pain. The pain had started, but nobody paid attention to me. Everybody had gone to see the devata arrive.¹⁰ Some had gone to get grass, others had been in the forest. I had also come from the forest. I had so much pain! I was working in front of our house when my water broke. Nobody was there with me. I started to feel pain and I was alone. I went inside the house, but I had to go to the bathroom. I went outside to pee, and the water broke. A woman was passing by and I shouted, "Come here!" She came and asked, "What has happened to you?" She came at once and when she saw what was happening, she understood. I told her to put her hand on my back, and she said: "No, that cannot be done here, we have to go inside! You are weak. The baby will die! We need help!" So we went inside, but I said: "No, there is no time – it is coming!" So she helped me, and my eldest son was born there. She cleaned him, helped me a bit, and that was it. It was all very quick. It did not even take five minutes. Others always talk about how long it takes and how great the pain is, but I had three sons, and it never took long. One moment I am working, cleaning the cowshed, for example, and the next moment the child is there, it is born right where I stand. I work all day, all day I do all the housework, and then I go to the cowshed to work, and there the child comes. Other people say that they go to the cowshed to have the child, but I go there to work, and it just happens.

If a woman does not need much help, if she is working until the last minute and does not complain, she is considered to be a good woman. Again, she derives her honour and her self-pride from her own physical strength. It is a woman's endurance and strength that is her capital. Actually, a good woman should ruin her body during her lifetime. If she is still fat and healthy, when her children have grown up, she must not have worked enough. That is what people say. This is a re-occurring theme in all my interviews with many women of all castes. Their strength is what they are proud of, and if they feel that they can get out of bed and stand, they should work.

We should understand women's accounts of their early years as mothers in this

¹⁰The village had decided to establish their own Bhairav shrine on their side of the river. On that day, they brought the devata to their side of the river.

sense. Every single mother I talked to said that life after marriage and with children was not only full of sorrows, but also and more importantly a life with children meant more work. Kamala remembers the time when she had her twins. She told me this story very proudly. In the end, she overcame all the problems and managed the difficulties, even though she was crying a lot at the time. These hardships and that she overcame them give her strength today. Here is how she told her story:

First I had the twins, Rina and her brother, he died when he was four years old. For a year, I had so much work with both of them. Twins are like this, if one starts crying, they both cry, if one is hungry, the other will get hungry, too. At that time I used to cry a lot, because I did not know how to handle the situation. I did not sleep at night, I worked a lot. Small children are like this, they make a lot of work, and two of them are just so much work. They were like this, they cried together, they ate together, and they slept at the same time. They even filled their pants at the same time. When I breastfed them, I had to do it simultaneously. One baby was on the one breast the other on the other breast. I stopped after a year. After one year, they could eat food, so I could stop breastfeeding them. For one year, I did not live properly. I did not sleep. My sas and sasur did not live in peace with us at the time, either. They were no help.

I was alone with the small children. First I had two. When they were two and a half years old, my son Pankaz came, too. When Pankaz was about a year old, I got ready for an operation. I thought, "I have two children now. Two boys and a girl, that is good. I will have the operation." Then the trouble did not stop. It went on and on and on. A few years later, I had Sibbu. He was 1- 2 years old and again, I got ready for an operation. I got ready so often. Every time I was just about to go, we did not have the money, we did not have anybody to look after the kids, I had to do work or something else came up. We went on and on like that, our sas and sasur did not help, either.

Suffering plays a major role in Chamoli women's lives. They consider their lives to start when their suffering starts and their strength to overcome the problems and tensions is the source of their "capital of honour". Together with their work,

the efforts women put into their children and family accumulates this “capital of honour”. Enduring the pain of childbirth without showing the pain, risking one’s health for the family and enduring difficult times for the health and well being of husband and children are gendered performative practices that produce honourable and proud women. The performance of suffering – endurance and strength, for example, when the women talk about their suffering, or when they give birth in exceptionally brave situations – adds to their reputations as strong and honourable women and eventually leads to a rise in personal power and the collective agency of their nuclear family.

4.4.3 Wombs and Sacrifice

While the Indian government has been concerned with birth control and family planning programs during the last four decades, Chamoli people are interested in the fertility of their young brides. “Parenthood confers honour on a couple,” (Patel 1994: 74) not only in Jodhpur but also in Chamoli. Therefore, if a woman does not bear children for years after the couple started to consummate their marriage people are seriously concerned. In Chamoli, it is almost universally believed that the children a couple will have, their gender and their well-being are a matter of fate, written in their destiny. Agency is ascribed to a divine power. As a local *dai* told me:

People believe that children are a matter of fate. God gives children and god takes them away. God determines whether a child will exit a woman’s womb healthy and whether the child will be healthy or not. For the people in the villages, it is god who lets the child grow. The mother has little influence on that.

Women who have had no boys at all are considered to have an especially bad fate. It is determined by their destinies that they should not have sons or sometimes no children at all. Manta, a mother of five girls, whose only son died when he was seven years old, for example, said: “Why did I have such a line of girls? It seems I came here to be cheated by life. That was my fate. It put me in jail.”

Sudarmar, a local guru, explained to me that many women who had such a bad

fate were afflicted by a divine being or a spirit. He said:

The typical story is that a person has eaten a lot of medicine, but does not find any cure through medicine. On the contrary, the problem becomes worse after having taken medicine. The hands and legs start cramping, the person can't move properly anymore, the hands become claws, so that the person cannot work any more, breath becomes short, the person is exhausted easily. At night the afflicted person has nightmares. Often he or she feels as if somebody is strangling him or her.

If these problems come from a chal (a spiritual being, associated with Masan, the master of the ghosts), they often go with childlessness. The woman then often has pains in different parts of her body: the knuckles of her feet, her joints (the knees and the elbows in particular), on both sides of her hip and her pelvis. Possibly, she loses a child after two or three months of pregnancy. If that is the case, then she often develops severe pains in her lower back and on both sides of her pelvis. Most often there will be a fight or constant fighting between her and her husband; the relationship will be disturbed.

Nearly all the women I interviewed during my fieldwork confirmed Sudarmar's statement that when health problems occur, they first consult a biomedical doctor. Access to biomedicine is generally high as compared to other parts of North India and Garhwal. At least basic biomedical treatment is readily available to women of all castes and classes. There exists a range of different practitioners: ayurvedic practitioners, pharmacists, the infamous "Bengali Doctors." The more reliable health centres and hospitals are often not visited because they are a few hours – by bus or jeep – away from the village. This is not only expensive, but also means that a companion is needed, as women are not supposed and do not like to travel alone as discussed above. Therefore many women do not go to these health centres because they are ashamed to tell anybody about their problems, or to ask another woman to accompany them. Sickness, physical discomfort, or a slight fever should never prevent a good woman from working. As I have outlined above, work is one of the most powerful sources of honour and pride for a Garhwali woman, and often a woman will work, even if she is sick. In general, village women are expected to suffer

in silence. Chamoli people usually seek treatment only for immediate and severe health problems that keep them from working. More chronic diseases, or those that are not immediately visible (such as gynaecological problems, tuberculosis, back-problems) may not be treated for years. Chronic illness in a young daughter-in-law is dishonourable as something that keeps her from doing her daily work and costs money. Especially those illnesses that cannot be immediately cured, chronic or more severe illnesses that require weeks and months, sometimes years of expensive treatment and rest, or a long and expensive treatment for fertility are considered very dishonourable. Many young women tend to go straight back to work after severe health problems. If such a problem does not go away after a while, these illnesses become causes of shame (*sharam*). For a young woman to seek treatment on her own is seen as selfishness, especially if it is related to problems not immediately visible. Treatment, be it biomedical or ritual, must be initiated by another family member. A healing ritual is somehow more honourable than biomedical treatment, especially for young daughters-in-law, because a ritual is never restricted to the healing of one person, one woman alone. An affliction is never restricted to an individual, but affects the whole family, especially if it is also connected to fertility. As such, individual treatment is a matter of dishonour and shame (*sharam*), whereas the ritual or collective therapy is accepted and can even help to raise the family's symbolic capital of honour. Medical treatment often goes along with ritual healing practices, the first for treatment of the symptoms, the latter for treatment of the cause. The practices of healing are always closely related to concepts of gender and family values. Individual well-being is subordinate to the well-being of the family. However, if family members see the source of a young woman's health problems in a *chal* affliction, they will fear that this affliction will prevent her from having children, or harm the children who are already born and initiate a *puja* (worship ritual). Apart from fulfilling people's hope to influence the fertility of a particular couple, the *chal* ritual can also become a performance of honour and power, or the discourse about the ritual a performance of modernity. The *chal* ritual is central to many discourses within a family and can be a practice of support and inclusion as well as a practice of exclusions and marginalisation, as the following case studies will show.

The *chal* is a very common affliction for women of all castes in Chamoli. In fact, most village women have performed a *chal puja* at least once in their lifetime. Most had to do it more often. It is not always connected to fertility, but very often this is the case. The *chal puja* is a ritual that is connected to a network of complicated social relations, performative practices, understandings of womanhood and honour. As Sax (1990) points out, the *chal puja* is a ritual practice that emphasizes the connection of a young woman to her *mait*, while at the same time contributing to her gradual de-attachment from it. All my informants confirmed that the *chal puja* is one of the obligatory rituals that must be performed by the woman's marital family in her natal village.

The most important item in a *chal puja* is the goat that has to be sacrificed. A *dhyani's* husband, or another male relative from her marital family, will accompany her and bring with him everything needed for the *puja*, the goat, the incense, the cloth, the flower for the image of Masan and powder needed to make the *yantra* and a mixture of seven grains. The ritual specialist, who can be a local Brahman or a Dalit man, usually speaks some mantras over the woman in her father's courtyard in order to prepare her for the main ritual. Then, after about an hour, the ritual specialist, the woman, her male marital relative, and other men from her *mait* go to the place where the *chal* is believed to have afflicted her. There, they set up the ritual space, dig a hole, make a *yantra* and an effigy made from manduwa-flour¹¹ and water that represents Masan. The woman is supposed to sit opposite the ritual specialist, circling the mixture of seven grains over her head while he is speaking his mantras, stroking her with a bundle of stinging nettles. The seven grains and the stinging nettles are used to take out the bad influences from her body. The grains are thrown into the pit or the place where the image of Masan has been placed and the ritual specialist shakes the stinging nettles out over Masan's image as well, thus transferring the negative energy from the patient's body onto the effigy. At the end of the ritual, a goat, sometimes a chicken, is sacrificed. When the guru has spoken the mantras, he sends the woman and her husband away, ritually closing the path

¹¹Manduwa, or African millet is used in most rituals. It is one of the most important grains in Chamoli agriculture because it grows easily and needs little labour. This is also the reason, why manduwa and bread made from manduwa is considered to be the "food of poor people".

behind them with water and mantras, so that the *chal* cannot follow her again. On the way back to her father's house, she should not talk to anybody or look back, as the *chal* could otherwise recognize her voice or her face and follow her again. When she is gone, the men, who were not involved in the ritual itself, but were sitting on the side waiting for it to end, come forth and behead the animal. "It is important that all the blood goes to Masan," the guru told me. "The blood pacifies him and gives him strength." Then a fire is lit and the animal cooked and eaten. The head and the right foreleg of the animal are always the payment for the guru.

The husband's family must pay for the ritual, which often involves animal sacrifice. Therefore, it is an occasion where the husband's family feasts the woman's natal kin. In this sense, many women feel that the *chal puja* contributes to their honour in their natal village. It is an acknowledgement of her roots in her *mait* and of the kin-relationship between the two villages established through her marriage. The *chal puja* can be interpreted in several possible ways. The *chal puja* is one of the rituals that have to be performed in a woman's *mait* after her wedding (see Sax 1990). And it is true that a lot of *chal pujas* are done because the ritual is considered to be a necessary practice after marriage. A year or two after a *dhyani's* wedding, she returns to her *mait* with her husband or another male relative of her marital family, brings everything that is needed for the ritual, honours the spirits of the land, and offers the Masan of her *mait* sacrifice. Later, her natal male kinsmen and other male residents of the village eat the sacrifice. In eating the woman's sacrifice, they take part in the bodily change that happens to young women after marriage and that marks her involvement with her *sauryas* and her detachment from her *mait*. They take the spirit of the place back, digesting it and forcing it to come back to its rightful place. Most *chal* rituals have a component that always does that, strengthening the woman's position in her *sauryas*, and taking back the spirits of the place that started afflicting her, when she left the place. Therefore, the *mait ka chal puja* is always also a ritual that, while recognizing her continual relation with the *mait*, can be seen as one step towards her gradual de-attachment from her natal village and the attachment to her *sauryas*.

But the *chal puja* is much more than a ritual that increases a woman's status, and helps her to de-attach from her *mait* and feasts her natal kin. Many poor

families cannot afford the *chal puja* in their daughter-in-law's natal village. And a woman whose *chal puja* has not been performed despite her physical discomfort, often reports chronic physical problems, such as pain in the limbs, hands and stomach. In those cases where the *chal* affliction remains untreated, it can become dangerous for the afflicted persons. Maheshwari, a woman with three young sons, the oldest of which was nine, told me that she had not been able to perform her *mait's chal* ritual because of her financial situation. But she was blessed with three healthy sons and should have given the ritual long before. She was afraid that it would start seriously harming her and her children.

I waited too long after the birth of my children. Masan is angry now. He comes at night and strangles me. You know, there is a big Masan, he looks like a man with a black hat. He is like a ghost, and there is also a woman, like a fairy, both are the masters of the chal or the chayas. I have to give a puja this year. Otherwise he will get very angry.

Not to do the *puja* means to be disrespectful to her natal kin and the deity attached to this place. In that case the angry deity will cause the woman problems. However, the *chal* is also closely connected to her reproductive abilities and can block her from conceiving any children or from conceiving sons. Many families have sponsored the *puja* in the hope of obtaining male children and grandchildren. Sometimes, the *chal puja* can put even more pressure on a woman to bear children soon, sometimes it can take pressure away from her, sometimes a *chal puja* is done “out of our own happiness” (*apni kushi se*) because a desired child, most often a son, has been born.

It is difficult to say exactly what a *chal* is, because there are many different understandings of the *chal* in every village. But people agree that a *chal* is connected to places. Masan, a deified ghost, who is the master of all ghosts, *chals*, and *prets* (ghost of a deceased person), and who dwells in the burning ground, is connected with the *chal* affliction. Some people say he is the *chal*, some say that the *chal* is like a part of him, like his child. But people agree on how a *chal* afflicts a person and that it more easily afflicts women and children than adult men. A local Brahman

woman explained to me,

Chal is Masan. When your heart gets afraid or weak, then a chal gets you. That is the chal. It comes to men and women, also boys, but the tradition is that girls always need to give the puja. A chal does not often afflict older people or men. It is more women, mostly young women. The ones who are still unripe (kacci umar) – the ones who are still open (kacci) – they get afraid. And then the puja has to be given. After marriage the puja has to be given. The pandit tells us where we have to go.

A *chal* afflicts when the person passing particular dark or wet places, in which Masan or the *chal* likes to dwell, gets into a particular vulnerable state through crying, fear, falling, or any other anxiety. As older people and men are more *pakka*, more closed, they do not easily get into these stages of vulnerability and are therefore not so often attacked by a *chal*. In addition, the *chal* dwells in many places that are also part of the female places of work. They are not “outside” beings, they belong to a place “inside.” They are part of a place, just as the people are part of it. Therefore, to get rid of a *chal*, the *chal* does not get destroyed, but taken back to its proper place. When a *chal* afflicts a women in her natal place, the healing ritual has to take place there and the people who live in this place have to help re-attach the *chal* to their place by eating the sacrifice. *Chals* afflict women and girls not only more often because the girls are more open, but also because they pass the places of the *chals* much more often than men do. *Chals* like the forest, dark and cold places, and bushes by the side of the fields, and they also often dwell in those places, where women go to defecate every morning and late afternoon.

The place of the *chal* is important. Most often, a *chal* is said to come from a woman’s *mait*. The *chal* affliction and its healing ritual are therefore connected to young, recently married women. People say that every girl in Chamoli is afflicted by a *chal*, while she is working in her *mait* during childhood, when she is still *kacci*, still open and therefore more easily afflicted. But the *chal* rarely troubles the girl while she is still in her *mait*. Usually, the affliction only starts after marriage. My Brahman informant said:

When a girl gets married here in Garhwal, she will be afflicted by the chal (mai ke ka chal lagta hai). After her marriage, her in-laws have to give a puja in her mait. For that puja, they will bring a goat, or a chicken, or both, and they will take the animals to the ditch and do a puja. And then, they will sacrifice the animal, and the deity will be pacified, and the girl will be fine. These people have to give a goat to the mait's chal. They will not stop that¹². They are afraid that the devata will give them a dos. That is how the devata in the mountains is like.

The *chal* has to be given *puja* in almost every village of the area. The timing and the reasons for the *puja* vary. In some villages, the *puja* has to be given within a year after marriage, in others after the first child is born, in others after the first son is born, some do the *puja* to have children, some believe that the *chal* prevents a woman from having children, others say that a *puja* has to be given after the birth of children. There is no rule, when a young bride is afflicted, no matter what the affliction is, it is usually first attributed to a *chal*. The *chal* affliction often shows through a woman's physical discomfort. Many women in Chamoli report that they had similar symptoms as described by Sudarmar. Cramps in the hands and legs, continuous stomach pain, fatigue – all things that prevent a woman from working properly. In this sense, the *chal* affliction could be interpreted as a sign of resistance, the sickness that befalls the young, powerless woman because she is young and powerless in her *sauryas*, and because she wants a break from her hard work. And in fact, many women complain that their health began to deteriorate only after they got married. For example, Sunita, a twenty-two-year old Rajput woman, said that she had never been sick before she got married,

but now, I am always sick. It is mostly stomach pain. Sometimes my whole body hurts. Sometimes my joints hurt. This pain happens because of a chal. I went to hospital to get medicine, but that did not help. Back then, I had small pimples all over my body. Slowly, they became bigger, and then they became hard. We showed it to the doctors. We went to Karanprayag and got medicine from there, but the

¹²She is referring to the efforts of a local NGO to stop animal sacrifice in Chamoli.

medicine did not make any difference. I became even sicker. Then my mother went for puch. She found out that I was afflicted by the forest chal. In the forest some woman had died and I was “caught” there. Then my mother went for puch and then we found out that I was afflicted by a chal. Then we did the chal puja. After the chal puja I became well. Since we did the chal puja everything has been fine. The oracle said that I would have children after the puja, too.

Or Govindi, a middle aged woman, who had given birth to six children, of whom only three survived, said:

Ever since I got married I have always been sick and the children I had did not survive. When I had my first child it was a son. He died when he was five months old. After that we went to Muradabad. I was pregnant with a girl there but she died during pregnancy. In those days, we didn't know about medicine. My baby son was sick and we did not give him medicine or daru (alcohol) or anything else. So he died. Then we went to Muradabad, and my other child died in the stomach (womb). Then we went home for puch, and we discovered a chal. My father went for puch in Kanauth and found out about the chal. The chal puja was done by my Sasur ji. They told us that it was the chal of my mait and that it had afflicted me during my childhood. When we had worshiped the chal, we had this daughter and after her we had a second daughter who died when she was five months old. After that we worshiped some other chaya (shadow, an affliction by fairies). When I was pregnant with my first child a man died in my village. His dead body was burned not so far away from the village. I did not know that, and one day I collected some wood in that place. A woman told me that I should not take this wood home. I threw it away. But still, I was afraid. My mind was disturbed by the chal. When my third daughter died, we went for puch and found out what had happened. After we had done the puja, I had this girl, and after that I had another girl and a boy. Now everything is fine.

The *chal* affliction or the affliction by another malevolent spirit is therefore often also connected to the health and well-being of a particular woman. As the second

example shows, the health of a woman is closely connected to the health of her children. In fact, the mother of a household is often seen as the guardian of the health and well-being of her nuclear family, her husband, and her children as well as the prosperity of fields and animals. If a woman is afflicted by something, it might not be her own body that suffers, but the body of a child, her husband or the fields and animals. If children die, this is often explained through the mother's affliction. Mothers are not blamed for these afflictions, on the contrary, it is her marital family's responsibility to make sure that these afflictions are not only recognized, but also treated. While a woman is responsible for her husband's well-being, he and his parents are responsible for hers. Therefore, if a *chal* or a *devata* "eats" a woman's children, the woman often blames her marital family members with neglecting her well-being. Prema, my assistant within the village, had such problems, only, in her case, the *chal* had come from her *sauryas*. They found out too late what had happened to her. For that reason, she said, her son died.

When I gave birth to my first child, I fell very sick. The boy only survived for one month. I was very sick for three months. When I became really sick, we went to an oracle. He told us that I had been afflicted by a chal from my sauryas. It was the chal from this forest. Then my husband brought a goat and we did the chal puja. After we had worshipped the chal, my health became better. But this chal only left after he had taken my boy away. Therefore it was too late.

In a similar case, Maheswari, a woman then in her mid-forties, blamed her husband and her parents-in-law for much of the misfortune she had had to face with her children:

Bhairav comes with all his dhyanis of my mait. That is what he does to the ones who do not give him a puja. One day, I broke a finger of my hand. It hurt a lot and it swelled a lot. Slowly my hand got very swollen, and I had to go for treatment very far. Medicine did not help me at all. Then I went to a woman of my village to do puch. She told me that my mait's Jamnu Bhairav had put a dos on me. It was him, too, who had given me trouble while I was pregnant. And my hand had swollen

because of his dos. Then I myself placed the devata ka ucchana (promise to give sacrifice). This night, a lot of pus came out of my hand, and it slowly recovered. Then I believed what the oracle had told me. I believed that I was under the dos of my mait's devata. In my home, we do the chal puja in the three months of Chait, Paush, Savan.

Even today my eyes hurt during these three months. They itch and I can hardly see. When these months have passed I am fine again. Yes, a lot of years have passed and we have never given the puja. But what can I do? Who should do the puja? My husband doesn't believe in devatas, he says that devatas are nothing. My father said that he would give the puja. But the devata does not want anything from my mother's home. The devata wants my sauryas to give the puja. That is why we have not given this devata a puja for such a long time. I tell my husband constantly that I am in trouble, that is why we have to give the puja. Now I will surely give the puja until Paush. My husband will give the money for the puja, and I will do the puja alone. We have not given the puja yet. The children have been fine, it was me who was in trouble. Now we will give a puja.

Practices of affliction and healing clearly play a role in the negotiation and renegotiation of interpersonal and family conflicts. Chamoli people partly do so by attributing the cause of an affliction to nonhuman agents. This attribution of affliction and illness to a nonhuman agent has been discussed, for example, by Boddy (1989: 1-10) and Crapanzano (1977a: 169). Boddy's understanding of female possession seems to be useful to explain some of the cases of supernatural affliction in Chamoli as well. In her analysis of possession in the Zar cult in North Sudan, Boddy sees possession as structuring certain problematic experiences for men and women. Possession, she claims can help to effect "emotional realignments of kin relations and social positions in ways deemed favourable to the possessed" (1989: 8-9). Something similar seems to have happened in Maheswari's case. Her affliction was caused by her *mait's* deity, who demanded a sacrifice from her marital kin. When her marital kin did not give the sacrifice, they did not only act dishonourably, but also disrespectfully towards her deity, her natal family, and her natal place. They also weakened Maheswari's position within their family by denying her the ritual.

In the last section, I described the importance of a woman's natal kin for her life in her *sauryas*. Good relations with a wife's natal kin are also important for her husband, or rather for the couple and their children. I discussed the importance of a wife's natal kin in relation to the separation of husband and wife from the husband's parents. However, some husbands may not have an interest in a strong relationship with their wives' natal kin simply because they do not have an interest in separating from their parents. Of course, some young husbands have a strong bond with their parents and their parents' efforts to minimise the husband-wife relationship can be successful in some cases. In this sense, her affliction and her insistence to give the sacrifice was also a negotiation of her position within her marital family. However, this explanation is not entirely satisfying, because at least one more factor played a role within the process: the fact that her husband said that he did not believe in the deity's power any more.

In such a situation, modernization and education can have a different hysteresis effect that turns against the ritual practices that are directed towards the wife's well being and the relations to her natal kin. The world of Chamoli people should not be thought of as a single entity. Like all "cultures", Chamoli society consists of a plurality of voices, and new practices may lead to differentiated changes in the different people's habitus. While education and the possibilities of modern technology in the case of Kamala and her husband had a favourable effect for Kamala and lead to the separation from her in-law's and good relations with her natal kin, in the case of Maheshwari's husband education and technological possibilities had a different effect. Her husband spend a lot of time outside the village and in Uttaran-chal's capital city. There, one of the effects of modernity and modern education is that people deny the efficacy and necessity of local rituals. The healing rituals in Chamoli are very expensive, but they are part of Chamoli people's naturalised and misrecognised system of healing that is in turn interwoven with the interconnected systems of symbolic and economic capital. What happened in the case of Maheshwari's husband is what Bourdieu called the hysteresis effect. His habitus changed because he left the social field of the village, and instead learnt to play by "the rules of the city's game". Part of the modern city's habitus is also that people perform their modernity in emphasising the value of economic capital over the value

of symbolic capital. While Chamoli people usually perform these rituals for reasons that are deeply interwoven with their sense of honour and their deep respect for the deities, Maheshwari's husband saw the healing ritual as an unnecessary and expensive practice of superstition. He thus acted dishonourably and disrespectfully, in the understanding of his wife and many other Chamoli people, to save money and to perform his education and association with modernity.

However, Maheshwari eventually convinced him, after many years of suffering, that the ritual had to be done. Even though her husband claimed that he did not believe in the deities any more, he still knew about the local sense of honour and the value of symbolic capital. Even though he was now able to consciously reflect about many usually misrecognized practices, his ideas of personhood, morality, and integrity were sufficiently implicit and grounded in experience to accommodate ideological shifts without undergoing radical reformulation (see also James 1988).

While the *chal puja* can be the performance of good relations with a young daughter-in-law's natal kin for husbands or marital families, and therefore add to both families' "capital of honour", it can also be something very different. Especially the denial of the *chal puja* can become a source of power for a woman's marital family over her and her body. Denying a young woman such a healing ritual is dishonourable for both families but at the same time it can become a performance of the disrespect towards a young woman and a signal that her husband's family does not want to undergo the efforts to help her change her fate in terms of the fertility of her body, a topic that will further be elaborated throughout the next sections of this work. Or, it can be the performance of progressiveness, sophistication and modernity as in the case of Maheshwari's husband.

At the same time, the *chal* affliction is interpreted in different terms by the women who are afflicted. Many women have real physical symptoms of ill health. Maheshwari's illness and her interpretation of it as supernatural affliction is typical of Chamoli women. Sickness and the death of children are both very common among young married women in Chamoli. They are almost always explained in terms of affliction and most often this is an affliction by a *chal*. The symptoms of ill health reported by many women in this context can and should be understood as an outcome of their poverty and their powerless situation. In this sense they could

also be seen as a form of resistance. This is an assumption that follows the ideas of Lewis (1989), who understood possession in women, or the marginalised as a choice or somehow conscious decision to resist existing power structures. However, I think that this is an overly simplistic explanation and does not do the local practices justice.

In the last pages I discussed the connection of the *chal* ritual with performances of honour, modernity, and power. However how are we to interpret the *chal* affliction in terms of gendered performative practices, the performances of gender, and agency? In discussing these questions, I agree with Janice Boddy (1989) that the phenomenon of possession or affliction is so complex that it cannot always simply be interpreted as a mere social one. To Boddy,

possession is a holistic social reality. It penetrates all facets and levels of human life, resisting analytic reduction to a single component dimension, whether psychological, aesthetic, religious, social, or medical. Studies that focus on one of these to the virtual exclusion of others cannot but derogate the complexity with which such factors interweave. Works of this sort may be read most comfortably, perhaps, by Western cultures, but ultimately they distort and impoverish what they seek to understand. Possession has numerous significances and countless implications: it defies simple explanation. It has no necessary cause, no necessary outcome (Boddy 1989: 136).

In accordance with the above statement, I see the *chal* affliction as a gendered performative practice in the sense that it is a general phenomena in Chamoli that women show signs of a *chal* affliction sometime after their marriage. They neither strategically plan that affliction, nor do they pretend to have physical complaints. It is the effect of a local discourse and the *chal* affliction is therefore part of people's habitus. The reaction to a *chal* affliction is usually closely linked to processes of practical kinship and practices of performance regarding women's and men's status and honour. At the same time, many women have real physical complaints because of an affliction. To the people in Chamoli these complaints are not the effect of power relations or oppression but a reaction to actions of spirits, ghosts, and deities.

These spiritual beings are considered to be active agents who are involved in their social world. To the Dalit women in Chamoli, most spiritual beings and deities that can afflict them are like siblings, or fathers, members of the natal family with a lot of authority, even if they may be malevolent at times. Chamoli women usually do not accredit themselves with agency when they get afflicted or even possessed. The *chal* of Chamoli, like all other spirits and deities of the region, consume goods provided by men. To get their offerings, the *chal* often afflict women and children. If they do not get their offering within a certain period of time, they get angry and demand more offerings, increasing the pressure on the woman's body or her children. It is the duty of men and marital families to care for their women's and children's well being. In this respect, it is a matter of honour to give these offerings, and in this sense a sacrifice is a performance that reassures a woman's position within her marital family and the relationship between her natal and her marital kin, including the deities. This also means that it is possible to exclude a woman who is unable to fulfil her duty as a wife from the family unit, by denying her her position within the family and refusing to support her efforts to have children or sons. An issue that will be discussed at length in the next sections.

4.4.4 Like a dried up old Flower

Children make men and women complete social persons. In addition, children raise their mother's status at birth and the work and responsibility associated with them adds to women's "capital of honour". Having no children at all deprives a woman of her womanhood in Chamoli and of the possibility to accumulate a "capital of honour". If a woman has only girls, then her fate is supposed to be bad, but if she does not have children at all, people will stop looking at her as a woman. She will become like "A dried up old flower," as Manori, a middle-aged childless woman, said about herself. A woman has to be a mother before she becomes a complete social person. As a wife, she became an adult, but only parenthood can make her (and her husband – if she is his first wife) complete. It is often said that the greatest fear of a barren woman is that her husband will find himself another wife, as Jacobson and Wadley (1992) write,

Some women feel that a woman's position in her husband's household and in his heart is dependent upon or at least bettered by her production of children. A man may seek another wife if his first wife has not given birth" (Jacobson and Wadley 1992: 73).

It is certainly true that there is the possibility that a man seeks another wife if his first wife does not bear him children in Chamoli as well. This is especially so as Chamoli people understand children to be god-given. The number and the sex of the children a woman will have are predetermined by destiny. Thus, if a husband finds out that his wife is "a girlbearing woman" or barren, he should take another wife to fulfil his duty to have children. However, before he seriously considers this option, a good husband and an honourable family should try to help his wife to change her destiny. Garhwalis, as many other Hindus, see their destiny as predetermined, but that does not mean that they regard it as fixed, nor that they have no agency in regard to their fate. As Wadley observed among the people in Karimpur, "the Hindu view of karma is based [...] on the idea that individuals are in constant flux, as each action creates them anew" (1994: 7). Like people in Karimpur and elsewhere in India, the Dalits in Chamoli constantly act to change what they are – they eat the right food, worship the right deity, and perform the right puja at the right moment. "The Hindu body," Wadley continues "is an open vessel, defined by Hindus by what it contains at any given moment rather than by some deep-seated genetic core" (Wadley 1994: 7). This is certainly true for Chamoli people as well. I have never heard a Chamoli woman talk about karma, but it is true that people believe that they have a certain destiny (*kismet*) and that this destiny is not necessarily fixed. It can be changed through actions.

There are many different ways to exercise agency over one's fate in Chamoli, but most of the time the agency is shared and depends on the efforts of a family and the power of divine agents. Some people, for example, go on pilgrimages to different deities, usually a goddess, to ask her for male offspring. A Rajput villager once proudly told me how he had gone to a devi temple one day, when he was still young. He had sat there for four days meditating. Then, on the morning of the fifth day, he received a sign from the devi, five flowers were lying in front of him: three pink ones and two yellow ones, he said. Then he knew that his wife would bear five

children and that two of them would be boys.

The Dalits in Chamoli, however, rarely visit the pilgrimage centres in the region. They are no longer prevented from entering the temples as they were a generation ago. Nevertheless, many Dalit people still do not like going to these places of worship for high caste people. But that does not mean that the Dalits feel that they have no influence on their destinies or are without divine support. On the contrary, Dalit people in Chamoli often sense that they have much more direct contact with some deities in their daily lives than they would at pilgrimage centres. In Chamoli, the main deity Dalit people turn to for help and advice are the different forms (*rup*) of the local deity Bhairav (see also Sax 2003b, 2004a,b). Bhairav is not exclusively a Dalit deity, and, indeed, he is worshipped by many higher caste people as well, but he is the main deity for the Dalit people. Many Dalit villagers consider him their protector, and Dalit women regard the deity from their natal home as their divine brother, a deity that will be with them and protect them in their new homes. In fact, many women have to offer the Bhairav of their *mait* an animal sacrifice after their first child or their first son is born. If this sacrifice is not given, the deity may become angry and harm the child or the mother. For the Dalits in Chamoli, Bhairav is an important agent with respect to many aspects of life, including conception.

Of course, in case of fertility problems or any other health crisis, most people in Chamoli make use of biomedical care services, especially family planning offices with INAMs (government trained midwives). But childlessness or the birth of only girls is always also believed to have a deeper, supernatural reason. And the cure for these problems can only be found in the spiritual world, according to Chamoli people. If god gives children and takes them away, then it is god or the devatas to whom one should turn in times of trouble. If a woman does not conceive children, loses one or more children during pregnancy, or gives birth to two daughters in a row, somebody – often an older female relative from her *mait* – will consult a deity to find out why this is happening to her. Young women very rarely go and consult an oracle for themselves. It is considered inappropriate if a young woman worries too much about herself. Therefore, if she has such problems, she should not complain or consult an oracle herself, but wait for somebody else, usually an older relative, to act in her name. This should not primarily be understood as an act of oppression. It is rather

part of the importance of family unity and the interconnectedness of individual family members in Chamoli. If a young wife is sick or has fertility problems, this is not only considered to be a problem of her own body, but also an issue of her natal family's honour and the responsibility of her marital family. Therefore the fact that older family members visit oracles for the young women is rather a sign that she is an integral part of a family unit. People take care of her, worry about her and organize her treatment. In fact, it is a shameful matter if a young woman has to take care of her own treatment not only because it displays self-indulgence but above all because it means that she has no family member who would do this work for her.

The relative, from her *mait* or her *sauryas*, will usually go and visit an oracle. If the deity talks through a family member, an oracular session may be held in the house. These oracular sessions are common all over Chamoli. The oracle who embodies Bhairav or the devi during a séance, tosses the rice from the woman's storeroom in his or her hands, and "sees" the source of her problems in the grains. The grains are considered to contain information about the people who have cultivated and harvested the grains and in whose storeroom they were lying for several weeks. During the oracular session, the deity is able to "read" this information and can therefore see the source of the patient's problems.

I have seen many such sessions and many desperate mothers, husbands, and other relatives sitting in front of an oracle, hoping that the deity will give them hope. One particular case of an older married woman, who had not had any children after twenty-three years of marriage, started for me in the small worship room of the guru (ritual specialist) and oracle Sudarmar. I had been working with him for several weeks by then. Sudarmar was a Dalit man who had learned the art of healing in Bengal, after he had discovered that the deity Bhairav had come upon him to help the people. It was somewhat unusual that he was both an oracle and a guru, a healer or ritual specialist. Usually, the oracles chosen by the deity are only the vehicles for the divine being, who speaks through them, helping the people, while the gurus know the art of manipulating and even controlling the deities. In Chamoli, oracles, who are often Dalit men or women, usually only identify the source of a problem and give advice in regard to a solution. The gurus, mostly Dalit men, sometimes Brahman

men, but never women, perform the necessary rituals. Sudarmar, however, did both, and he was considered to be one of the most powerful local oracles and healers at the time I met him. Every day many people came to consult him. Sometimes he did not sleep for many days in a row, because he was so busy performing rituals all over the district and sometimes beyond.

Manori was the sister of my friend Kamala's husband, who had come for a visit to her *mait*. She had been married for twenty-three years and, apart from one miscarriage in the second year of her marriage, she had not been able to conceive a child. She and her husband had been to many places for treatment, they had tried medication and had worshipped many deities, had sacrificed numerous goats and had taken many hormones. But nothing had helped. She said:

Our fate is that we do not have children. Twenty-three years have passed. At first, we went to different doctors to get treatment and checkups, we spent a lot of money on that but nothing happened. The doctors said that we both were fine. They said that there was nothing wrong with either of us. Then we went to do puch (oracular session), did puja (worship) for the devi-devatas (female and male deities). However, until today nothing has ever happened. How much treatment we did, how much money we spent, nothing helped. We went to lots of places to do puch. One said this, and another one told us that, but nothing happened. We also went to a lot of doctors for treatment. The doctors said that nothing was wrong with us (ham donom mem koi kami nahim hai). Then somebody told me that he (this guru) was very good.

When she heard about my involvement with the famous guru, Manori decided to give it another try and asked me to take her to an oracular session with him. It was somewhat unusual that she wanted to go to the oracle herself, but she was already thirty-seven years old at that time. Her sas and sasur had died long before and therefore she was no longer considered to be a young daughter-in-law. Her mother and father, with whom she stayed during the time of the treatment had already given up hope. They had consulted many oracles for her and had sacrificed to all the main deities. So much so, that they were embarrassed to try it again. Manori was on her own in this matter. So, early the next day, we climbed on my motorbike

and set off to visit the oracle. We tried to get there early in the hope that we would be among the first patients arriving at his place that day. There was usually a crowd of thirty people or more on Tuesdays and Saturdays, the most auspicious days for an oracular session, and even on the other days it was difficult to get a turn, because there were always so many people waiting. On this day, we were lucky: Only three people had come before us. We took off our shoes and entered the small *puja* room, where the oracle sat, getting ready for the first session. When we came in, he had just started speaking mantras into a *mala* (a sacred necklace) that he then put around his neck. Then he lit some incense and circled it over his utensils, many books, and a metal plate in front of him. There was a small shrine in the corner of the room, where Sudarmar put the incense and lit a light in a small clay oil lamp. “The devata will be there as long as this light is on. Once the light is out, the devata will also have left,” he used to say. We sat down in front of him, watching him say his mantras to get into trance. Finally, he crossed his arms in front of his chest and touched his earlobes, the right one with his left hand and the left one with his right hand. This is done in front of deities to humbly ask for forgiveness for any mistakes committed unknowingly, like impurity. For Sudarma it was the sign that the deity had arrived. The session began. When it was our turn, he took the rice we had brought and tossed it in the metal plate in front of him. Rice, he explained to me later,

has the ability to absorb all the problems, the fighting, the sicknesses of all the people who live in the house. Therefore, the rice can tell one who has shakti (power) all about the people who live in the house where it came from.

Then he gave Manori grass, which he had tied together with a red string, while uttering mantras into it, and asked her to put the small bundle of grass into one of the books that were lying in a pile between the two of them. That was his method. He told me that the deity would make him read “the truth” from these books. They were ordinary books, and what was actually written in them did not matter, because the deity changed the letters so that he could read each person’s fate out of them. His method was rather unusual, but effective. Many other oracles scream and

shake while in trance, shouting their message at the people. In Sudarmar's oracular session, people were able to ask if they did not understand. It was much more a conversation than in the other oracular sessions I had seen, and people seemed to like it, considering that he was one of the most popular oracles and gurus at that time. The puch (oracular session) for Manori started like this:

Guru:

The puch is not about someone else, you have come to do the puch for yourself. But you did not bring rice from your house. The rice is from outside. You do not live in the house anymore.

It is a problem of two legs (a human).

Nobody is lying on a cot (i.e. nobody is dying) it is a problem of a walking person – (chalta-phirta pareshani hai). It is a physical problem with pain and so on.

It is a problem in the middle of the stomach.

You do not have children. This is a very old thing. The couple has been married for a long time.

You have no children. The problem is an old one. This is nothing recent, nothing that happened within the last one or two months, it is an old thing.

You have left your home and now live somewhere else but you have problems there, too.

There were problems and fighting over land (bhumi), the house (sthan).

There are two more parties in the family. You and they fight with each

other.

You have given a lot of pujas, done lots of puches and eaten lots of medicine, but nothing helped.

There are two problems. First, there is a ghost (Masan), and secondly somebody sent a devata after you (pukar kar rakha). It was your jethani (husband's elder brother's wife).

He “read” all this out of the book. He was reading very fast. After each sentence, he looked up to see her reaction. Manori just sat in front of him, her palms clasped together in a reverential gesture for the deity. She nodded every time he looked at her. Occasionally, she said *ham ji* (“yes”). Suddenly, he stopped and grabbed another book from his pile. He looked up her star signs and told her to come back the next day. So again the next morning, we went there on my motorcycle, and he took up the puch again from the point he had dismissed us the day before.

Guru: *The thing that afflicts you has reduced what was written in your destiny.*

You do not have severe troubles; you were never sick or anything like that. The biggest problem is that you get no fruit (phal nahim milta).

Whatever you do, upcharan (promise for puja), puja etc. you have had and will have no success.

It is not a dos (curse) from your mait, but from your sauryas. There is something coming from the mait, a bhut (ghost).

The bhut came from the left side of the house. The real dos (curse) comes from the sauryas.

You have visitors in your dreams. The ghost that visits you in your

dreams lies between you and your husband, he disturbs your dreams. He is responsible for your childlessness.

Manori: *Is there still hope? Can I hope to have a child?*

The guru took some rice from the metal plate in front of him and tossed it in the air. He caught the rice again with one hand. He looked at his hand. One grain lay in the middle of his palm. Later, he explained to me that the deity could give messages through rice. If some of the rice sticks to his hand, there would be hope. Had nothing stuck to his hand, there would have been no hope. He looked up at Manori and said:

You have a chance. You have to do the work, then you will have a chance, but the work will have to be completed. Only eleven days. We have to do this work for eleven days. You have to put rice and black lentils in your mouth every night. Then close your mouth. Take the mixture out again after two minutes. Then put it under your head on the left side and sleep on it all night. The next day you come to me and bring the mixture. That means you have to do that the evening before you come to me. The stuff has to be fresh.

After he had explained this, he obviously considered the session closed, because he turned without any further clarification to the next patient. For the next month, we came to him every day for her treatment. Every day Manori brought a new rice-lentil mixture that she had put in her mouth and slept on the night before. He placed it in front of her and started the procedure. With a bundle of peacock feathers and stinging nettles he wiped all over her body, over her arms, her head, her belly and her back, to loosen the bad influence, to loosen the spirit's grip. Occasionally, he shook the feathers out over the rice-lentil mixture that was lying in an open plastic bag at her feet. "Feathers from the tail of a peacock", Sudarmar said, "are very powerful". He had bought them in Delhi and ritually treated them for a hundred-and-eight days before he started using them. He said that all the powers of the peacock and the powers that he had put in them through meditation and mantras enabled him to get everything bad and evil out of a person. "The best

thing about peacock-tail feathers,” he said,

is that using them reduces the physical problems and pains immediately. But it only works together with mantras. The mantras loosens the bad stuff in the body, so that it can then be taken out. All the stuff that is inside a person comes out over the head, through the body, and out of the feet into the rice and black lentils. You have to put it inside, and then throw it into the water, so that it does not immediately enter another person.

After about thirty minutes Sudarmar closed the path for bad influences on the body. By placing ash on her body, he closed the forehead, the throat, the navel from right to left and top to bottom. Together with the ash he blew mantras all over her body, took the feathers and brushed them over her body once more and then he took a thin black string and pulled it over her head. All of this was done for one purpose: to extract the bad influences from her body. The rice and the lentils were then circulated over her head again. The string was used once more to bind everything in the plastic bag. After this procedure, Manori had to dispose of the mixture in the river nearby. After a week, Sudarmar decided that the treatment would take longer. “This is no ordinary affliction,” he said. “I need more time to finish this work.”

When I met her, Manori was thirty-seven years old. She had been married for twenty-three years and had consulted numerous doctors and oracles, and the couple had performed many rituals to receive children, but nothing had helped. Nevertheless, Manori did not want her husband to take another wife, and he had not done so by the time I met her. I had always heard and read that it was easy to take a second wife, if the first wife did not have children or sons. But, Kamala explained to me, that it is not so easy:

If a man has taken his wife in a kanyadana wedding, he cannot give her back to her mait. He will be responsible for her until she dies. He cannot give her back. If he wishes to marry another wife, his first wife should agree with him. Otherwise he will be a very poor man. What can he do in a house with two wives who are fighting

all the time? He will get no food, his clothes will not be washed, and nobody will take care of him. A good man cannot just take another wife. He will destroy his life if he does so.

Before Manori had began her last attempt at ritual treatment, her husband had tried to come to an agreement with her and her natal family about a second marriage. He had proposed to marry her younger sister. Manori's parents were delighted because they had already started worrying about their daughter's marriage. A barren daughter is very bad for one's reputation and, in fact, the only solution for such a situation is to give another daughter in marriage to the same man. If this marriage had happened and Manori's sister had born him children, the children would have been considered to be Manori's children, as well. Sisters regard each other's children as their children. But Manori had forcefully refused this marriage at that time because she did not want to share her husband. She did not tell me that this happened, I heard different versions of this story from her natal family, whose members were by then very disappointed at her. "She is very selfish," Kamala told me. "She wants to have her husband on her own, she does not care about his future. A man must have children."

A man must have children. That is the only legitimate reason for a man in Chamoli of today to take a second wife. Of course, there are always exceptions, and I have heard of men who had fallen in love with another woman and left their wives and children for her as well as of men who had brought a second and younger wife into their house. But this is a practice looked down upon by most ordinary people and, usually, I have seen that husbands become very attached to their wives, and many would not even consider leaving them even if they had only girls. Men in Chamoli are as much bound to their families, to the restraints of their society and their customs, as their wives are. No man sees himself as an individual being in the sense that he sees himself detached from his wife, his children, his parents or his wife's parents. It is nearly unthinkable for a Chamoli man to break ties with the people he is close to. Therefore, the decision to take another wife is not an individual decision, but rather part of a process of which the second wife is the effect. The families exercise collective agency and decide together about the future

of the couple. But, as Manori's story shows, women who do not fulfil their duties as wives and mothers are often singled out, they cease to be an integral part of a family, are pushed to the margins, muted and powerless. Like young widows, they are deprived of the chance to live an honourable life. These women at the margins have only little agency exactly because they are no longer part of a unit of collective agency. The discourse of afflictions and responsibilities in Manori's case shows that guilt is attributed to the woman in order to justify the process of her marginalisation within the family that follows.

"Manori's case was complicated," Sudarmar told me.

She started dreaming of the ghost and he made her husband leave the bed, instead of him, the ghost was lying with her in the form (rup) of her husband. Of course, she could not get pregnant this way. But because both did not realise what was going on, they started fighting.

In a lot of cases, a woman will start dreaming of Masan. In the dream the woman will walk over several dirty places with Masan. That is the same thing. Somehow, the demon prevents her from getting pregnant or makes her lose the baby she carries. Then, she will first see a medical practitioner to find out whether her ovaries or her uterus are fine or not. If nothing is found, her husband might also have an examination. If there is no obvious medical reason for the couple having no babies, they will go and do a puch. At the puch session, they will find out that she is afflicted by a chal, they will also hear where the chal afflicted her and how.

With Manori, it is a pret, an actual spirit of a dead person. The man had died in the forest. He fell there and died. He was from her mait. The man died many years ago at the edge of the river, where he later attacked Manori, long before she got married. After attaching himself to her, he was able to come as a man (admi ke rup). Then, when she got married, he started to cause trouble. He took her away from her husband's bed. He did not allow her to have her husband's children. He closed up her body against her husband. As long as he was there, she could not conceive a child.

If it is a pret troubling somebody, we will give the pret a puja, and we will close the hole that stands for his atma, so that he will never come back. The chal stays, it lives with Masan, we just send it back. A bhut takes over another person's atma, attaches itself to it. The ghost can be seen only by that human being, he or she is in the person, does not exist without him or her. This sort of ghost does not walk around freely. This ghost exists only together with another human being. The ghost comes at night, becomes a body, and lies down between a husband and his wife. The ghost will push the man away, without him noticing anything, and then the ghost stays with the woman all night. She gets sick from that. Her health will become bad and she will develop back pains, get depressive, she will have headaches and so on.

The guru had diagnosed that Manori's most pressing problem was that *pret*. She was also afflicted by some other curse from a sister-in-law and, because of the mixture of bad influences that bothered her, he had to treat her for four weeks. In the end, he performed an elaborate ritual that was supposed to bind the *pret* and enable her to get pregnant. He told her to come back after three months and finish the work. She went back to her husband, who worked for the police in a city about a day's journey from her *mait*. About three months later, Kamala and her husband thought that it would be good to call her and find out how she was. She told them that she had finally become pregnant. Her family was very happy and relieved. But only a week later, she called them. She told them under tears that she had lost the child. She was devastated. The first thing her brother did was to visit the ritual specialist, who told him that he was not surprised, the work had not been finalised, he had told her so, and it was her who had not come back for the final ritual. A few weeks later, Manori had come back for the wedding of her sister's daughter. As Sudarmar was also a relative of her sister's husband, she met him there on the wedding day and shyly asked him whether she could come back and give it another try. He told her that this was still possible, but that she had to do the whole procedure again. A few weeks later, he told me:

As long as the pret was there, she could not conceive a child. After all this time, it would have been sufficient to sacrifice a goat for the pret down at the river. Every-

thing would have been fine. But the woman herself carried most of the responsibility for what had happened (galti manori ka tha). She had fallen in love with the ghost after all this time. She did not really want him to leave. The man came back in her dreams.

She also has another problem. They fought in the family and somebody sent the devata after her, her jethani (husband's elder brother's wife). She did the pukar (sending the devata after somebody), but nobody ever gave puja, because the family was not united. That is Bhairav. They fought about the house and Bhairav afflicted them all. After the curse the devata afflicted (lag gaya) her. Then she had been married for twenty-three years. She had become pregnant and the child was growing in her for five months, but she did never complete the work (ritual). I think that she will come back for treatment in April. She has to be purified for twenty-one days. Then she has to give the chal-bhut puja. We will have to wait for one or two months before we can give the Bhairav Puja in her sauryas. The pujas cannot be performed together. We have to wait a while. Then she will become pregnant, because the ghost who looks like her own husband will not come back. Then everything will be fine.

However, in the meantime Manori's husband had become very frustrated and her own natal kin sided with him. One morning, I came to Kamala's house and found the courtyard full of wood. She explained to me that they were helping Manori's husband to build a house in the nearby market town. She suspected that he built this house for Manori, so that Manori could live there, close to her parents and natal kin, while he would take a second wife and take the new wife to the place where he worked. "That is fine," she said,

a man has to have a child. If his wife cannot have children, she cannot expect him to live like this with her. That is not why marriages are arranged. He has to get another wife and have children. He has to treat his first wife well and see to it that she eats well, but what can he do if she blocks every effort to come to a peaceful agreement. She is a selfish woman, she wants to have him for herself.

By then, Manori's husband had tried everything to help her conceive a child. Even

her natal kin agreed that he should take a second wife. Her barrenness deprived him of his manhood and decreased her natal family's social capital. Labelling her as selfish and blaming her for the failure of the healing ritual was part of the process that eventually marginalised her and in turn enabled her husband to have the chance for children, and as such, to become a full social person.

Manori's husband was frustrated because he had spent a lot of money on her without success and she was still not ready to agree on taking a second wife into their household. In the eyes of his family, even her natal kin, he did not have a choice. He was not getting any younger and needed at least one child before he died. In the Chamoli view of things, it is therefore legitimate to take another wife.

As Manori's case makes clear, curse, affliction and cure are complicated issues. Manori was not only afflicted by the *pret*, she had also been cursed by her sister-in-law, a common practice among women of one family who fight fiercely with each other, as will be extensively discussed later on in this chapter. Manori's case clarifies that any explanation of supernatural afflictions and spirit possession, which follows a single and clear-cut "scientific" logic gives an unsatisfactory account of Chamoli people's social reality. A widespread anthropological rationalization of similar phenomena throughout India, for example, understands possession and supernatural afflictions as symptoms of psychological dysfunction (Freed and Freed 1964), as a reaction to suppressed sexual desire (Kakar 1983; Obeyesekere 1981) or as the effect of unusual stress (Obeyesekere 1977). Inspired by an argument made by I.M. Lewis (1971, 1989), these accounts on spirit possession assume that spirit possession and affliction are safe ways to express frustrations and to deal with exceptionally desperate situations. This line of argument explains why such a high number of young and recently married wives are most vulnerable to supernatural afflictions and possession (see also Opler 1958; Fuller 1992; Harper 1963; Kakar 1986). These accounts of women's afflictions and spirit possession are based on the assumption that women, or at least young daughters-in-law, are powerless and muted members of their society and as such, as Fuller writes: "Womens possession episodes are [...] culturally tolerated opportunities to complain about female inferiority and subordination within Indian society" (1992: 233). All these explanations of spirit possession or affliction assume that individuals use the supernatural to solve their own personally difficult

situations. Kalpana Ram, for example understands demonic possession among the Mukkuvar women from a catholic fisher community in Tamil Nadu, as a means to reinterpret dominant constructs of female sexuality and oppressive social structures. To her, possession by demons enabled the Mukkuvar women to “challenge the daily discipline of living within the confines of respectable femininity” (Ram 1992: 93).

It is clear, that Manoris case cannot be explained through a Lewisian reading of her situation. First of all, her affliction was understood to be the cause for her childlessness. In this sense, her affliction could better be understood as a shift of responsibilities from her body to a divine agent, but not as a reaction to oppressive structures. Secondly, in local terms her childlessness could not be explained by a single cause. The ghost of an untimely dead person had afflicted her sometime during her childhood. After she got married she was cursed by one of her sisters-in-law. In addition the ritual specialist noticed that some of her problems could also be found in her horoscope. To understand and explain her affliction, the ritual specialist needed to know her life history since childhood. That means that her affliction was part of a complicated network of events and relationships. And thirdly, her affliction clearly did not give her a voice, as in the cases of ecstatic religion described by Kakar or the cases of demonic possession in Ram’s case. Instead, the numerous rituals in combination with the allopathic treatment she received made her childless state even more embarrassing. In the local understanding, every person deserves treatment, ritual and allopathic, as long as he or she is a valuable member of the families and takes part in the accumulation of symbolic, social, or economic capital. However, if a single person is constantly in trouble and continually creates a negative balance of capital within the family, taking more out than giving back, he or she becomes a liability. It is a matter of honour to take care of young wives. Her husband and her marital family are responsible for her spiritual and physical well being. To deny her treatment is not only dishonourable but also harms the family. While it is true that men can remarry after they have abandoned their first wife or after their first wife has died, it is also true that people do not tolerate cruelty or mistreatment of young wives. Stories of extensive violence against young women travel fast, and they can seriously decrease a familys capital of honour and therefore weaken their kinship networks as well as narrow their chances for future alliances. The second

marriage often does not produce strong kin-alliances nor does it help the family to accumulate symbolic capital. As such most young women are supported by their marital and their natal kin. But if the treatment shows no success and the woman remains childless or sonless, if she becomes a liability for the family, ritual practices can be part of the process to single her out and exclude her from the family unit.

I do not understand the *chal* affliction as a form of resistance, exactly because the usual process and the ritual of healing centre around family unity and strengthen the relationship between a woman's natal and her marital kin. It strengthens the collective agency of the networks of which the woman is a part. However this effect does not lie in the woman's hands. If the relationship to her husband and her parents-in-law is troubled, they might use her affliction to humiliate her. This is so because when it comes to matters of her own health, a woman should never demand anything from her in-laws. It is considered shameful (*sharam ki bat*) to ask for anything for herself or to complain about physical grievances. Her husband and her in-laws should see a spirit affliction when it occurs. If a woman loses a child or if she does not get pregnant, there are two possibilities. The first and common outcome is that her husband or her in-laws get worried and take action. However, they may also decide against her, choose the less honourable but also less expensive way and restrain from her treatment. The *chal* affliction is therefore part of different, even opposing discourses within families. And in that way it also negotiates power relations within the family. There are many gendered performative practices and performances of gender, honour, or power that directly deal with cursing and affliction and which are an even better example of the negotiation of power relations within the family and divine agency. I will deal with one of the most prominent examples of curse and affliction in the next section.

4.5 Conflict and Affliction

To Chamoli people, affliction is done to someone by an outside agent, and often this agent is nonhuman. Deities, spirits, and ghosts can afflict persons for their own reasons because they are sad, angry, disappointed, or because they have been convinced by another person to attack someone. Thus, similar to an argument

made by Crapanzano and Garrison (1977b) and Lambek (1988a) in the context of spirit possession, I argue that any account on affliction and cursing in Chamoli should grant supernatural beings an existence as agents. They are social beings who interact with persons not only during public ritual practices, but also in everyday experience and practice. However, Chamoli people also play an active role in the afflictions of other people, because they can influence the deity Bhairav to help them in their conflicts with others. In Chamoli, affliction by evil spirits (e.g. *Masan* and *chal*), ghosts (*bhut*), deities, the evil eye, and dirty substances (*kabad*) is part of people's everyday life. Supernatural afflictions, feeding *kabad* and cursing all involve gendered performative practices. Especially cursing seems to be a female way to solve fights amongst each other that involve harsh feelings of disappointment, anger, and hate. There are also male practices of cursing, which involve complicated rituals of sending the deity "back" to somebody. However, this section will deal with female practices of cursing.

In the local discourse, women are stereotypically said to be more involved in cursing and affliction than men because their femininity is said to make them more vulnerable to afflictions and more open to outside influences. In addition, women are considered to have less self-control, to be bad tempered, and therefore more easily curse other people. But afflictions can happen to both men and women. And, while women are said to curse people more easily when they lose their temper, men are involved in the more complicated business of sending deities back and forth amongst each other through ritual practices (see Sax 2004b). The afflictions through cursing are usually dangerous, and most often it is a group of people who is afflicted and not an individual person. Consequently, if a mother is afflicted by an evil spirit (*chal*, or *bhut*), it is likely that her children are affected, too. If a man has forgotten to worship his deity, the deity's wrath will strike his wife and children, and, if people curse each other, it can affect people throughout generations.

4.5.1 Bhairav, my Brother

Cursing, affliction, and healing play a major role for Chamoli people in solving and fighting their conflicts. While brothers fight over land and sons fight with their

parents over money, women fight over money, jewellery, men, the fertility of their bodies, and separation. Tensions among women in Garhwal, especially women of one extended family, are often played out in terms of cursing and affliction. For the Dalit women of Chamoli, the local deity Bhairav, with his many forms, is a particularly important agent. For them, this deity of their *mait* is like a brother. Bhairav protects them when they leave for their *sauryas* and promises to stand at their side in times of suffering and pain. As Prema explained to me,

When a girl's marriage takes place and she leaves for her sauryas, then our Bhairav also goes with her to give her protection against evil. When the girls go to the forest, he always comes with them. In the mait, they won't ever come to face a chal. In my mait, a chal never ever afflicts girls. The girls bring goats in Bhairav's name and give him puja.

Bhairav protects his *dhyanis*, but he expects offerings and worship in return. For Dalit women in Chamoli, Bhairav plays a major role in many social relations. He is a protector, but he also consumes, and most often he demands offerings from his *dhyanis'* marital families. He therefore plays a crucial role in a woman's connection to her *mait* and in practical kinship networks as well. However, for the women in Chamoli, Bhairav becomes especially important when they are in very difficult situations in their *sauryas*. Inner-familiar tensions among women are often played out with the help of this particular deity, and therefore cursing, affliction, and healing are particularly interesting gendered performative practices connected with aggressive conflicts, anger, and even hate. The practices of cursing, healing, and being afflicted by a curse are part of Chamoli identity. They create relationships, and can maintain or destroy family unity. In the eyes of Chamoli people, they can also kill.

For Chamoli people, Bhairav is an independent agent, and many women try to resolve their problems with his help. He is an agent because he is treated like a real, if divine, family member. He is advisor and healer as well as judge and prosecutor. But while Chamoli people acknowledge Bhairav's agency, they do not give up their

own¹³. Bhairav rather becomes part of the collective agency of the family¹⁴.

Bhairav is thus important for both men and women in Chamoli, but he plays different roles for each. For Dalit women (and some higher caste women as well), Bhairav is like a brother. The particular form of Bhairav, whom she can ask for divine help, is typically the deity of her mother's house. Sometimes, the deity has travelled over generations with the women of her family, and therefore people can also establish kin relations in the matriline through his worship. For example, when women ask him for help, he might ask for a place in her village in return and might one day follow her daughter to her *sauryas*. Rajeshwari, a young married woman with three sons, for instance, told me that she had to sponsor a puja soon. Goril-Bhairav, who is worshipped in her *mait*, demanded a *than* (a shrine) for himself in her *sauryas*. Rajeshwari said that she had called him herself unintentionally. One day, a few weeks before, her son was very sick. Her husband had been sick for a long time. He was unable to work and hardly able to talk. When her son got seriously ill, she started crying in her house and said, "I have nobody (*mera koi nahim hai*)!" At that moment the devata came and said, "You are not alone. I am here for you! Give me a *than* (shrine) in your house. I will stay with you and take care of you. I will stay with you, my *dhyani*. I will not go back." She told me that it is good if something like this happens for those people who have enough money to sponsor the ritual that is needed to establish a shrine, but when somebody cannot establish a shrine, after the devata demanded one, the devata will become very angry. The *dhyani* is a daughter of his village, and she should treat Bhairav like a brother. She therefore has to treat him with respect. If he demands a *than*, she must give it to him. In return, she will receive his protection and will flourish under his benevolent powers. Anil, Kamala's husband, explained:

Bhairav follows his dhyani to watch over her sorrows and her happiness (dukh/sukh). He stays with her. Bhairav Nath's love for his dhyanis is very great. If any of his dhyanis is in need of him and calls upon him (apni pukar karte), he will hear her and come to her support immediately. He will hear her call and come to her aid to

¹³For a lengthy discussion of the transfer of human agency to divine agency, see Keane (1997).

¹⁴for a lengthy discussion of divine agency, see Sax (2002b, 2003a).

punish and trouble those who have brought her suffering (dukh). He will give them what they deserve.

4.5.2 Bhairav, the Protector of the Dalits

The stories of Bhairav are famous all over Chamoli, and it is not only Dalit people who believe in his power. He has many different names and dwells in many different places. Most extended Dalit families in Chamoli at least have one small shrine dedicated to him. The shrines are always outside, as the deity does not like to live under a proper roof. Many higher caste people are also involved in the worship of Bhairav, but because the deity is associated with the lower castes, they are embarrassed about their own involvement and therefore hide his shrines in their houses. Most of these shrines have been established with blood sacrifices, and the deity's strength has to be refreshed every two or three years with a one-to-three-day ritual spectacle (*kauthik*) in the name of the deity and this almost always involves sacrifice of at least one goat. Very devoted people give him small offerings and a small *puja* (worship) at his shrine at least once a month. The rituals for Bhairav and the blood sacrifices in Chamoli are another example of gendered performative practices into which men and women are involved in different ways. The blood sacrifice and the monthly rituals are, for example, in men's hands. Women rarely attend the killing of a goat for sacrificial purposes, because the violence of the blood sacrifice could scare them and thus open them to other dangerous spiritual beings that might attack them. For the same reason, they do not perform the monthly offerings. The shrine of Bhairav is considered to be very powerful and dangerous, therefore men should open it and give the offerings. For many Dalit men in Chamoli, Bhairav is the source of their success. They also see him as their protector, not so much against mishaps within their own families, but rather against unjust treatment in the "outside" world. One of the most impressive stories I heard involved fighting over land between people of different castes in Kamala's *mait*. The government had promised the low caste people land that had formerly been government-owned land, and had not been used by the villagers. The low caste people had started to cultivate that land. When the government turned this land into private property and allocated it

to the low caste villagers, fighting broke out. One of the sisters of Kamala's husband was married to one of her brothers, therefore her father felt that he had the right to ask the Bhairav of Kamala's *sauryas* and the *mait* of his daughter-in-law for help. This is how Kamala's husband told the story to me:

Not so long ago, in 1978, Bhairav ji went to my sister's sauryas and my wife's mait. Why did he go? He went because my father-in-law had come here to ask for his help. He went down to his sthan (place) to lay a ghat (curse). When he arrived here, he went straight to Bhairav's sthan and said: "I have come here before you to ask for your help. A great injustice is being done to others and me at our village. If you come and help us, we will give you a sthan (place) in our village and promise to worship you. If you do not want to help us, I will walk straight back home. I have come to get you, I have come to ask you to return with me and aid us in our struggle! Your dhyani lives with my son. Please come and help us. High caste people are doing your dhyani and us great injustice. The savarn (high caste, lit "with caste") people have troubled your dhyani greatly. The government has given us ten Nali¹⁵ of land. And we have started to work on this land. We wanted to cultivate it. And now the Rajput people say that this land is theirs and that we have no right to any land! And they have beaten us! Us the Dalit people." When Bhairav heard that, he reacted immediately and said: "You have come, I am going with you!" My father-in-law had come with his wife, his brother, and his eldest son. Bhairav told them to take some soil from the than, sacrifice a chicken, and take its head with a light inside its beak, and walk with this back to the village. He told them to place the chicken's head at the entrance to the village. "Everybody who sees this, will die", he said. And his wrath started straight away. The very next day people started getting sick and they started dying, one after the other. The girls and the boys: all died. The animals, the cows, and the water buffalos; the fathers and the mothers. Bhairav was so angry that he killed more than half of the Rajput people in this village. Now there are very few men in the village and more women, because he did not kill the women. And the people of this village have become very faithful devotees of Bhairav Nath. Until today, they take his puja very seriously and give it regularly. And Bhairav loves his

¹⁵Nali is a local measure for land that depends on the productivity of the land.

Dalit people very much. He looks after them that they have no reason to become angry and that no trouble can reach them anymore.

Bhairav is the deity who belongs to the low caste villagers who still suffer from caste discrimination in their everyday lives. Whereas the great deities, who regularly go on pilgrimages to visit their devotees never stop at low caste houses, and very few of them accept offerings from low caste people (see also Sax 1991). Bhairav lives with them, he dances at their homes, he takes their sacrifice, and he blesses them with his divine powers.

4.5.3 Curse and Cure: Family Unity and Women's Conflicts

For the women in Chamoli, Bhairav often functions as a mediator. In the fights between daughters- and mothers-in-law, *devaranis* (wife of husband's younger brother) and *jethanis* (wife of husband's older brother), he often gets involved. As such, Bhairav plays a major role in the everyday lives of many, if not most, rural Dalit women in Chamoli. The relationship among women of different age and status in a single family is not only influenced and negotiated through cursing and curing, but also to a great extent defined by discourses around the power of deities. Issues of family unity are always at the centre of this discourse. Cursing, curing, and afflictions are also female ways to communicate tensions and relationships in ways that transfer some of the agency to a nonhuman agent – Bhairav. Following Taussig (1993) and Bourdieu (1990), I argue that cursing and affliction are part of Chamoli people's habitus, in the sense that it is acquired through mimetic practices and put into practice at moments of distress, anger, and desperation. Practices of cursing and healing are part of the Chamoli social field, "the game" and every Dalit person in Chamoli embodies the knowledge about cursing, understanding affliction, and healing rituals. It is part of the everyday life of Chamoli people. If somebody gets sick often, has no children, and has agricultural problems, people assume that an affliction is behind these troubles. If women fight or get in desperate situations, they automatically call upon their deity for help.

Bhairav is said to have a special relationship with his village's outmarried

daughters, his *dhyanis*. Whenever a *dhyani* sheds tears and uses his name while doing so, he will hear her and come to her aid. He helps her by afflicting the people and their families who have been causing her pain and trouble. In other words, her tears can call Bhairav, and weeping is a gendered performative practice that can become a performance and a curse in certain situations. I realised that weeping is considered to be a dangerous practice, when I started crying myself as a reaction to an especially difficult field situation. I had been living in the village for about six months and felt that I had not made much progress. The village people seemed to be suspicious about my intentions and they were secretive about many aspects of their lives. I was frustrated and had fallen into a lethargy for a few weeks. I had finally decided that I had to take action to pull myself out of this lethargy. I thought that it was a good idea to collect some data about village statistics. Therefore I walked around the village for a few days, sat down in people's courtyards when invited and asked questions. However, most people did not want to answer any of my questions and when I had been unsuccessful for a couple of days one of the older village man lost his temper with me and scolded me about bothering him. When I reached the house of some friends, my nerves showed and as soon as I saw them, tears of frustration started showing in my eyes. When they saw that I was crying they immediately ushered me into their house, so that nobody else would see my tears. Instead of comforting me, they first tried to stop me from crying which made them very uncomfortable. My friends later explained to me that crying was something that should never be done in public, unless there was a reason. The weeping of a leaving *dhyani* is one of this situations, the arrival of a ghost (*bhut*) another. Even when somebody died, people only cried moderately. It is not only embarrassing to weep, as is weeping in public in Germany, but it is also dangerous, because it can easily become a curse. But this danger only lies in the weeping of women. And it depends on the situation, whether a weeping woman is dangerous or not. For example, men and women weep, when they are sentimental, when they grieve or when they are exceptionally sad, none of these forms of weeping are particularly dangerous nor are they to be understood as performances. They are part of the habitus and as such appropriate reactions to a situation. But at times, people know exactly that they are expected to weep and in such situations the weeping or the non-weeping

becomes a performance. It is impossible to say whether weeping is either a performance or performative practice because sometimes weeping is a performance and sometimes it is a performative practice. The performance seems obvious in the case of the weeping *dhyani* who wants to perform the “good daughter”, or in the case of a woman who wants to place a curse. However, sometimes weeping is a rather automatic reaction to circumstances – a gendered performative practice. Not all *dhyanis* weep as a performance and not all women who are in a desperate situation weep to place a curse. Often, when a family or a women is afflicted, and an oracle has told them that someone has called the deity, the women say, “I must have wept, I can’t remember, but I must have wept and Bhairav heard me.” Again, it is difficult to say how much of this is performative and how much of this is a performance. But, cursing and affliction are part of the female habitus in Chamoli and deeply embedded in everyday practices.

People say that a *dhyani* has the power to call upon (*pukar karana*) Bhairav in times of distress and therefore cause him to afflict her enemies. In this view, he is the protector of the weak, the protector of his sisters. However, there is a great danger in cursing somebody in this way. It is usually a new bride’s mother- and father-in-law, her sister-in-law (the sister of her husband as well as the wives of the brothers of her husband, *jethani* and *devarani*) and sometimes also her husband himself who cause her trouble in her new home. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a young married bride has to subordinate herself to her in-laws. Especially her mother-in-law has power over her in the sense that she can tell her when and what to work. She has the control over the resources and decides when and how much her daughter-in-law eats, and she controls the relationship between her new daughter-in-law and her husband. The mother-in-law’s daughters typically side with their mother in times of conflict and, if a woman’s husband has elder married brothers, she is also subordinate to their wives. I have heard many stories of abuse by mothers- and sisters-in-law. In the moments, when the conflict escalates to the point that the women constantly fight and become angry, desperate, or cornered, they often call on Bhairav for help. But it is both shameful and dangerous to ask Bhairav to help in such situations. Firstly, cursing is a sign of bad temper and uncontrollable anger, which in itself is considered shameful. Secondly, Bhairav usual

protects the honour of her natal family by protecting the unity of her marital family. If a *dhyani* tries to call Bhairav for help against her in-laws, she might get herself in even greater trouble. This is illustrated by the following case study, the story of Munni Devi told by a local Dalit guru:

Munni was married when she was sixteen. She and her husband led a very happy life together. Her husband worked for the forest department, and therefore they lived in Dehra Dun and not in his natal village. They did not go to see her husband's parents very often, especially because Munni had had some problems with them before moving to Dehra Dun. He did, however, send financial aid to his family on a regular basis.

One day, Munni developed health problems. The doctor suggested an operation. Before Munni had the operation done, she gave her jewellery, including a golden necklace that had been made by her husband's family, into the care of her father. When she came to her sauryas after the operation, her mother-in-law greeted her with a slap in her face. She was very angry, thinking Munni had given the necklace away to her natal home, so that her father and brothers could sell it. Munni tried to explain the situation, but her mother-in-law did not believe her. In the meantime, the father-in-law got sick and died. Because of all this Munni could not go home to her father to fetch the necklace. The situation escalated to the point where her mother-in-law and her two other sons kicked Munni, her husband and their two children out of the house, denying her husband any share of his father's inheritance. In the course of this fight, Munni called upon Bhairav, asking him to help her through this unfair situation. "If my father has taken your necklace, then both my brothers shall die, but if you are in the wrong than your two sons shall die!", she said to her mother-in-law. After that dirty fight, she went straight to her father's house to get the necklace and thus proved her innocence to her mother-in-law.

About a month later, Munni's husband died in a car accident. Munni was able to convince the government to give her a pension and a job in the forest department. Therefore, she was able to sustain herself and the two small children. However, she still tried to convince her husband's family to support her children. At a minimum, she needed their help for arranging their marriages. They refused, and Munni went

to ask for Bhairav's help again. A few months later, she started to develop health problems, again. Physicians could not help her, she went to perform pujas at different places, but nothing helped. In a final consultation, it became apparent that Munni had been afflicted by her own curse. As she had tried to use Bhairav against her own family, splitting up the family, the deity came after her and not her enemies.

Munni's story is one of the clearest examples of the ambiguity of Bhairav's benevolence. He is at the same time the protector of the weak and the protector of certain moral values at the core of which stands the most important social unit, the family. When Munni tried to turn against her marital family, Bhairav decided to punish her for that and killed one of the sons of Munni's mother-in-law. But he killed the son who was Munni's husband. He granted her plea for justice, but he had his own interpretation according to the moral values of Chamoli. According to local understanding, Bhairav uses his capacity to act and as such takes part in the creation of social reality with his own interpretations of pleas for help and justice. This is what makes him particularly dangerous.

The local understanding of curse and affliction is connected to the ambivalence of a daughter-in-law in her new home. A new *bvari* is always seen as a symbol of hope, fertility, prosperity, and stands for the reproduction of the patriline and the fertility of the fields. At the same time, she is also seen as dangerous. Her femininity has the power to split up the family, cause fights between son and parents, split up the relationship between mother and son. At the same time, the new *bvari* is also the weakest part of the family. Right after her marriage, she is new in the village and the family and often totally dependent on her mother-in-law who tells her when to eat, sleep, work, and be with her husband. At this stage, she has almost no agency. Her husband is also usually helpless in this situation, not knowing whether he should stand by his mother or his wife. When the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law start fighting in such a situation, the fights may lead to cursing. Sometimes the new *bvari* curses her mother-in-law. However, just as often the mother-in-law curses her *bvari* for threatening to split up the family or for actually having left the hearth of the mother-in-law. Practices of cursing and rituals of affliction still seem to follow older social practices of a time when separation was uncommon and tragic for the extended family. However, the rituals needed to heal a curse, or the rituals

to establish a new shrine, also ensure ritual unity among the descendants of one patriline. In fact, even though they had separate *culhas*, most men remain attached to their parents and brothers in the sense that they still jointly worship their deities. In particular, Bhairav often demands that the family worships him unitedly and does not accept rituals given by only a fraction of the extended patrilineal family. To assure the deity's benevolence, a family should give Bhairav a family ritual every two or three years. Such a ritual usually lasts from two to three days. A ritual specialist is invited to sing songs and play his *hudaka* accompanied by the sound of a *thali*. The songs and the music are supposed to invite the deities to come and dance on the people and control them once they have arrived. Usually there are two such sessions of dancing a day, one in the early afternoon and one in the evening. A whole ritual should include at least three such sessions. Depending on the amount of visitors and the atmosphere during and between the sessions, especially the evening session can last long into the night, with many people dancing wildly to the sound of the drum. Before the main ritual is started, however, the ritual specialist calls the family together. He puts a string around all of them and performs a ritual that is supposed to unite the family and to eliminate all bad influences from them (*kas puja*). Bhairav wants the family united and that does not only mean that all should take part in his rituals but also that they settle their fights before they do so.

Therefore, a *bvari's* curse can only be successful if it strengthens family unity, in other words. People say that Bhairav will always insist on family unity, and most often a curse consequently brings more harm than help to the powerless daughter-in-law. But we have to keep in mind that a ritual specialist himself, who gave his own explanations about Munni's situation, told her story. In this respect, Munni's story might be a reflection of higher cultural values and might differ greatly from Munni's own account of her unfortunate fate. Family unity is one of the highest values in Chamoli, but as I have shown in a previous section of this chapter, there are a lot of tensions within these units. Most joint families of today have split up, and it has become the norm rather than the exception that married sons eat separated from their parents.

The ritual practices around Bhairav regulate power relations within an extended family. If a new *bvari* does not behave in the way expected of her, rituals and social

pressure will force her back into a socially accepted behaviour or, like in the case of Munni, will place the responsibility of her own and her family's misfortune on her actions. The family unity has a higher moral value than the happiness of an individual woman. Therefore, the affliction reminds her that she has acted wrongly. The ritual that can heal her is a ritual that reunites the family. The mother-in-law can refuse to do that without further consequences. However, women like Munni often need the consensus of their families. The healing ritual is thus not only healing her affliction, but is also forcing her to behave within a certain moral framework. Nabokov (2000) and Stirrat (1977, 1992) postulated a view on exorcism that I find useful for the interpretation of this situation. Stirrat sees exorcism at a Sinhalese Catholic shrine in Sri Lanka primarily as an attempt "to impose power over others, particularly young women" (1992: 112). To him, the diagnose of affliction by a demon starts a process initiated by her relatives to regain control over a young woman who tried to leave or break free of her oppressive situation that ends with exorcism. Nabokov similarly argues that many of the exorcism rituals for young women she observed in Tamil Nadu were violent attempts of their family members to publicly repudiate her "reprehensible behavior" and force them to "rededicate themselves to cultural expectations of the "good wife" " (Nabokov 2000: 72). Nabokov's understanding of supernatural afflictions and healing rituals strongly opposes the theory that possession is a practice that empowers Hindu women. Instead, the Tamil ritual silence the women and help to re-establish the order of family life.

Far from working toward their emancipation, the ritual I have described is an assertive pedagogy and not a dialogue. Women are silenced through the interrogation, the symbolic decapitation, [...] which invade their person and imprint on their beheaded bodies society's "mark" or "truth" so that they will never forget it. Now these young women know not to venture beyond the boundary of the supervised, life-giving sexuality of the home, for it can lead only to madness, and utter absorption of wasteland symbolism by the self (Nabokov 2000: 99).

The situation in Chamoli is different, because the women are neither considered to be possessed by a spirit, nor are the rituals forcefully played out on their individual

bodies. But, it is similar in the sense that the healing rituals of Bhairav remind young women of their inappropriate behaviour and that they work to force them back into behaving like “good daughters-in-law”. It is bad to turn against her own in-laws. The social pressure also works the other way round, when the mother-in-law takes revenge for her *bvari* convincing her husband to leave the family home, for example. Again, the *bvari* has acted against family unity and is therefore punished. The ritual that would free her from affliction is a ritual where the family is reunited, where she has to admit that she had been in the wrong. However, Nabokov’s line of argument does not fully explain the situation in Chamoli. In contrast to the rituals of exorcism in Tamil Nadu, the discourses of curse and cure in Chamoli usually are dialectical. They do not empower young women. But they usually force families as a unit to communicate and solve their problems in order to give the necessary sacrifice. Both parties have the choice to either re-unite or to live with the affliction. In this sense, Bhairav does not actually protect the weak, nor does he support the powerful. As an independent agent, he upholds the moral order.

Yet, conscious cursing is an inherently immoral practice. Any woman who admits to be involved in the cursing and curing circle around Bhairav considers herself to be a victim. Nobody pleads guilty to have cursed somebody wrongly or to have done anything that could justify anybody’s curse. To accuse somebody to have placed a curse is thus at the same time a moral statement. It says: “You have cursed me and therefore I suffer. You may be more powerful, but I am a moral and honourable person!” This is what happens in the following story. Rajeshwari told me how the constant fights and the pressure of sas and jethanis on her, the youngest *bvari*, first led to the separation of *culhas*. Eventually the tensions between her and her mother-in-law were interpreted by her as the ultimate cause of the accident of Rajeshwari’s husband. Rajeshwari told me her story as follows:

I came to my sasural when I was twelve years old. I have four sisters-in-law, two are older than me (jethani), two are younger (devarani). I have a mother-in-law (sas), too. My father thought that I should go to a house with a mother-in-law. He thought, “My daughter never had a mother. In this house she will find a mother’s love.” My sas turned out so bad! She used to send me into the forest, I was a girl

of twelve years, but my sas wanted me to do the work of an adult, and she did not accept any less than that. One jethani was twenty-two or twenty-three, the other was twenty-one or twenty-two, so they did the work of an adult, how could a twelve-year-old be able to work as much and as well as they did? My sas said, "You have to do just as much work as they are doing."

We were a big family: four sisters-in-law, four brothers, that makes eight, nine, with the sas, then one girl and one boy with the oldest brother, a girl and a boy with the second oldest, that is thirteen. We had to prepare food for such a large family, and I had to do the washing up, and if the dishes were still a little big black, I was sent down to the river again. They sent me down to the river with a huge basket full with dirty plates and pots, and they gave me a pot to fetch water as well. When they sent me to the forest, they told me how much wood I had to get. I never had enough for them, so they sent me straight back into the forest. So I had to go back alone, and afterwards, they sent me to get grass. Because of this work, I fell here and there; I fell in the forest, in the fields, down at the river. Since I arrived in my sauryas, I had been injured a lot. When I was sixteen years old, I became pregnant with my oldest son. My health had turned bad. I told my sas, that I had a fever, stomach ache, and headaches, she just said: "You are lazy, you don't want to work." She was very angry. I told her that this was not true, that my health had turned bad. And then my husband said that he would take me to hospital. We both went there together, and the doctor told us that I was carrying a child and that the stomach pain came from the three-to-four month old child in me, "That is why she has aches, that is why she has fever, she is a very weak girl." The doctor told my husband, "She is too young to have a baby, you should abort the child, she is very weak and she is so young, she should not have the baby." My husband asked me what to do, he was helpless, because he thought that I would die and I said: "No, we will not abort the child, we will be able to raise it, I can give it a mother's love." We went home, and he told his mother not to bother me any more, because my health was not good and because I was carrying a child. The doctor, too, had said that I should not do too heavy work. That is what he told my mother-in-law. My two jethanis started doing the outside work, and I did only work in the house, but that was a lot, too. I had to clean the cowshed, get water, wash the dishes, make food for such a big family,

that was a lot, but they did not understand this as work. I brought the water for all the family up the mountain every day on my back, but they still thought that I was not doing any work. My son was growing in me, and after a while I told my mother-in-law that I would not live with her any more. That was not what I had thought it would be like. My father had thought that I would find a mother's love in my sauryas, but what was this like? We moved out and had our own hearth then.

When my husband had his accident, I was twenty-four years old. Two children were at primary school, the other child was still small. He was four years old and stayed with me. I sent the other two to school every morning. I had a cow and a water buffalo. They both gave milk. This day, I went to get grass for them. I had sent my children to school, and I took the small one with me. This day, my husband fell. I don't know how he fell. I think it was kismat. Our kismat just is not good and it went on, we had been happy for a while, but we should not be. He may have had some alcohol the night before, but the accident happened in the morning. He was walking along the path downhill and he felt dizzy. He fell down very far. The people who watched it said that he fell without moving. He simply fell as he was, and we thought he had died. I was at home when people came to bring me the bad news. I had one thousand-five hundred rupees at home. My husband had saved this money over a long period of time. He wanted to buy a TV-set for his sons. In the morning, he had given the money into my hands and said, "Today I will do my work, and tomorrow we will go and get a TV-set. We will get a TV-set for you and your children. I promised the boys to do that." I took the money and went straight down. By the time I reached him he was lying on the way and looked just as if he had died. I did not even tell anyone to go back and look after my children. I was so shocked that I had forgotten my children. That was how shocked my mind was. I thought, "Now, I have nobody (ab ki samay mera koi nahim hai)." The boys were at school, and I took him straight to hospital. I stayed with him for eighteen days. After eighteen days I remembered my children. My mind had been so corrupted, I had even forgotten my children. After eighteen days, I remembered my children and I thought, "Oh no, my children are at home all alone." I went home. By then, my children were in a very bad condition. I had forgotten them, I had only thought about my husband. I saw them and thought, "This is how they have become? Oh god, what

have I done to you?" It was so hard. Finally, after twelve years of struggle, I had managed a nice life. We ate and we lived in peace. Then god did that to me. He put me back into the state I had always been in, just like my mother and father had been. I could not breathe. I was so shocked. I worked all day, I cleaned their clothes, washed them, made them food, fed them. Nobody had looked after my children. My family had not done anything for them. The two jethanis had not done anything, nor had my devaranis, nobody had looked after my children. Only the devarani who lived in our house had done a little bit. She had given them some food, looked a little bit after my cow and my water buffalo, but she had small children, too, and she had to look after them, too. Sometimes she had given my children food and sent them to school. She said, "Go to school, don't stay at home." But what can one person do with other's children? She had small children herself. I came down from my village, was on the way to hospital, and swore an oath before the forest Bhairav. I said, "If my husband comes back, I will return to the village, if he does not come back, I will never return. I have three children and the three children will stay in your care, I will not return if my husband does not, and I will leave my children in your care."

I gave the devata this oath, and on this day or the day after, I came to hospital and the doctor told me to get a bottle of glucose for my husband. It was two hundred and fifty rupees at the time. I went and bought two bottles for five hundred rupees, and the surgeon injected my husband the medicine. At four o'clock he started to gain consciousness. He slowly woke up, and my oldest jethani and my sas also arrived. And my youngest devarani came, too. My sas came and said, "He is coming to his end, he will die, he is like already dead, he will die for sure. Why should we stay? We are going home!" They went home to the village and told everybody that my husband was dead. In the village people immediately started to gather wood, and from our village all the men came walking down to the bazaar, bringing wood (for the funeral). They all arrived in the bazaar with wood in their hands. They sent seven people with jeeps and sent for somebody from the Brahman village. They came to give him a funeral. All the village people had come to the bazaar with their wood and they were talking amongst each other, "He looked as if he was dying, but today he is moving, his hands are pulling on his clothes." Therefore they went and got a doctor, the doctor came and said: "He woke up, he was to die, but now he will survive. He

woke up and he will live. Why are you afraid?"

But sister, the day after my husband woke up, my son fell at school. He fell at school, and he broke his arm. People brought him here to the hospital, and when I saw his arm, I felt dizzy. "Look here lies my husband and now they have brought in my son, too! I do not have money, no food, no medicine what will I do?" They did the boy's arm, and we all slept in one bed, on one side my husband, on the other my son. My mind was very heavy. Things were going round and round in it. This happened one night, and three days later, my youngest son fell from the roof down the stairs on his head. He had really bad luck, too. He had a huge cut over his face and was injured at several other parts of his body. My devarani took him to the hospital, too. You won't believe it. I left the hospital and went straight down to the river. I wanted to drown myself. I said, "I am not going to stay in this world, I am not supposed to live any more." I went down to the banks of the river. When I had stepped into the water, somebody grabbed me from behind and dragged me out of the water and away from the river. He said, "You don't go here!" Somebody took me very far away from the river. He dragged me out. It felt as if there was somebody behind me and pushed me out, away from the river. I said, "Leave me! There is nothing left for me in this world. I will not live on." How would I ever be able to get enough money together for all this medicine? My husband was sick, so was my boy, and now my youngest son had just been brought in. My youngest son, who was still drinking my milk, had been taken to hospital; that would break any mother's heart. I thought that some man had dragged me out of the water but when I turned around there was no one there. My mind had become corrupt. Right there in the station, my mind had become corrupt. I came to the station, there were people from my village and they saw my eyes. They said, "Why have you come here?" They took me and went back to the hospital with me. When we arrived at the hospital, I started crying as I had never done before, and the whole hospital was crying with me. Everybody cried with me. "Her husband lies here badly injured, one son comes with a broken arm, and now the other comes with a big cut on his head, and one is still at home. What will happen to him?" I was as if crazy. I stopped eating and drinking. And from that time on, I have hated food until today. Every time I eat I remember that day. I make food and leave it. I make food at home and forget it. I do not eat.

All this would not have happened if my husband had not fallen. Had he not been in hospital, I would have been at home, looking after my children, and they would not have fallen, either. Then my sas said, "Our devata is on you. You have become separated from us. You ate alone, and did not share anything. Therefore I cursed you." When they visited the hospital and were convinced that my husband would die, they were certain that I would not stay with them, either. They thought I would go with some other man. As my children had also become sick and my husband was still in hospital, they also thought, I would leave soon. But, they all recovered quickly. At last Bhairav had heard so much of my plea that my children recovered within fifteen days and went back to the village.

(Q: And this time, your sas had said that a curse is over you?) Yes (Q: What did you do?) Nothing, we did not do anything. I said, "If a devata is on us, then this devata will look after us." The devata has come over us, made my husband sick, and my sons, too. The devata gave us so much trouble (kashth). I did not even want to waste a single incense-stick. We did not do anything, and look at us: We are fine.

Nevertheless, we are fine today. It did not do us any harm to do nothing. We are happy. How should we have given the devata a goat which costs two thousand rupees or a chicken for hundred-and-fifty rupees? It would have cost us at least four thousand rupees to appease the devata. Where should I have taken the money from? I do not have four thousand rupees, and I would not have given them to the devata who has given us so much trouble. If I had four thousand rupees, I would build a little house to live. Then my children would live better. Now, we have people on the right and on the left, we live in the middle of everything, and the house is broken, so that people can watch us all day. If we had a small shed on our own, we would go. At our place, if you leave the house, it is impossible to even stand there for a little while. Once you have left the house, you have to keep walking, there is no place to linger. If I had four thousand rupees, I would build a small shack, and then we would live there, in peace, nothing would trouble us there.

Thanks to Bhairav Nath, my fate was like this, that he gave me my husband back; that he came home together with my children. If that had not happened, I would not have come back from the river that day. If Bhairav had not given me my

husband back, I would not have come home that day. Bhairav lives in our house, too. He will dance shortly. He is an old devata here, they took him to the other side of the river a long time ago.

This story is only one example of the complicated relationships in which Garhwali people involve the different forms of Bhairav. It is also an example of female fighting for power and honour in terms of gendered performative practices. The first part of Rajeshwari's story is a typical conflict that leads to the separation of *culhas*. In Rajeshwari's case, this separation did not solve any conflicts, but made her mother-in-law so angry that she kept on fighting. The other four sons were by then all married, and they and their families were still living within the extended family and shared a *culha*. The family was very poor, and none of the men was employed except Rajeshwari's husband. That made her mother-in-law angry because she expected her son to share with them, but he spent the little money he had on his wife and his children. In the eyes of his parents, the son was thus doing them a great injustice. The selfless caring love that is expected of parents in many European or American families does not exist in the same way in Chamoli. Instead, sons are raised for a certain purpose, the most important of which is to support his parents in old age. They have obligations towards their parents, and if they break these obligations, they become socially dead. Sons should take over responsibility for their parents. The definitions of family and unity are changing, and today the nuclear family unit becomes increasingly important. The new definitions of family and unity are opposed to the traditional values of extended family unity where parents were the accepted leaders, but in the eyes of his parents he committed a "sin" not only when he left them, but also when he did not share with them. I do not know whether her mother-in-law actually told Rajeshwari that she had cursed her. It is unlikely because people rarely confess a curse. It is, after all, highly shameful to curse anyone. However, the fact that Rajeshwari claims that her mother not only cursed herself and her husband, but also confessed it underlines how aggressive the conflict between the two women must have been. In that way cursing is the practice in Chamoli that carries hate and anger in its most violent form. At the same time, the telling of the story became a performance of honour for Rajeshwari. She contrasts

her own suffering with her mother-in-law's heartless behaviour, places the blame for her misfortune partly into the actions of her dishonourable mother-in-law, whom she accused of having cursed her family, and at the same time displays her efforts and her hard work to feed her family.

The other side of Rajeshwari's story shows how women, who have no one else to turn to, ask Bhairav for his help. On the one hand, Rajeshwari was very angry at Bhairav and her mother-in-law for having cursed her. On the other hand, she was glad that her Bhairav has saved her husband's, her son's, and her own life. She did not name the person who dragged her out of the water. But it is clear from the context that her saviour was Bhairav, possibly the *Jangali Bhairav* whom she had so desperately asked for help on her way to hospital. She refused to sponsor a ritual for that Bhairav who was responsible for her husband's accident and whom she associates with her mother-in-law. She therefore refused to give in to her mother-in-law's wishes to make an effort in reuniting the family and re-establish family honour. The family break-up here seems permanent because the damage has been too great, the anger communicated too strong. But the form of Bhairav whom Rajeshwari herself chose as her protector and whom she associates with the prosperity of her family is honoured and worshipped by her. This was only possible because she asked for help not in a fight, but in a desperate situation where only divine assistance could help her. No other people were involved, and she had asked for help to save the health and well-being of her family. Whereas to call on Bhairav to harm members of the own patriline in anger and hate is dishonourable, it is honourable to ask Bhairav for help in such a desperate situation that endangers the family. But cursing is not only a communication of anger and hate, it is the embodiment of aggressive conflicts and takes a great part in the creation of social realities in the sense that it makes people sick. As Rajeshwari refused to perform the crucial healing ritual against the curse, the ritual that could reunite the family and cure her affliction, she was constantly sick and weak herself. She took several painkillers a day and went to see a medical practitioner every time when she had enough money to afford it. Sometimes she did not even get out of bed. I went to several oracles and gurus with her during the two years of my fieldwork, and the result was always the same. People told her that she had to perform the ritual. She refused on the grounds that she did not have

any money and started feeling even sicker after the consultation. She often talked about ending her life. She had to look after her three children and her husband, had to earn money, and look after the household and the animals. And she did not have any support. Her father had died several years before, and her brothers could not help because they themselves were poor and had their own families. Her in-laws, on the other hand, wanted to force her to reunite with them. They wanted her to work and share with them again. They might have seen that her husband had saved some money to buy a television-set. Perhaps, they just saw that there was enough food in their kitchen to fill everybody's stomach. In the parents' view, their son should share everything with them, and they made Rajeshwari responsible for the separation. That is why they told her at the hospital that they wanted her to leave. Rajeshwari did not want to reunite with her husband's family again. Therefore, the way she told her story can also be understood as a performance in the sense that she provides many reasons why she should not re-unite with her husband's parents.

But even if we understand her version of the story partly as a performance of her suffering and her honour, the affliction was real for her and had consequences on her body. The uncured affliction made her physically ill. It often prevented her from working and taking care of her family. She was now in a no-win situation. If she returned to her mother-in-law's hearth, the fighting would start again. If she did not, she would be alone with her sick husband and her three children and she would remain sick. In this situation, she turned to *Jungali Bhairav*, the Bhairav who lives in the forest and who is the most powerful form of the deity, but also the most uncontrollable and unpredictable. She chose a form of the deity that will probably not force her to establish a shrine for him in her village and thus cost her money, because *Jungali Bhairav* prefers to live uncontrolled and in the open, but whom she thought strong enough to help her. In this sense, she had support, but she was still alone with her invalid husband and her young children. She was not part of a strong unit and struggled to strengthen her own nuclear family in a way that would enable them to become an agentive unit. The affliction did not empower her, but it also did not force her back into the old structures. Instead, the conflict rested unsolved, because Rajeshwari decided to leave it unsolved. The possibility to perform her own honour and her mother-in-law's shame by accusing her to be the

cause of Rajeshwari's husband's accident by having placed a curse was important to her. At least it opened the possibility for her to remain in the morally superior position, perform her suffering and thus expand her "capital of honour".

It is always shameful to be accused of having cursed someone. Cursing is always bad and I have not met a single person who admitted to have cursed someone consciously. Nevertheless, most Dalit people in Chamoli are involved in practices to cure afflictions, send deities back to a curser and so on. The conscious curse belongs to dreadful emotions and actions: anger, uncontrollable rage, and hate. And this anger will always come back to the curser, so people say. According to local understandings, the old woman in Rajeshwari's case has harmed her daughter-in-law, but at the same time, she harmed herself and her family unity. Her son was so badly injured that he will most probably never be able to work again, and therefore all hope that he will support his parents one day has been destroyed. The unity of the extended family has become nearly impossible.

The practice of cursing is dishonourable, but it can nevertheless help a person to exercise power in the sense that it brings about effects and reconstitutions in the world of conflict and power. In daily life, the language of cursing with one's deity is often used to perform one's own superior moral position within a fight. However, the fear to be cursed by an especially vicious person is real and many young daughters-in-law will refrain from any open confrontation with the more powerful women in her house. Both these aspects are illustrated in the following story that was told to me by two young *bvaris*, Bimala and Hema:

Bimala: *There is trouble (dukh:) in my family, with our family.*

Hema: *They send the devata straight away.*

Q: *What is the fight in the family about?*

Bimala: *One of our little children has torn something that belonged to them. Now, they make trouble like small children! We said, "Ok, our child has done something wrong; your children do that, too." But now we just do not say anything. And*

this stays in their stomach (uska pet) and it was her atma () that has befallen us now.

Hema: *We have a sister-in-law (jethani). When we quarrel with her even just a tiny little bit, then her atma, her mind befalls (lagana) us straight away and then we become sick.*

It is clear that the two women are at the same side in this fight. They complain about their much older sister-in-law who seems to be dominating their household. The family does not have any parents-in-law any more, and the three brothers have separated their *culhas*. But the three families still live in the same house. Bimala and Hema immediately clarify that their older sister-in-law is fighting viciously and immorally with them in mentioning that she curses people and that even her atma is so bad that it befalls people. In saying this they make a very strong negative statement about her. Only the atma of an especially vicious, angry, or uncontrolled person can befall other people. They continue with their performance of their superior morality as follows:

Q: *What do you think is the reason you fight?*

Hema: *She wants that everything is hers, that she can “eat” everything. She does not want to share anything, she wants to live here alone and eat everything herself.*

Q: *Does she have a devata’s than (shrine) to go to?*

Hema: *No, her mind itself is a mandir (temple).*

Q: *So, what do you people do about it?*

Bimala: *We did not do anything yet. We do not have any money right now.*

Here, Bimala and Hema carry on presenting their sister-in-law as an dishonourable woman. The statement that she wants everything on her own is a very strong as-

sertion of her immoral and asocial qualities. It is most shameful to be greedy and unwilling to share. Similarly with calling her mind a mandir, Hema reasserts her understanding of her sister-in-law as evil.

Q: *What is the exact cause of her quarrel with you?*

Bimala: *One day I went to my mait, and my house was full with rice paddy. I locked the house before I left. When I came back, somebody had broken in. I do not know who it was. Somebody had broken the lock. It must have been somebody from the village. And they stole our rice paddy and our dal. I had left the village to spend Diwali (the festival of light) in my mait. I took my son with me, too. When we came back, we saw that somebody had stolen paddy from us. Then my husband asked all the neighbours whether they knew who had taken the food. Her people were there, and my jethani's people were there, too. My husband asked them who had taken the stuff! And that was it. She became very angry, and this thing stuck in her. She was befallen by ahamkar, she was really angry that we said that to them. Then my son got sick. We went for puch to the guru nearby. The guru told my husband that we were afflicted by her ahamkar (jealousy).*

Q: *And why is she fighting with you?*

Bimala: *There are lots of things with her! Our jethani wants her husband to become hers.*

Hema: *She had that in mind before I got married, that both brothers would be hers. She likes my husband because he lives in Delhi.*

Bimala: *Actually, I am the youngest (the wife of the youngest son). But my wedding happened before Hema's wedding because her husband did not want to get married that early. Hema is actually my jethani because her husband said that he did not want to get married yet. He said: "Go ahead and marry my younger brother, then we have somebody to look after our land at home." Before he got married to Hema,*

he was with his Bhabi. They continued their affair even after his marriage had been performed. Hema saw them a few times. Then she spoke up and her devata afflicted them.

Like a witch, the powerful sister-in-law is accused of an overly strong sexual desire for their husbands, jealousy towards her younger sisters-in-law and an overwhelming greed for food and other resources. It is this strong immoral picture of her, however that also makes her so dangerous in her sisters-in-law's view. They not only complained about her, but also displayed a great fear of her.

Hema: *When I had been married for a year, I became very sick. I was with child for two months, but he soon became a ball of blood, I was sick at home for three months. Then I went to the big hospital. There is the surgeon, you know?¹⁶ He had said before that he would be able to treat us and told us to go to Dehra Dun, but we did not have enough money. We finally convinced him to treat me, and he did.*

Q: *So, how did you find out that you were actually afflicted?*

Bimala: *We went to a lot of places to do puch.*

Q: *What did they tell you?*

Hema: *He said that it was ahamkar. She had gone to her mait's devata and cursed me.*

Bimala: *That time, she had gone to her mait. We didn't know which devata it was, the devata of her mait. But when she went over there, she probably did the devata's pukar (i.e. she called the devata).*

¹⁶She talks about the surgeon in a big government hospital at the nearest bigger marketplace. He was from the plains of North India and famous for his skill throughout the region. He was also expensive, because he had decided to open a small private clinic where he could charge people for his services. He did not spent much time in the government hospital anymore when I was there, where he should have given free examination and free medication to the villagers.

Like Rajeshwari, Hema and Bimala placed the blame for their misfortune onto the person with whom they had a deeply conflicted relationship. The two young sisters-in-law went on to tell my assistant Poonam and me that they did not dare to confront their older sister-in-law with anything any more. Even the afflictions they had were difficult to deal with, so they said, because the ritual needed for cure was expensive. They had no parents-in-law any longer, and their *culhas* were therefore separated from the beginning. However, they were all living in one house. Bimala and Hema are from the *Rudhiya* caste, weavers who produce baskets and sell them to earn a living. The low caste villagers at their village were particularly poor and owned only the land on which their houses stood. They had no fields and therefore depended entirely on their income for survival. The oldest woman in the house had lived there for years on her own with the three brothers, and I suppose that they managed to live well for village standards at that time. When the younger brothers got married, she had to share their income with the new wives. But she was the oldest woman in the family and could therefore expect respect and obedience from the new women. Their conflict was clearly a fight about power and dominance within the extended family, and it was fought out by involving divine agents. Cursing and involving a divine agent in such a conflict is as much a performance of anger, hate, and jealousy as is the act of talking about it. In telling this story the way they did, the two young women also expressed their moral superiority over their *jethani*. They claimed that they did not send the curse back and therefore acted honourably. At times, therefore, subordination can also be a performance. We have to ask what the women would gain, should they engage in the circle of mutual cursing? Hema and Bimla were both very young when they got married. They had both passed primary school when their wedding was arranged. They were still interested in gaining honour to consolidate their positions within the family and the village. While Bimla had a three-year-old son, Hema had no children yet. In this situation, it would be destructive for them to enter the circle of cursing. In their view, it could not only endanger their honour, but also the health of Bimla's child and the chances of having a child for Hema. In this sense, I consider their position as a strategy to keep the blame for any mishaps with their elder sister-in-law.

Today, most people consider the practice of cursing or even threatening with curses as shameful. Many young women claim that they would not do such a thing and that it is part of “the old way”. Today, so they claim, they still have to worship Bhairav for his protection, and there are still many cursed families, but this is the heritage of the “old people.” Many people say that it brings too much sorrow to send the deity back and forth. The rituals are simply too expensive to make the threat of a curse worthwhile. Not all conflicts are solved with the help of the devatas. As we have seen in Kamala’s case, the separation between her and her in-laws involved a lot of hard feelings, but they never cursed each other. They had other means to solve their conflicts, and both sides felt that they had other people’s support. Kamala’s parents-in-law still had their other son, while Kamala and her husband had Kamala’s natal kin on their side. Only when there is no one, when a woman feels that she is utterly alone, or if she is so angry that she loses control, so people say, she calls upon Bhairav. But even that, she should not do if is not sure that she will be able to thank him for his help. To thank him means to give sacrifice and to give sacrifice means that she needs to be part of a unit: she needs her family to thank him. If that does not happen, then her own cry for help can become the very source of her destruction.

4.5.4 Dangerous Brother

It is always dangerous to curse anybody as a young *bvari*, even if the person cursed is not a family member. “Bhairav”, so Sudarmar, the ritual specialist, said, “will always come back to you!” At least if the curse is done in hate and anger. The deity who has done something to help a *dhyani* always demands a blood sacrifice or even the establishment of a shrine in her *sauryas* afterwards. But the decision to give a puja with blood sacrifice or to establish a shrine for the deity cannot be made by a woman alone. As people in Chamoli see themselves as part of a group rather than as an individual that should act and exercise agency over his or her own life, such decisions are always made as a collective. In practical terms that means that a lot of money is needed to establish a shrine and appease a deity, and it is always men who have to do the work of establishing a shrine. In addition, Bhairav always

demands family unity. Therefore, the agreement and participation of mother- and father-in-law, or the husband's brothers is needed for the establishment of a shrine. If not that, then they should at least contribute some money for the ritual to satisfy the deity. If they refuse to do that and the shrine is not established or if the deity is not satisfied, the deity will most likely afflict the woman, his *dhyani*. If a *dhyani* calls her *mait's* Bhairav for help, she needs her marital family to fulfil his demands after he has helped her. When Bhairav is called for help, it is not always a curse or anger that called him. Sometimes, he hears her crying and comes for her help, without her even calling him. In these situations, he wants to re-establish family unity and consolidate her position within the family through asking for a shrine in her marital home. He calls for family unity, and by afflicting his *dhyanis*, he forces her in-laws to acknowledge her desperate situation and to integrate her into their family. But if they do not do that, if they refuse to give him a sacrifice or to establish his shrine, Bhairav becomes dangerous for the *dhyani* herself. Many Bhairavs have come to women's *sauryas* whose families have established a shrine. But these were families that were already united, or managed to unite upon Bhairav's call. If the family is fighting, however, it is nearly impossible to find a solution, and the person who will suffer most from that is the person who has called Bhairav.

This happened to Prema. Soon after she got married, she found out that her husband had fallen in love with another young *bvari* in her *sauryas*. They had started an affair long before Prema's wedding, and they continued it afterwards. At first, Prema thought that there was little she could do. She was so busy working, trying to hide from her sas, and consolidate her position within her new family and village, so that she had little time to think about it. She was also happy to have someone to talk to during the nights, when she used to tell her husband Rupchand about her sorrows. But then her first son died soon after he was born, and she became very sick. After that her husband was absent for more than a year, and she demanded that her parents-in-law should bring him back. She hoped that she would become pregnant again soon, and she was very happy when he was finally back at her side. They lived well together for a few months, until she became pregnant again. Prema spent most of this pregnancy in her *mait*. She was afraid that something would strike her again, and she did not feel comfortable around her mother-in-law,

who made her work so much, did not treat her well, and used to threaten everybody with her own deity. After ten months, she gave birth to a healthy little girl, her daughter Rupa. Everybody was happy that this time, no complications occurred. Her father-in-law came, distributed sweets to all the villagers of her *mait* and took her and her daughter back to their village. Prema had a second daughter a few years later, and her troubles began again. Her parents-in-law began to tell their son that she was a “girl-bearing” woman and that he should take another wife. He refused to do that, but his affair with the other village woman became more intensive afterwards. Prema and the other women of the village suspected that the last son born of that woman and her husband was actually fathered by Rupchand. Rupchand became very frustrated after a while and started drinking heavily. He started to beat Prema and her children when he was drunk and fled to his lover more and more often. Prema said that the husband of that woman was such a soft man “the best man the world has ever seen,” that he never said anything. The situation escalated, and Prema tried to argue with the other woman to stop her relationship with Rupchand. She even went so far as hitting her on her head with her sandals. This is the ultimate insult for Hindus because the feet are the lowest part of the body, whereas the head is the most sacred part. Hitting someone with one’s shoes therefore pollutes the other person in a most insulting way. But whatever Prema did, nothing helped. Rupchand and his lover could not stop their affair, they had become too attached to each other after all this time. Then, one day, Prema called upon her *mait’s* Bhairav and asked for his help. After that, according to Prema, the deity afflicted the other woman’s family. And, tragically, it ended with sickness and the death of that woman’s husband. But then, Prema’s Bhairav expected his sacrifice and his place in his *dhyani’s* home. It was never given to him. Prema’s parents-in-law constantly fought with her, and her husband had neither the money nor the strength to organize the ritual on his own. It is questionable, too, whether Bhairav would accept a ritual performed only by a fraction of Prema’s marital family.

Instead, Rupchand’s affair with the other woman became even more intense after the death of her husband. He started to visit her every night. When he came back from her, or when he was drunk, looking for her, he used to make a lot of noise in the village and upset the neighbouring women. The worst was that, when

he came home, he hit Prema and her children. I have seen her cry in her jethani's house many times because of his beating and her own frustration about not having a son. During her last pregnancy, she had hoped that she would have a son this time, but the baby was born dead. She said:

Six years ago, I was pregnant again. The child stayed in my stomach (pet) for the full nine months, but he was born dead. I was sure then that I must have been afflicted by something again. The child was fine at first. But from time to time I had heavy backaches. Therefore I went to see the doctor, the surgeon. He gave me medicine and he said that the child was fine and that the medicine would not affect it.

By the grace of god I was pregnant at that time. Because of this difficulty I went to join my husband at Joshimath. It was in 1994. But then god betrayed me once again. At that time, too, my husband was at home, and I began my last month of term. But as soon as I went home and began to live alone, I had stomach pains. I had raised a dog, and in the night at about 1:30 the dog died, and my blood began to flow. My nephews lived there, and they helped me, what could I do? Just me and my little daughter. I looked at the four walls of the night, and at my little daughter, and was depressed and began to cry: "Hey Bhagawan, who knows what I did at some time to deserve all of this? What samskaras (effects of actions in previous lives) of from previous births have ruined me?"

The child was perfectly fine then. I do not know in which month he died. My back did hurt a lot and I was in pain. Therefore I started to think that this had to be a chal again, or a ghost, something from the sauryas or from my mait must have afflicted me. We finally went to an oracle. The oracle told us that the Bhairav and Kachya of my mait had afflicted me. My husband became very angry and said, "How can it be that we are afflicted by a deity who eats my children? In the whole world", he said, "All he wants is goats and my children?" Then we took two goats and went to worship Bhairav and Kachya. Now our hearts are relieved, we feel that everything has turned fine. But until today no child has stayed in my stomach.

Prema felt "betrayed" by Bhairav because he could not help her. Instead, her

situation became even worse. She weakened day by day, due to the death of her two sons. The effect of this was that her marital family, or rather her parents-in-law, wanted to get rid of her. They had no interest in integrating her ritually into the family unit any more, because they had already decided it was better for them if she left them. They were convinced that her deity wanted to “eat” their son’s “fat buttocks” and that her natal family wished to take over control of their village through Bhairav. As her deity had neither been given sacrifice in Prema’s *mait*, nor had he received a shrine, he afflicted Prema to demand his rightful offering. She explained how she found out that she was afflicted:

When I get problems, be it from a devata or if it is just a fever, I will first go and see a medical doctor. But if we have eaten medicine and the problem gets worse or if it does not get better at all, then the suspicion enters my heart that I might be afflicted by a devata’s dos. Then I take out some rupees, make pithaim and circulate it over my own head, put on the pithaim made in his name and say: “I promise that we will give you a puja in Mangsir, Paush or any other month, if you tell us what I have.” If it was a devata that had afflicted me, the devata will be pacified. Our devata has a lot of shakti. If it is no dos and our health has turned bad, we will go to hospital. In Garhwal, there is a devata in every house. When we are sure that it is not a dos, then we can consult a doctor.

In the meantime, her husband became sadder and sadder because yet another son of his, born to his rightful wife, had died. He remembered the moment when this happened:

It was exactly five o’clock in the evening. She gave birth to a boy, everybody was very happy. But then, the women tried to make the baby breathe after he had been born, and he did not start to breathe. He lived for a few hours, and then he died. Prema, her daughter and I cried a lot. After this, her health became bad immediately. The midwives had not cleaned her womb after she had given birth that is why she was in trouble now. This took a long time, and I looked after her treatment. I let her be treated by a lot of doctors, but it did not make any difference. It went on like this

for three years. Because of all this, I lost my job and we had to go back to the village.

When I sat with Prema, Rupchand, and their daughters at night and ate, I saw that they were very affectionate towards each other. Rupchand continued his affair with the other woman, and he still beat Prema and the children occasionally when he was drunk. But he was nevertheless not a bad husband. He didn't threaten to leave her because she did not have any healthy sons with him and, on the good days, I could see that they were happy together, a couple who had known each other for more than twenty years and had stood together against many hazards that had happened to them. In the meantime, Prema had forgotten her own old curse, and she was convinced that the deity was pacified. She told me:

Four months ago, all my devars (husband's younger brothers) and devaranis (devar's wives) came home. We let the deities dance here in our courtyard. We had invited a guru and brought three or four goats and three chicken, and we worshipped the Panchayat's devata Auliya, the Bhumiya devata, and our Tila ka Kachya¹⁷. We did the puja for these three deities. Since that day everything is fine. My mind is at peace, and I think that we have given Tila ka Kachya a puja, whatever has been going wrong before that, it is fine now.

But the difficulties with her mother-in-law continued, and she still hoped to have a son one day. She became pregnant again during my stay at the village. Together, we went for a check-up in the nearby town, and everything seemed fine. She was worried that this child would be a daughter again, and she regularly went to see a Brahman guru in the nearby village because of the difficulties she experienced during this pregnancy. She went there secretly, because she was afraid of what her husband and her parents-in-law would say if they found out. She only told me, because it was easier for me to go to the guru's place to get things for her, like salt in which he had spoken mantras or sacred ash, but she made me promise that I would not tell

¹⁷The main deity of the village, residing in the oldest house of the village is *Auliya*. The *Bhumiya* devata is the deity of the place, the land on which the village was built. And *Tila ka Kachya* is a powerful deity of Prema's family who came to the village with her mother-in-law

anybody about her being treated against an affliction by this Brahman guru. She could not give a puja. She thought that she would give the puja for her *mait*'s deity after the birth of the child. She told me:

Only when my heart's desire is fulfilled, I will go again and give a puja. If there should be another wish in my mind, I will say: "Oh Bhairav, if my wish is fulfilled, I will come back and give you a goat. If my wish is fulfilled, then we promise that in a certain month we will come and bring you a goat."

She was worried during the most time of her pregnancy. She was worried that she would have a third daughter, but she was also worried about her affliction. During the last months of her pregnancy, she developed problems. Her husband remembered what happened:

We started looking very well after our family. Then the time helped us and Prema became pregnant for the fifth time. She was in the fourth month when her health again started to deteriorate. Again and again, Prema went to the surgeon, and she started taking medicine, but it did not help her. The people at home did not believe her. Prema kept on taking medicine, but after a while her health became even worse. Then I brought Prema to have an ultrasound check-up. We wanted to know how the child was. The doctor did the check up, and he told us that the child was then eight months old and that it would take another month and twelve days until it was due to be born. After we had met the doctor, we met her brother, and he invited us to come to her mait. We all went to her mait and stayed there during the last month of her pregnancy. Finally, I went to the next village and told the dai to come. We came back together. When we arrived the dai helped Prema, after her whole tummy had been ripped open, she gave birth to a little boy. It was a very nice little boy. Everybody was very happy. We went around all over the village and told everybody the happy news and distributed sweets. All of us were very happy about the boy. Everybody told me how happy they were that I had finally been blessed with a son. I thought that in six days I had to go and get my parents, and I sent a message up to the village. My mother and my father got ready. They packed everything and

thought that they would have to come soon to pick up their grandson. Very happily, they packed food and sweets for all. But then suddenly after four days, at ten o'clock in the morning, Prema started to cry. I heard this and stormed in to look after them straight away. She said, "Look, there is blood coming out of the child's nose!" The child was all dried up and blue! As soon as I saw my child like this, I also started crying. After a while people heard us crying, and they came to see what had happened. They came to pick up the dead body of the child. Then we all went back to my village. When we arrived here, everybody started crying, too. From then on, Prema did not do anything other than cry. She cried and cried, and thought and thought, and became weak over the pain. I understood her and tried to comfort her. I told her that whatever had happened we would still have each other. And as long as we were together and looked after our two daughters, everything would be fine. But Prema kept on thinking and became weaker and weaker. After a while, we had to take her to hospital, but it did not make a difference. The surgeon told us to take her to Dehra Dun (the capital city of Uttaranchal, about twelve hours' drive with a bus from their village). There, the doctors told us that there was no hope that she would survive because both her kidneys had stopped working. When I heard that, my heart broke. I was angry in my mind that god would let her die. I asked him, "What did you do to her? Why did you never let her see any happiness?"

When we arrived at our market, Prema broke down in the middle of the road. I picked her up, she could not get up, and people started to get angry. Then all of us men picked her up and put her into the car. We went straight home. When we arrived at our village, Prema was not able to walk, and therefore I sat her down in a chair and carried her down in this. After we had come home, she lived for another twenty or twenty-two days, and after that she was taken into the loving arms of god. About five days before she left us, her voice became weak, and after a while she could not speak at all. Today the memory of her is with me every day. I still think that she is here, that she has gone to do her work in the fields and will be back soon. Every time I leave the house, every time when I come back home, I think of her. She has left her two daughters with me, and they, too, are thinking of their mother, are missing her. If those two girls were not with me, I would also die. My life is dark now, but I do not know what god's plans are for me.

During the last days of her life, Prema's mother was with her, holding her in her arms and watching her die. Heartbroken, she later told me that Prema's mother-in-law had come into the room one day, looked at her dying daughter-in-law and said, "See how powerful your devata is, see what he is doing to you. You should never have called on him. Now he is eating you up!" Prema's natal kin said that she died because she had been treated unjustly by her in-laws. They should have treated her and her deity with respect. But instead, Prema grew weaker under their pressure every year, and finally, so they said: her heart broke, and she died. Her devata's wrath was interpreted not as the devata's punishment for her, but as the evil intentions of her in-laws, who had always neglected her and her needs, had shown no respect to her natal kin and had ignored her natal deity.

4.5.5 Conclusion

Prema's case strongly suggests that we cannot interpret affliction and curse in terms of resistance, nor can we explain it simply in terms of an effort to force people back into a moral framework that they wish to deny. Instead, it suggests that we have to understand agency in Chamoli as concentrated in family unity. If a woman is alone, cursing or a supernatural affliction cannot empower her. Instead afflictions and illness become a source of dishonour and make them shameful persons. When their treatment becomes too expensive in terms of economic and symbolic capital, she might be abandoned and lose her status in her family. This ambiguity of curse and cure is also observable in other healing practices. Sometimes afflictions take the responsibility away from the victim, sometimes the affliction is the very reason why the afflicted person is seen as responsible for her (or rarely his) situation. Local understandings of healing and affliction are clearly, if not exclusively, interwoven in discourses of power and can be employed as tools for resistance as well as pressure. Affliction, possession, and healing are therefore to be seen as phenomena which should not only be understood within their cultural, but also their social multivocal, fluid, and heterogen contexts and which might have different interpretations within the same cultural framework.

In his cross-cultural account on possession cults, Lewis (1971, 1989) distinguishes central cults that are associated with a positive experience of spirit possession, uphold the moral order, and are typically associated with dominant groups or men while peripheral cults are associated with the involvement of amoral spirits and lead to illness. These peripheral cults are, according to Lewis, linked to women or other people of marginal or subordinate status. To explain the possession of women, he thus directed his analysis to instrumental and strategic uses of consensual beliefs. The claim to be possessed by a divine being enabled them to voice their plight and exercise agency (see also Gomm 1975). While this understanding was useful to interpret possession in terms of resistance to dominant structures, or even to hegemonic changes in the global economy (see e.g. Ong 1987), it cannot satisfactorily explain the performative practices or the practices of performance in Chamoli. First of all, while the rituals of Bhairav include ecstatic possession, this is not necessarily central to the practices of calling Bhairav for help, cursing, affliction, and healing. Secondly, while women are central to these practices, the rituals of Bhairav always involve and need men's involvement. They, therefore, do not give a voice to supposedly marginal or subordinate women, but to family unity. Thirdly and most importantly, Bhairav can be asked for favours, he can save lives, can be like a friend or father, but he does not empower any individual persons. Bhairav is the one people can turn to when they feel that they are alone in the world. When people in Garhwal feel that they have no one on their side, they can still turn to Bhairav. On the one hand, Dalit women often bring the Bhairav from their native village to their *sauryas*, as Rajeshwari's woman's mother-in-law had done. This deity is first of all thought of as coming to the village to protect the *dhyani*. On the other hand, the deity has to be established by the men of the family together with a ritual specialist in order to transform his power from a threatening power to a benevolent one. After this has happened, after a shrine has been established and a ritual meeting of the family and all the village deities has been arranged, the deity no longer belongs to the woman or her natal family exclusively. From now on, her deity has become her marital family's deity and will protect all of them as a unit and against enemies from outside. If somebody like Rajeshwari's mother-in-law tries to use the deity against members of her own family, it is self-destructive. In this case,

the mother-in-law wanted to take revenge on her daughter-in-law and jeopardized her own son's health and nearly his life. Powerlessness is not turned into a powerful situation through cursing. On the contrary, a powerless *bvari* who curses her family will most probably get herself into trouble. Cursing will not solve her situation.

The strategic explanation of Lewis is therefore not satisfying as an interpretation. Crapanzano's definition of possession as "an idiom for articulating a certain range of experience" (1977: 10) seems more useful. In his interpretation, possession becomes an idiom of communication. Crapanzano suggests that people who are possessed can shift the responsibilities "from self to other" (1980: 20) and thus objectify their feelings. And this is certainly true to some extent in the case of Chamoli people. However, as Boddy (1994) postulates, all models that understand phenomena such as possession and affliction by deities and spirits as women's claim for compensation also understand the societies where such phenomena occur as ultimately dominated by men. Instead of readily accepting this assumption, Boddy (1994) suggests that we "focus on what women do, rather than what they cannot" (1994: 416) and if we do that we may

find them working in the spiritual realm on behalf of themselves, their families, households, or communities, channelling spirit's assistance or heading off their wrath, protecting future generations, even protesting injustice. Here so-called peripheral possession is concerned with social domains for which women are typically assigned primary responsible: the maintenance of kin ties and family health, the social reproduction of their communities, often in the face of radical social change and erosion of prior supports. It is about morality and social identity. Scholars responsive to the insights of feminist anthropology bracket the issue of instrumentality without denying the relevance of subordination per se, and endeavor to situate women's possession in wider social discourses and practices of power (Boddy 1994: 416).

Boddy uses Bourdieu's concept of habitus to point to the fundamental "relationship between women's embodiment of gender-appropriate dispositions and the proclivity to become possessed" (Boddy 1994: 417, see also Boddy 1989, 1992). If

we understand this in light of the discussions of this chapter, then cursing and illness through affliction are an integral part of the adult female Chamoli subject. Cursing is their way of protecting themselves against an overwhelming aggression, calling Bhairav for help is the “natural” and objectified reaction to helplessness. While cursing is dishonourable because it is destructive, the call for help is honourable because it is directed towards the family’s well being. But even Boddy’s understanding does not explain the situation of Rajeshwari and Prema. This can only be understood, when we take Inden’s claim that Indian persons do not exercise agency as individuals, but as part of complex units, seriously. Rajeshwari’s and Prema’s cases show that their affliction brought them into even more trouble. Both were marginalized by their own families and both needed their support, but both did not receive it. Bhairav’s affliction can only be turned into a positive relationship with the deity when the women are part of a family unit. As soon as they have lost this unit, they are no longer able to heal. Rajeshwari’s situation was not as hopeless as Prema’s because she could built a new unit with her own weak nuclear family. She chose therefore to perform her honour in telling the story the way she did and in working hard not only to feed her family but also to accumulate a “capital of honour” that could later strengthen her nuclear family. Prema did not have this option any more. She tried to remain an honourable and hard-working woman, but because of her physical weakness she soon became a liability to her husband as well. He told me, that he spend so much money and time on her treatment when he lost her second son that he even lost his job. Her sickness and the fact that all the sons she carried in her womb died eventually excluded her from her marital family in such a way that they no longer thought it appropriate to try and heal her affliction. In the end she was blamed for her own death.

Bhairav is a peculiar deity because he does not always protect his *dhyanis*. Sometimes he kills them. Sometimes the *dhyani* can call him for help and his wrath will strike her fiends, whereas sometimes, when she calls him, he turns against her, hitting her with his destructive powers. Ultimately cursing and affliction are also struggles for honour and status, and the agent Bhairav, though powerful, is not always the decisive agent in this struggle. As we have seen in Prema’s case, she could do nothing against her in-law’s rejection, and ultimately their refusal to

acknowledge Bhairav's demand on their side killed her. But this was not the way to honour. An honourable family would have re-united the family with a ritual directed to turn the malevolent powers of Bhairav into benevolent powers.

Chapter 5

Coming of Age

The last chapter described the most turbulent time in Chamoli women's lives. After marriage, Chamoli women undergo significant changes, have to adapt to new circumstances and endure severe physical and mental modifications. They become daughters-in-law, have to become good wives and mothers, and are under constant surveillance and pressure by their new in-laws. This time, which is also the reproductive time in women's lives, is usually the focus of the literature on women in India. When it is said that women are closely linked to concepts of purity and pollution, honour and shame, this is all said in relation to female sexuality and fertility. Women's bodily experiences of menstruation, childbirth, and lactation are considered to define them as polluting and impure (see e.g. Allen and Mukherjee 1982; Das 1988; Fruzzetti 1982a; Fruzzetti and Ostor 1982b; Ferro Luzzi 1974; Viswanath 1997). In this understanding, women are reduced to reproductive, menstruating, and childbearing bodies with a female sexuality that has negative and dangerous connotations (see e.g. Gatwood 1985; Bennett 1983). Women or rather women's bodies in India are considered to be crucial for caste purity and family honour (Yalman 1963; Das 1979b). Central to this is an understanding of "woman" as wife and mother. Women's sexuality needs to be guarded, so it is argued, to maintain patriarchy and patriliney (Ram 1992; Papanek and Minault 1971; Sharma 1980; Ganesh 1989). Ideologies of segregation, purity, and pollution serve to define women in terms of the limits in movement and social relations. Because of the idea that female sexuality is wild, uncontrolled, insatiable and dangerous, it needs to be under

male control (Wadley 1988; Bennett 1983; Gold 1994). Women are described as incapable of controlling their own sexuality and may bring shame to themselves and the family without male control. In this view, family honour is centrally located in the behaviour of women, and women's uncontrolled sexuality is a potential threat to society (Tapper 1979; Bennett 1983; Mandelbaum 1988).

Whilst all these descriptions are partly true, for women of a certain age in Chamoli as well, I cannot reduce females in Chamoli to these ideas of male discourse. The centrality of women's sexuality in this ideology of honour and shame that needs men to control women's sexuality and women to subordinate themselves under that control paints an incomplete picture of both femininity and understandings of honour and shame. As I have described throughout the last chapter, female honour is more than just the reflection of a male discourse, and further femininity is not reduced to a woman's bodies reproductive abilities, although children are important for the consolidation of a woman's power and status within her family. And although it takes up most of the space in this work, too, I consider it wrong to reduce women to their reproductive role and focus our attention in gender studies only on the reproductive time of females. If we want to make statements on the understanding of 'women' or femaleness, we surely must include childhood and the post-reproductive periods in female persons' lives. Practices and gender performative practices change significantly as a person grows older. In the first section of this chapter, I will illustrate how Chamoli women today decide to end their reproductive phase and how they perform a gain in power and status in their family and village through practices formerly connected to shame, such as laughing and dancing in public, meeting and talking with each other in public village places, and how they get involved in village politics and take over control in their households. Women who are in this position probably have the most personal agency a female can have in Chamoli society. During this time a Chamoli woman's life is less turbulent than at the time of struggle for agency, power, and status preceding it, but it usually lasts for a longer time. Both life stages are, of course, connected and, especially the amount of a woman's suffering in the preceding phase, has a great impact on her honour in this phase. The change in gendered performative practices is, of course, a gradual process, but it is possible to clearly distinguish a young *bvari* from a "powerful

woman” through observing, for example, body posture, clothing, movements, and relations to other people. While a young *bvari* does not sit down in public village places, older women do. While young married women hide their faces in front of village men, older women do not, and while young married women are never allowed to leave the ‘inside’ of their village on their own, older women may.

In the second section of this chapter, I will then concentrate on aging persons. At old age, gendered performative practices again change considerably, especially in comparison to those of the ‘powerful women’. For example, while meeting in public spaces, visiting each other, extending and maintaining practical kinship networks and engaging in the arrangement of children’s and sometimes grandchildren’s marriages with other villagers and within the practical kinship networks take up an important space in older women’s lives, aging women are expected to disengage from those activities. They stop roaming around in the village, visiting other people, gossiping and getting involved in worldly business and instead engage in detaching from kin and family. While gender remains important in terms of dress, movement, and authority, it becomes less significant at old age. Old age is a time of disengagement for both men and women. Old persons are expected to give up agency, power, desire for food, and physical pleasures and slowly detach from the world of the living. At the same time, performative practices become less gendered and less important.

5.1 Powerful Women

In 1910, Walton observed that

in Garhwal women, except in respect of their possibilities as agricultural labourers, are held in rather low esteem and they themselves are apt to live up to their reputation. They do nearly all the field work except the actual ploughing. They sow, weed and reap, and between harvests are fully employed in carrying in fuel and fodder from the neighbouring hills (Walton 1910: 68).

As I made clear in the last chapter, I share Walton’s observation that women are the main labourers in agriculture. However, I never observed that women, in

general, are held in rather low esteem. Rather, their work adds to their honour and status within their marital family and their village, and they are highly valued for their abilities to work and procreate. In the last chapter, I concentrated on the years after marriage during which young women are mainly concerned with arranging their new lives, settling their relationship with their in-laws and husbands, proving for themselves and others that they can fulfil their expectations for work, fertility, and prosperity. During these years, young women are physically and mentally vulnerable. They are said to be still *kacca*, easily afflicted by evil spirits or demons, and easily hurt by humans. These years are indeed marked by subordination and hierarchical struggles. And these are the years where their bodies, movements, and actions are controlled the most by hegemonic practices. Those young women should never speak freely in front of men. Their situation is similar to that of most young married women in North India. Wadley, for example, observed for Karimpur women that “men can be silent; women must be” (1994: 55). However, Wadley also rightly makes the argument that much of this “belief in the necessity of women’s silence stands [...] in marked contrast to the perceived power of women’s speech: it is women whose curse is feared” (Wadley 1994: 55-56). A similar understanding of women and the power of speech and performance, for example weeping, is true for Chamoli as well, as discussed in the previous chapter. During the first years after marriage, young women are dangerous and yet needed, feared and yet submissive. These years are also the main childbearing years of Garhwali women. Their performance – as *bvaris*, daughters-in-law, workers and wives – during this time determines their future status in family and village. The childbearing years and the years of fighting and negotiation with the other women and men of the new family are the years when most of the changes in a woman’s life happen. Once this phase is over, they enter the less turbulent phase of adulthood. This phase is “full of responsibility, work and routine” (Eriksen 2001: 136). Expectations towards older women’s behaviour, movement and work as well as their own understanding of their bodies and related issues of honour and shame undergo a significant process of change. The fear of dishonouring the natal or marital kin has disappeared. Many women have done their duty in terms of fertility and work, and have become physically and socially fully socialised into their *sauryas*. They are no longer young and powerless *bvaris*

who have not lived in this place long enough, have not drunk enough of this place's water to really be like the other people. The *sauryas* has given them their substance, and they have worked leaving their sweat in the fields of the place, so that they have become full members of the village community. They no longer have to hide in the forest to meet with friends and exchange news. The older women sit on the roof of their houses, or in the courtyards in the middle of the village to meet, exchange news and plan village politics. They no longer feel shame towards the village men, and they articulate their opinions openly. They can eat when they are hungry. They manage their household as they wish, and have subordinates themselves. Their daughters, sons, and their daughters-in-law have to follow their orders. They can laugh and tell each other "dirty jokes" in public, and they can let the deity dance in them without feeling shame. It is these women who are often seen at an oracular session, asking about other family members, rarely about themselves. When the deities dance in the courtyards of their village, and it has become time for the deities to descend on women, then it is above all these women who are seen dancing wildly with their hair loose and their sari tucked in tightly so that they do not dishonour themselves in showing parts of their body that should not be displayed, such as legs and shoulders. Of course, young *bvaris* also sometimes get possessed by a deity on these occasions, but they should not. Most feel ashamed if that happens to them and afterwards hide in a room. It is considered particularly shameless to dance in an "outside" village. I was once at a gathering of deities who had met at one village while they were on their processions. As already mentioned in previous chapters, deities in Chamoli regularly go on processions through the areas of people that consider themselves either *maitis* (natal kin) or *sauryasis* (marital kin). During their journey, that usually lasts for six months, they visit the villages of this area to give their blessing and assure prosperity of people and land (see also Sax 1991, 2002a; Sax and Ecks 2005). On this particular day, two different deities met in this village and celebrated this meeting, dancing wildly on their mediums in the village courtyard. Many people had come from many different villages to watch the deities dance in the courtyard. We were watching from the roof of a house. Suddenly, I heard a loud shriek behind me, turned around and saw a young woman shaking. A deity had descended on her, and she was about to run down to the

courtyard to join the other deities, when her friends held her back and pushed her down to the ground. The other people around me shook their heads and turned their back to her, saying how shameless this woman was to let herself get possessed in a village that was neither her *sauryas* nor her *mait*. Women should never dance in front of strangers. Young *bvaris* are also ashamed if they get possessed in their *sauryas*, because they are still very deeply ashamed in front of many of the people there. Women's possession in Chamoli is often connected to their sexuality. They dance wildly so that their hair becomes loose and they shout loudly. While they are not blamed for possession, people are still of the opinion that they should not allow this to happen. While ecstatic dancing in their *mait* is fine – because young women are not considered to be potentially sexual partners of the village's men and therefore possess no dangerous sexual power in this village – young *bvaris* are expected to shake a deity off when he or she tries to take possession of her in the *sauryas* and even more so in a “foreign” village. The young *bvari* is restricted in her bodily movements and her speech in everyday practices as well. Loud laughing and talking, dancing and singing, in front of any male members of her *sauryas* or older women is considered particularly shameless. In contrast to that, older women whose children have grown up to marriageable age, whose mothers-in-laws have become old and have stopped working themselves, and who have gained their honour and status in the village through hard work are not restricted in the same way and display different gendered performative practices.

As time goes by, and a woman's children grow older, Chamoli women grow more and more *pakka*. As little girls and young daughters-in-law, they are still considered to be *kacca*. Literally, *kacca* means unripe, raw, vulnerable, incomplete, and rough thus easily destroyed or injured. *Kacca* does not only refer to persons, but also to houses made of clay or wood, to streets that are not cemented and so on. In the case of people, it means that they are not ready yet, easily influenced, easily afflicted by evil spirits and influences, easily changed through the exchange of substances such as food, sexual fluids and water. In contrast, *pakka* means solid, ripe, cooked, hard and complete, thus refined and not easily destroyed. When somebody refers to a woman as *pakka*, they say that she is a full adult, has reached some status, is not easily afflicted by anything any more, and has adjusted to most influences of places

and persons surrounding her.

In her study on aging in West-Bengal, Lamb (1997) observes that the nets of *maya*, the nets of connections with and to other people, increase as a person gets older. Dalit people in Chamoli are too concerned with their own poverty and everyday survival to be much concerned about such philosophical questions. But they have a similar, yet different understanding of personhood. To them a person and especially women and their connections to other people and places are in constant flux. During childhood they start to exchange substances with land and people, and after marriage the women establish a new, similar bond of substances with new people and a new place. This is a process that never ends. However, persons can become more *pakka*, and the exchange of substances with new persons and places becomes limited. Persons can become *pakka* where outside influences cannot easily affect them as embodied persons any more. Men are said to reach this state of relative boundedness much earlier than women. I do not argue that Chamoli Dalit persons do not see themselves as fluid and changing. But there is a time when they are more open for influences from the outside. When this time is over, they are referred to as *pakka*, complete and stable. Whereas young and *kacca* male and female people are easily afflicted by a *chal* or a ghost, this becomes rare after a person has become *pakka*.

It is often claimed that the inner order of persons in India depends on the gender of the person, where males are thought to be self-controlled and thus “ordered”, females lack self-control and are therefore thought of as disordered (see e.g. Wadley 1994: 3). Chamoli people see this order as also relative to the social age and status of persons. In chapter four, I showed that cursing is a female performative practice mainly because Chamoli people consider females as ill-tempered and easily losing control. But does this mean that females in general are less ordered than males? Aging in Chamoli does not mean that women become like men, or closer to men. Performative practices and understandings of persons are always gendered. Men become *pakka* much earlier than women, and women never become *pakka* in the same way men do. But women become ordered persons. They are ordered in a female way through fulfilling their duty in terms of work and fertility as well as accomplishments of honour and status. To accomplish honour, women need to work

hard, and to gain status women need to fulfil their reproductive role.

Being a *pakka* woman means to have more self-control, to be less easily influenced. A *pakka* woman has fulfilled her *dharma* as wife in the sense that she has done her duty in her reproductive role as mother and her productive role as labourer. Once a woman has become *pakka* the partnership between husband and wife also changes. In the ideal case, the couple forms an agentive unit. Together, they are concerned with raising, educating, and marrying their children. Planning their children's future at the same time implies that they are concerned with their own future. Their daughters' marriages will open new networks of kinship, and the potential spouses and their families have to be chosen with care, so that they are people one can rely on in times of hardship. Equally or even more important is the education of sons. Parents always hope that their own sons will get a good education and find a good job, so that they will be able to feed their own family and look after the financial needs of their parents when they are old.

The male-female relationship in India has always been presented as complex, ambiguous, and unresolved. Within Hindu cosmology, male deities cannot act without the female force, and human females are believed to be inherently powerful, including the power to give life. Male forces are not seen as inevitably dominant (see e.g. Seymour 1999: 276). Yet in studies of gender in India, especially those inspired by feminist activism, females are often depicted as constrained and disciplined by hegemonic codes of experience (see Puri 1999; Gedalof 1999). And in more structural accounts of gender, females and especially low caste women are considered to be "at the bottom level of rural hierarchy" (Srinivas 2002: 286). Therefore accounts of female agency in India often argue that the only way they can exercise agency is through resisting hegemonic structures (see Raheja and Gold 1994; Gold 2003; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996). And while I see that all these accounts of oppressive hegemony, violence, and powerlessness are true to a certain extent, I also experienced the women of Chamoli as persons who are proud and strong. Chamoli women were not concerned with feminist issues or with a revolutionary change of their society that could free them from their oppressive society. They were concerned with feeding their families and their survival.

The theoretical concerns that lead my discussion of gendered performative practices – Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus and Butler’s notion of gender performativity – both assume hegemonic and normative structures as one of the effects of practice. Bourdieu sees the habitus as possessing its agents in the sense that “it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action reveals itself only in the *opus operatum*” (Bourdieu 1977: 18). Therefore it is often difficult for the agents themselves to explain or fully understand their actions. Although they may provide explanations for their practices, these explanations conceal “the true nature of their practical mastery, i.e. that is learned ignorance, a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles” (Bourdieu 1977: 19). That means that Bourdieu sees agents and their practices as being subject to objectifications and misrecognitions of strategic practices and normative rules that give structure to their society. Butler (1990, 1993, 1999) goes even further in her discussion of hegemonic practices, when she claims that the very notions of sex and gender are effects of regulating, normative mechanisms of power. To her the heterosexual matrix rules most societies and therefore defines everything that does not fit into the objectification of people’s reproductive duty in society as the “Other” and “abnormal”. I agree with this understanding of the construction of society, rules and norms through practices and the construction of the subject and identities through performativity. The remaining question is how we can translate these rather general comments on the construction of society and identity into our understanding of any particular society. Every society is subject to hegemonic practices and normative frameworks. Gender, sexuality, and identities are constructed differently in every society. Therefore, it should be our task to understand the performative practices that construct identities. That means that we should be able to see women as they understand themselves and look at their practices in the context of their social fields instead of assuming that they are objects in a game ruled by men, as radical feminism often tends to do. Women are actively shaping their own society together with their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers. Chamoli women work hard to care for their husbands and children. They can make their husband and their family prosper. Garhwali men are very proud of their hard-working women, and the women in turn are very proud of their

ability to work. Both men and women are actors in a complex social system that works and provides benefits to both men and women. Jacobsen makes a similar argument and claims,

It is really a mistake to see women as competing with and being restricted by men, rather, male and female roles are clearly distinguished, and the sexes are seen as complementary to each other (Jacobson and Wadley 1992: 57).

While the complementary roles of husband and wife may not correspond to our western view of equality between the sexes, many Garhwali men and women see themselves as a team. As I indicated in the last chapter, there is violence towards wives, and many men in Chamoli have an alcohol problem. In no way do I wish to downplay the problems that stem from alcohol abuse and domestic violence. But most married couples nevertheless see themselves as a unit that works together for a common goal, and they understand their agency as joint agency.

Men and women in Chamoli do not want to exercise agency as individual persons because they are part of a unit and are most powerful together. While feminist anthropology has long been concerned with women's empowerment, I argue that Chamoli women are more interested in joint and collective agency than in individual power. Only women who are alone exercise individual agency. And the same is true for Chamoli men. While they are responsible for the representation of the family in any public affairs, they would not want to exercise power on their own. They, too, see themselves as part of a unit and their agency is shared. While men are, for example, responsible for the public negotiations of their children's marriages, the public representation of the family in all financial and political matters (for example when negotiating with the local government for money and land), they need the family unit and their wives' agreement to realise any plans and decisions. Marriage negotiations, for example, usually fail without female content. A man is not considered a full social person without a wife and children, and therefore often pitied and marginalised. Local definitions of power and agency in Chamoli greatly differs from Western narratives of power and control that privilege men in a special way.

Recent studies on women's oral traditions and speech in South Asia (see Raheja 2003) provide a framework to rethink gender and power. The multiplicity of women's voices and subject positions is consistent with the insights of feminist theory that gender is a process generated in discrete locales and through particular histories. Women do not constitute an undifferentiated category (see Butler 1990; Flax 1990; Kondo 1990). Recent work in gender studies also calls into question the prevalence of social inequality in gender studies as an assumption of western feminism. For example, Karim's work on Malaysian women understands

the need to maintain social relationships through rules of complementarity and similarity [as more important to understand social relations] than hierarchy and opposition, and the need to reduce imbalances of power through mutual responsibility and cooperation rather than oppression and force (Karim 1995: 16).

She suggests that women's power is often underestimated because informal power falls outside frame and values of the discourses of feminist anthropology. To Karim, both feminist and other Western scholars have privileged social relations of inequality and formal power over other possible interpretations and have therefore been unable to adequately conceptualise women's actions (see also Blackwood 2000). Instead, feminist anthropology has concentrated on the concept of autonomy to describe situations of female agency (see Stivens 1992, 1996; Ong 1987, 1990; Lederman 1990). However, as Stivens (1994) notes, the construction of women as autonomous or resistant to dominant husbands, fathers, and brothers merely reflects Western and modernist ideas of individualism and autonomous selves. Consequently, the term "autonomy" often signifies women's freedom from social and marital constraints and their ability to act as individual agents. But autonomy has nothing to do with the understandings of personhood in South Asia. As Marriott and Inden (1977) made clear, South Asian persons see themselves as *dividuals* rather than *individuals*. Accordingly, women are rather complementary family persons than *individuals*. It is not autonomy that makes them powerful agents, but complementarity. As Raheja notes, "we need to move beyond dichotomous modes of analysis" (2003: 8) and look instead at the definition of community and the creation of identity within a

community.

There is a proverb in Garhwal and neighbouring Kumaon, “*syaini liber ghar* (one’s household depends on a woman)” (Upreti 2003: 371) that exemplifies not only the importance, but also the recognition of women. It especially refers to the older women, who have enough experience, strength and honour to be able to manage a household. Together with the proverb, Upreti (2003: 371-372) tells a story that I have heard from the people in Chamoli many times. It is about a king and his wife. One day on their way home, they passed a poor man. The man was dressed in rags and carried a load of firewood on his head. When the king saw him, he remarked that he had to be a lazy man without honour. The queen did not agree with the king about this, she was of the opinion that the man should not be blamed for his poverty and suggested that it was probably his wife who was lazy and careless and therefore responsible for the family’s poverty. The king was angry that his wife disagreed with him and suggested that she should live with this poor man if she was convinced that she could change his situation. Therefore she started to live in the poor man’s house. She advised him how he should sell his wood and told him to buy grain instead of flour, which was cheaper, and therefore enabled them to eat and save money. She was a very clever woman, and the poor man soon became rich because of her advice. While the poor man became rich, the king’s empire was in trouble. His house was unordered and war was breaking out at the borders of his kingdom. He had lost control. Therefore, he decided to find his wife. When the king came to the poor man’s house, he saw how rich the man had become, admitted that his wife had been right, and took her home with him again.

Women are important for the prosperity of a household, and they sacrifice a lot for it. The health, prosperity, and happiness of children are important for their mother to become *pakka* and powerful. Only when their children get enough food and flourish can mothers relax. As Yashoda, a Dalit woman in her mid-fourties put it, god was good to her, he had given her healthy children and fertile daughters-in-law. She said,

Where else should it come from, but from his grace? Thanks to him, the children will always be happy. My jethi bvari (oldest daughter-in-law) has two sons and one

daughter, my daughter is married, she has just given birth to a son. My younger son is now in his twelfth year, he will also have to get married. Everybody is happy. The youngest boy is in the eighth class. Thanks to god everything is great.

As Yashoda makes clear, most people in Chamoli see themselves as limited in their agency by divine power. Everybody is considered to be under the divine protection of the deities and therefore god's grace is the ultimate reason for fortune and misfortune alike. However, as I have mentioned in chapter four, fate, destiny and the grace of god are never considered to be fixed but can be influenced by human beings. This is done through offerings and rituals, but also by everyday devotion. Because females are said to have the most power in themselves, their devotion is also considered to have the greatest effect (see e.g. Wadley 1992) on the wellbeing of their husbands and children. In Yashoda's case, the grace of god has given her a fertile daughter-in-law, and her daughter brought honour to herself and her parents by giving birth to a son. In addition, the family can afford to send their children to school, and everything seems to be going the way it should be. But not all women are as fortunate as Yashoda. There are women (and of course men) who do not fit the norm. Many suffer from poverty, and even more have lost children and husbands, and their eyes fill with tears of sorrow when they talk about their lives. Like Gaini, who was the second wife of her husband, she had four children with him and saw two of them and her husband die before her youngest daughter was married.

She said:

He Bhagwan (god), what problem should I tell you about? My son died, since then he is coming back as a ghost. My health is not good at all. My eyes are bad, I get no food before twelve o'clock and no tea. We eat once a day, and even that is not good food. If there is nothing at home, if you are poor, where should you take any food from? Sometimes you do not eat one day, then nothing for two days in a row. That way you grow weak! The doctor said that I had anaemia. The doctor said that I should drink milk and eat good food. I drink red tea (lal pani, i.e. tea without milk). Where should I take the milk from? We do not have any! Wherever I turn to, another sorrow awaits me! My young son is unemployed, my daughter is in marriageable age, and for that you need money.

After all the work they did brought no fruit, when they have lived in poverty all their lives and have seen nothing else than sorrow, when they have seen their own children die and their remaining children go hungry, when they have become lonely widows without support, they also become hopeless. These women do not have the proud aura of the strong mountain women. They are broken by life and fate, surviving from day to day, hoping that their children will lead a better life one day. These women, who have the unfortunate fate of not fitting the, indeed have very little agency. It would take another book to write about all the women who fall out of the normative framework of Chamoli and have to create their identities through other performative practices than those who are as fortunate as Yashoda or Kamala. They deserve more attention, but they are not the centre of my analysis here because I want to identify those performative practices that both produce the norm and the “Other” in Chamoli.

It is important to document abuse, but it is equally important to counteract stereotypes of Indian women as powerless victims of their society or as individuals with no personhood, completely ruled by their relationship with their fathers, husbands or sons. While there are those with little or no agency, such as Gaini, the usual fate of a woman is not powerlessness. On the contrary female agency is real, not only in the context of Hindu cosmology, but also in everyday life. This agency

does not only lie in women's reproductive powers, but most impressively constitutes itself in their position within the family unit and the control they consequently have over their households and the decisions made about their family after their reproductive years. Agency, dominance, and oppression are themselves ambiguous terms and depend on the interpretation of situations. While for Chamoli women their bodies and the deterioration of their health can become vehicles for honour, the same processes will always be interpreted as male oppression in the Western understanding of power. Hegemonic mechanisms of power and the misrecognition of underlying norms of certain practices may at first sight seem to produce submissive and oppressed subjects. However, sometimes these subjects gain more than they lose from these seemingly oppressive practices, as we will see on the following pages.

Women reach their most powerful stage after the childbearing years are over. In the last chapter I cited Kakar who claimed that motherhood is responsible for the rise in women's status and is a major factor in creating her identity. He also claims that "Each infant born and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and a redemption" (Kakar 1981: 56). While it is true that a Chamoli Dalit woman needs to be a mother, and the mother of at least one son, to become *pakka* and powerful, most Chamoli women today do not greet every single child they give birth to with equivalent joy. In fact, as soon as a woman has given birth to a son and a daughter, she says that she has done her duty. "We have *chutthi* (vacation) now", say those women who have a male and a female child, emphasising that they have done their duty and will not have any more children now.

Children are not so much needed for a woman's inner fulfilment and happiness, as Kakar puts it again and again, but as a fulfilment of a married women's duty towards her husband and his patriline. Once she has done that, she does not wish to have more children. Children are expensive. They need an education, and a good one, along with clothing and food. And for the Dalit families of Chamoli who struggle for their own survival every day, it is not desirable to have as many children as possible. In addition it is considered inappropriate for Chamoli women to bear children once they have children of a marriageable age. This is common throughout South Asia, as Patel (1994: 162-167) shows. In Mogra, where she conducted her

research, women who are potential grandmothers, that means whose children are married, should not have children on their own any more, but wait for their grandchildren. While reproductive abilities were a matter of duty and honour in the first years after marriage, it becomes a matter of shame once a woman's children have grown up. Birth control has consequently become very common in Chamoli, and many women have been sterilized after they had their children. In a way, this operation has become a step towards becoming *pakka*, as it marks the end of a woman's childbearing years. Chamoli women refer to this surgery as "the operation". It has become so common that this synonym is commonly understood. But "the operation" is never unproblematic. Poverty and work often keep women from having the operation done in the first place, and from resting enough afterwards. Nearly every woman who reported that she had had the surgery done also claimed to have heavy pains until today. Kamala is a typical example,

I finally managed to have the operation done when my youngest daughter was six months old. We thought about an abortion when I was pregnant with her. We thought that it is not good to have too many children. But we did not have the money for an abortion. They wanted five hundred rupees in the hand. We did not have the money at the time. The money we earned went into food and things of daily need. We just did not have the money. Then it was too late, and the doctors said that it was impossible to do an abortion, it would have been a great risk. So, I had my daughter. When she was six months old, we had the operation done. At that time, we needed the permission of the block officer, they asked for fees. Before that they used to go to different villages and selected the women who wanted the operation. We needed their permission. They gave some money, too. They went to every village and tried to get one or two women to go with them and have the operation done. They gave them money, and this was how they earned their money, too. They gave us four hundred rupees to get some healthy food and so on. So they helped a little bit, and the hospital also gave some one hundred and fifty rupees for the operation. Now they don't give that anymore, but then they did. Today women have to pay. So at that time I had the operation we got four hundred rupees from those people and one hundred and fifty rupees from the clinic. It is good to get help

from different directions. It helps a little bit. I never ate eggs or chicken, or meat, but it was good. I had my cow here and we needed food for her and so on. I had to do the operation. I already had such a long line of children, how should I raise them, where should I take their food from? For that reason I had to go. The operation happened and I stayed in hospital. Soon after the operation, I came back home. For three days, I rested, and then I thought I should go home. Who was to prepare the food for my children, wash their clothes, look after my cow, milk her and give her fodder? All this work, I did all on my own.

Kamala refers to the government policy about fifteen years ago, where the Indian government tried to implement new birth control methods by paying men and women to be sterilized. “The operation”, of course, would not have been necessary, if Kamala’s husband had had a vasectomy. But as a local dai explained to me,

It is more common today to have “the operation” done. It was quite seldom one or two generations ago. First, it was the men who had a small operation, but then it was decided for Uttaranchal that women should do it. Men argued that they were in the army and had to do heavy physical work. They need their strength. That is why women do it nowadays. The government regulates that. The government says that women should do the operation for family planning. Most men here are in the army.

At first I found this infuriating, and to me it seemed to be an obvious sign of male domination. In biomedical terms, a vasectomy is a much less complicated and dangerous operation than the sterilization of women. In addition, I had seen so many women do physically hard work that I did not see any reason in this argument, especially since many women complained about difficulties they had as a consequence of “the operation”. But there is a logic in it that is more complicated than my first reaction. Kamala explained to me that she needed to have the operation done because she already had such a long line of children. Many people in Chamoli consider too many children as a sign of shamelessness. To have children is honourable, but to have many children is a sign of poverty and naivety. It is still

important for a woman to become a mother, but in fact one son, in the ideal case a son and a daughter are enough for most Chamoli people. When they have nurtured them into childhood and adulthood, they have fulfilled their *dharma* as women. Motherhood and fatherhood are important to become full social persons, but they do not define personhood. Women's gendered performative practices define them as persons: their control over their households, their ability to work, and therefore their honour.

Kamala talks about how she ruined her own health because she went back to work too early. Like many women in Chamoli, her work and her own household are more important than herself and her own health. But although it is a sign of her family's poverty and can be interpreted as structural violence, Kamala also displays quite a bit of pride when she talks about ruining her health. Work and the fulfilment of their duty help these Dalit women to lead an honourable life, even if they ruin their own health. Kamala claimed that it was important to her to keep the household going, produce the crop in the fields, and to redistribute the resources of the storeroom. Kamala does not complain about her husband, who could have done the housework, but about her mother-in-law, whom she claims to have refused to help her. Kamala claims that she has done all the work alone, that she was able to do everything, even though she ruined her health, while her mother in-law was lazy and behaved dishonourably because she did not do anything. But Kamala also wanted to keep control over her own resources. She did not want her husband to take over. Instead she wanted to be the one to distribute the food in the family. Food and its distribution is important in Chamoli, like all over India, to establish relationships and to maintain control. As Wadley explains,

Food in India is often used for ordering relationships and creating internal order in one's body. [...] Food signifies relationships, especially those involving giving and taking, whether between god and devotee, landlord and tenant, mother and child, or husband and wife. Food also signifies the emotions found in those relationships. [...] It is not surprising, then, that food transactions also mark subordination, whether of females or the low or even of children (Wadley 1994: 45).

Kamala wanted to remain in control over her own household. She did not want to lose her power to distribute the food to her husband and children. Honour and the control over one's own household are more important than health. And hard work, to the extent that the own body becomes ruined, is part of the process to become a *pakka* woman. In a later conversation, Kamala said,

That is why I have become so weak. You should not do hard work after such an operation for three months, and for six months you should take care. I did not even wait for six days. Quietly, I did my work. This is why I have become so weak. Before that I was really healthy, I have a picture that shows how healthy I was, I don't know where it is. Otherwise I would show it to you. I was very healthy. I was very fat at the time I got married. Some people from my mait, who had known me then, do not recognize me anymore when we meet in the street because I have become so skinny, and if they do they say, "You look as if you are about to die! What has happened to you, what happened?" And I answer, "What should have happened to me, what is there in a women's sasural and what is not?" So, since then, I started to grow weak. I did all the work after the operation and slowly, my health deteriorated from sorrows, hard work, and all the daily problems. That is why I am ill all the time. After the operation I did not rest enough. Those women who can rest for a while after the operation normally become very healthy afterwards, they do not have any problems. But those women who go straight back to work, even after one month, three months, and there are a lot of them, they become ill. They have no rest, and therefore they must get sick.

I have not met a single woman who has reached the same status as Kamala, who has become a *pakka* woman, who does not report to have health problems because of her work and because of her operation. Of course, they are real health problems, and I do not want to ignore that they are an outcome of the relative deprivation of the Dalit people in Chamoli. They are an outcome of poverty, too much work, not enough food, not enough rest, and it is a tragedy that nearly without exception the women of Chamoli complain about constant backaches, headaches, light fever, stomach aches, and little appetite. However, most women also talk about

their suffering with pride. As Kamala says, the result of being a good woman in one's *sauryas* is to become weak and sick. If you stayed healthy, it means that you rested, and if you rested, it means that you are lazy, without honour and that you did not care for your duties or your family. The story of the queen exemplifies not only the power to lead a household to prosperity, but also the willingness to give up comfort and luxury for the sake of the family. Women are not forced into "the operation" by their husbands and not any more by structural violence that leaves them no other contraceptive options. There are other possibilities and free medication for contraception, and the women in Chamoli know about most of these possibilities. Most couples in Chamoli today see their joint responsibility in reproduction and contraception. What is at issue here are the questions, Why Kamala did come back from hospital so early that she seriously damaged her health? And why is damaged health a sign of a good woman? I argue that much of this can be explained by gendered performative practices and the performance of honour. If a woman accumulates a "capital of honour" through work, then the more and the harder she works the better will be her reputation. Caring for children, husbands and working hard on the fields are honourable practices for woman. If a woman does all this work, even when she is sick and should be lying in bed, then she earns even more honour. In this way, pain and sickness, and the complaints about this can also become a performance of honour.

The peak of power, status, and agency for a Chamoli woman is reached once her reproductive years are over. That means she can have sexual contact with her husband (or her lover) without the danger that she will get pregnant again. This is a desirable situation for a Chamoli woman, hence many women want "the operation". This sterility thus adds not only to women's agency, but also to their honour in the sense that it is said that they do this for the sake of their family. They come back early from hospital not because there is nobody to do the work. Husbands are able to work and feed the children and do so if it is necessary without complaint. The women come back, once again, to remain in control and gain honour. When they come back home early, they perform their energy and their honour. The next statement by Kamala may clarify this. She continued,

At that time I had a lot of pain in my back, it was bad. I could walk only very slowly. But two or three days after the operation the children's clothes had to be washed. My sas never watched. She never thought, "These kids are small, I will help a little bit." Now they tell you what a wonderful daughter-in-law I am. But back then, they did not even think about us. For that reason I walked around with my back bent and did my work. It happens even today, sometimes when I carry heavy loads, I am in pain. Here in the back and in the front. That is why all the women here are in trouble, they do all the work: in the fields, get firewood, cut grass, do the cooking, look after the children. And they do not rest after the operation. Look at all of them. All of them have the same problem. Garhwali women have this problem and this is the reason. The operation takes place, and they senselessly go back to work too early. That is why so many women here are ill all the time. In the mait, a girl has no needs everything is there.

She emphasized again and again that she made it through that time without the help of her parents-in-law. Her independence from those who, in her view, betrayed her, was personally important to her. She did not ask her mother-in-law for help, and she did not ask her husband to do the work for her. She did it herself, "with my back bent". This can, of course, be interpreted as submissive and docile behaviour towards her husband, or as submission to hegemonic structures. However, in the context of the pride and self assurance, Chamoli women express about their own ability to work, in contrast to the lazy women from the plains (and of course the lazy woman from Germany, who only "ate sitting"), the constant reference to their health problems becomes also a performance of their strength and power. While illness in young daughters-in-law was a shameful matter, it now becomes a matter of pride. Chronic pains, fevers, stomach problems and so on are often used by these older, powerful women to show how much they have worked during their lives. For them, it is a sign of their dutifulness towards their families. They have sacrificed their bodies for the well being of husband and children – and are still doing this. It gets even more complicated when we include the daughters-in-law in our considerations. If work is a sign of honour, it is difficult to hand over the work to the daughter-in-law. However, many older women said that their daughters-in-law were

doing the work for them. This logic worked most of the time through the language of illness. Remember what Rupchand gave as a reason for the overwhelming workload of his young new bride. He said,

When Prema arrived at her home, she was the only bvari there. She had young devars, and her sas was doing the work. But her health was not so good, and therefore most of the work-load was shifted onto Prema's shoulders.

The performance of ill health becomes the performance of honour for a mother-in-law. Honour and status increase her power within the family. At the same time the performance of ill health and physical weakness makes it possible to leave most of the daily work up to her daughter-in-law. While a daughter-in-law is still young, work and submission are ways to earn honour and status. When she has become the most powerful woman in the household, the interpretation of work and the performance of honour changes.

The process of becoming a more powerful member of her family and community, however, does not start when a woman becomes a mother-in-law. It starts as soon as she becomes more powerful than her mother-in-law. As Kamala explained to me,

As long as the children are small, the sas will not give the bvari any milk or food, as long as she is not satisfied with her work. She will say, "You have not done this work yet, but you have left your children with me. I had to take care of them. Go and finish your work and then eat!" But when the children get older, this happens less and less. Then people say that the bvari has grown up. She has become big now. A sas will not say much to a big woman. Then, her son gets married and she herself becomes a sas. Then she puts the old sas in a corner and says, "Stay there and eat!" Now she has herself become a sas, and she won't listen to what her own sas says any more. That is it. She herself has grown old, and she will become a sas just like her sas was. She will do the same her own sas has done. Everything starts again. The young one learnt from the old one and she will do the same. She will not listen to her old sas anymore. If she says anything, the daughter-in-law will say, "Be quiet. I do whatever I think has to be done and if you think I should do some-

thing for you, you better do it yourself.” We have become a sas ourself, and that is it!

In addition to the position towards her mother-in-law, it is usually daughters who make it possible that a woman becomes *pakka*. When daughters start taking over responsibilities in the household, their mothers have more time for other things, like village politics, and much more freedom of movement. They can, for example, easily visit their *maits* or their sisters now without having to worry about their households. These women are auspicious guests at engagements and weddings and are invited to sing the songs mentioned in chapter three. They have fulfilled much of their *dharma*, their life’s duty, and now enjoy high status and prestige. The Dalit women of Chamoli are poor but proud women who talk about their work and their house as their achievements. They are involved in village politics, arrange the weddings of their daughters and sons, help sisters arrange their children’s weddings, and host feasts for the deities. Most women had already left the hearth of the mothers-in-law by then, and if they had not, they had become the more powerful women in the household. Then, they had full control over the household’s resources, and they and their husbands could enjoy the prime of their lives together.

Prema never even reached that stage. While she had two children, her eldest daughter Rupa had always belonged to the household of her mother-in-law. Since she was a child, her mother-in-law had taken care that this daughter would be with her and not with Prema when she was able to work. Her younger daughter was not old enough yet to be of any help. Prema had never become more powerful than her own mother-in-law, and she had never seen the day when she could tell another female what work she had to do, or when she could go to a meeting with the older women of the village to talk politics. She never saw her daughter’s marriage, and she was not able to look proudly back at the work of her life. Manori, who had never had any children, had also never reached that stage. Deprived of her womanhood and having become a woman of the plains, “eating while sitting”, she had to deal with a new woman entering her household and pushing her to the side. As she was unable to have children and refused to let her younger sister become her co-wife, she was unable to fulfil her duty as a wife. When her troubles with the other women in her household became too much, she decided to move to the city with her

husband and become a lazy woman. In fact, her own mother told me one day that her daughter was sitting in the house all day without doing work and watching TV. “She has grown fat and lazy”, the old woman said with a disapproving look on her face. Manori will never be considered to be a full member of society and therefore won’t have the pride and respect other women her age enjoy.

Kamala, however, was in the prime of her life when I met her. Her children had nearly become old enough to care for themselves. When she went to the fields, her two daughters accompanied her. Her eldest daughter cooked at least one meal a day as preparation for her marriage, and her youngest daughter collected grass and looked after the buffalos when Kamala did not have the time to do so herself. Kamala was an exceptionally powerful woman, not only because she was amongst the most educated, but also because she had one of the strongest characters at her village. She was a member of the local communist party and led most women’s meetings at the village. Respected by both Rajput and Dalit women, she was able to convince them to work together on the water-supply system and for development projects coming to the village. She had opened a small pre-school to relieve the village women of childcare in the morning and to promote the education of Dalit children. In the village, she was able to go anywhere she wanted, she no longer hid her face in shame from anyone, she did not have to listen to anybody, and she had finally reached a stage where she could live comfortably, as she put it herself. Many women do in fact reach this honourable stage in life, when they are still healthy enough to work hard and eat the fruits of their own work. At this point, performative practices change again, as does the understanding of their womanhood. Now that they have become *pakka*, and sometimes powerful, they also have *himmat* (courage). They can leave the village with a female friend to visit a doctor, or alone, in Kamala’s case to go for the meetings of the communist party. It is no longer important if people think that their husbands don’t like them because they have already secured their status within their family. They are no longer afraid to dishonour their parents, and they are no longer considered to be dangerous to the honour of their natal or their marital family. Their sexuality has long ago been channelled into motherhood and they have now become honourable inhabitants of their village.

5.2 Old Age

Radhuli Devi was a nice old woman. Every evening she sat in front of her house, and when I passed her to go to my own house, she told me to bring my camera again and take a picture of her. “I will die soon”, she used to say. And she wanted to have a nice picture of herself so that her son could remember her death with a picture of hers¹. She had been a widow for many years. But her family was well off and her son loved her dearly, so she had never had any problems. Her husband had been in the army and had just started to receive his pension, when he died. That meant that she was widowed, but that she had always had enough money to pay for herself. Her family had never separated. At the time I first met her, she lived in a big, joint family with her two sons, their wives and children, the wife of her husband’s brother, and her two sons with wives and children. She had had a full and happy life.

Her husband had been in the army. That meant that he was well educated and that he always had enough money to look after his family. They managed to get both of their sons in the army, too. They had both already retired when I came to their village. That meant that the family shared three pensions. They were rich and thus without worries about food, clothing, medical care, and children’s schooling.

Radhuli never roamed the village to talk to any of the other older women. She was past this age, she said. She had heard all the gossip she was supposed to hear and had listened to all the sorrows she was destined to hear. She spent her days sitting in the shade of her house in her own courtyard, playing with her grandchildren, or just watching the world pass by. “I have everything I need”, she told me. “The devtas are with my family and me, my sons still worship my deities, and they all take care of me. I can leave without worries.” Her oldest son cared

¹When a Dalit person dies, the eldest son becomes impure for the following twelve days. He is not allowed to come into contact with any other person in a way that exchanges substance. Thus, he has to sleep on the floor, get his own water, cook for himself, and restrain from sexual contacts. He should only eat one meal a day, and his diet should exclude everything that is considered hot such as garlic, oil, spices, or meat, and he should not drink any alcohol. He should perform ancestor rituals for the dead person, and most people today use a photograph for that. At the end of the mourning period, he will perform a purifying ritual and invite the villagers to the sharaddh.

a lot for his mother, and when she grew weaker and weaker, he took her to many doctors, but he could not do anything for her anymore. One day, I had not been in the village, because I had observed a family ritual somewhere else, I came back to the market place and saw the men of the village, some of them with a shaved head sitting in a local restaurant. When I went in to greet them, I saw Radhuli's son sitting at a table crying. They had just come back from her funeral. All the men of the village had taken a piece of wood, and they had carried her dead body all the way down to the river where they had performed the last rites for her, set fire to her dead body, and sent her off to her last trip on the Alaknanda river, one of rivers that later joins the holy Ganges.

5.2.1 Defining Old Age and Family Unity

Being old considerably changes people's gendered performative practices and the ways younger people look at a person considerably. Chamoli people often say that old people in India enjoy high status and prestige. This is a view widespread in South Asia in general. As Lamb points out, especially the image of older women as

powerful matriarchs who have finally come into their own as elderly mothers, mothers-in-law, and grandmothers, revered in some ways [...] as deities (2000: 1).

But she also rightly points out that older people themselves usually do not speak of themselves as powerful. Instead, they emphasize their loss of power and often complain about their sons and their wives forgetting them. This is similar in Chamoli. Radhuli was a lucky old lady. Her family was exceptionally "rich" because of the pensions they got from the Indian government. Her family was still united. No son or daughter-in-law had left her hearth and left her alone at old age. Radhuli was surrounded by a big family, and her people listened to her stories. Her daughters-in-law took good care of her, and she was never in need of food or clothing. Not every old woman is as fortunate as Radhuli. Sunita, for example, was not as lucky as Radhuli. She was the mother of three sons, and her husband married a second wife when their children were still unmarried. When I met her, her grandchildren

were of marriageable age, and she already had two great-grandchildren. When her husband died and the family land was divided among the three brothers, her sons took the land and built three different houses for their families. Radhuli continued to live alone in the family house. Then her youngest son found a government job and moved to another village with his wife. When his wife was expecting a child, he asked her to come and live with them to help his wife with the child. Since then she had lived with her youngest son, his wife and children for the most time of the year and only came to her village, she said, when she missed her other children. When she came for a visit, she usually stayed alone in her old house. Her family was not only separated, they also lived in different houses and were constantly fighting amongst each other and with their father's children he had had with his second wife. When Sunita talked about her life and children, she always sounded slightly disappointed,

That is how things are nowadays. My daughters-in-law are not nice, not one of them is looking after me. My sons are good, but they are afraid of their wives. If I had a daughter, things might be different. At least there would be somebody who would ask me how I am. Today, there is nobody, only my granddaughters sometimes listen to me.

Radha, a grandmother, who lived with her only son, felt similar,

I got married when I was perhaps nine years old, and a few years later I started living in my sauryas. Then I had my daughter and raised her with great difficulties. About a year later I had my son. I raised him, too, and it was very difficult. I always had to work on other people's land to get the food to fill their tummies. When my son finished High School, we arranged his marriage. Today, he is not interested in us any more. When he was young, he needed us, and he loved us very much. But he does not ask his mother or father anything any more. He does not care.

For these women, old age meant that they were not only unable to work, but also that this made them dependent on their sons and their wives. As long as old women were still able to work and lead their lives of self-esteem and honour, they enjoyed

a considerable amount of self-respect and control over their own lives and bodies. They were the ones who made the decisions at the villages. But as soon as they were too old for work, they entirely depended on their daughters-in-law or other family members. Cohen described a similar process of aging people in Banaras. He writes that old people in Banaras had two fears, “(1) the fear of being a burden, and (2) the fear of inadequate support.” These fears were closely connected to the “fear of progressive bodily weakness” (Cohen 1995: 320).

It has been argued that women in South Asia undergo an especially drastic change during menopause. In her study on aging women in rural West Bengal, Lamb (2000) postulates that after their menopause women see themselves as more dry and less open than before. This process also involves a “cooling” of the body, and this bodily cooling also has the effect that women give up practices of purdah and containment. Sexual activity, reproductive powers, and sexual heat are here all conceptualized as one. To Lamb, the end of a female body’s reproductive years induces the major changes in a woman’s life. She reports that sexual contacts are no longer considered appropriate, that older women are no longer associated with sexual heat, and therefore some old women even stop wearing blouses under their saris or start wearing men’s white dhotis. To Lamb,

Covering the body reduces warmth and is a barrier to interaction; decorating the body attracts and invites attention. Both actions were thought appropriate in younger, sexually active women but inappropriate (as well as unnecessary) in older, postreproductive women. Nakedness, too was interpreted in two different ways, depending on the life stage of the woman: it was sexually provocative in the young, and a sign of asexuality in the old (Lamb 2000: 204).

According to Lamb, postmenopausal women in Mangaldihi have no sexual desire any longer, and they perceive their body as “dried up” and therefore not capable of sexual activity. The end of reproductive abilities and sexual activity leads to the process of cooling. Lamb argues that old women in Mangaldihi and elsewhere (see Flint 1975; Rasmussen 1987; Abu-Lughod 1986: 131) become more pure (*shuddha*), less dangerous, and less open and therefore more like men (Lamb 2000: 200). While

I agree with Lamb that older women's dress, movements, and speech considerably differ from that of younger women and girls, Chamoli Dalits define old age quite differently. The end of the reproductive phase is not the end of sexual desire and activity, and also not the beginning of a cooling process in the sense that women become more like men. With the end of their reproductive years, Dalit women in Chamoli change their gendered performative practices. Their body is perceived differently, and their sexuality changes. They are considered to be less hot, but that does not mean that there is no sexual desire any more or that their bodies become unable for sexual contacts. It rather means that the need to control their sexuality has ceased. They are no longer dangerous for their husbands or the honour of his patriline. But the end of reproductive powers in Chamoli does not mark old age. Rather, as I discussed in the previous section, the end of the reproductive phase is the beginning of a phase of power and activity for most women. In contrast to that, old age of both men and women was defined through the inability to do physical work and therefore dependency on others for survival. Age and aging in Chamoli are not judged chronologically, nor is it dependent on biomedical understandings of aging, but on abilities and achievements. A person in Chamoli is considered 'old' when she is unable to feed herself and her family through her own work. In addition, old age is marked by loosening the networks of friendship and kinship that are so important for young and middle-aged women. While Lamb writes that old women in Mangaldihi roam the lanes visiting each other, sitting on the roadside and watching people, old people in Chamoli usually prefer to stay within their houses. Roaming the village, visiting other people's houses, organizing meetings to plan and fight was an activity of middle-aged women. In contrast to that, most old people, like Radhuli, rarely left their courtyards and preferred to slowly detach from the social world. This is an argument that also appears in Lamb's work (1997). She writes that old people loosen the nets of *maya* (attachment) as they prepare for death. But in Chamoli, it is not menopause that marks old age, but the inability to work. This is true for both men and women. A person is old as soon as he or she cannot do hard physical work anymore.

This was explained to me by Kamala's father-in-law one day. While I was sitting near the fire in my friend's courtyard, I watched her old father-in-law slowly

walking up to us. He sat down beside me and started coughing badly. He had had a bad cold for a few days and was clearly not feeling well. *I am going to die soon*, he said. *There are a lot of people I will never see again. I will surely die before you come back here.* He sighed and went on,

I am very lucky. My young bvari prepares my breakfast every morning, and when I get hungry at lunchtime or in the afternoon, I come up here, and my older bvari gives me some food. I can't work anymore. I am so old now. I have worked all my life, but now my body fails me. My body does not want to work anymore. That is why I rest and eat at my son's hearths and wait for the day I die.

People in Chamoli agreed that it was impossible to ignore parents and parents-in-law at old age. Kamala explained to me that it was important to feed them, no matter how much trouble they had given their daughter-in-law when she first came to their house. She explained,

An old person cannot do anything any more. We have to feed them. If we do not give them any food, we will be caught by their ahamkar². That will haunt us when they are long dead. Therefore we at least have to share our food with them so that they are satisfied.

Many old people said that they felt lonely and treated unfairly by their daughters-in-law. And many were abused by their children and daughters-in-law. However, they were always fed. As long as there were children or other family members who felt the responsibility to take care of them. Cohen (1992, 1995) rightly points to the tendency of Indian gerontology and other studies of aging in India to emphasize the joint family as the safe place for old people, where they are always taken care of and therefore do not become senile. In contrast to that stands the westernized or modern tendency towards nuclear family units that are the reason for the decline of old people's health. Instead of making his own study on aging a critique of mod-

²The ahamkar (jealousy) curse is one of the most powerful and dangerous curses if it comes from a dying or dead person. It is difficult to cure and can haunt families for generations.

ernization in India, he was interested in the question of how old age defines social difference and how people in Benares themselves defined old age (Cohen 1995: 317). I agree with Cohen in the sense that the discussion of joint families and nuclear families romanticize the view on old people in India. This becomes particularly clear at the margins of society, with people who do not fit the norm. I met several old women, who had become childless widows. And they usually had no one to take care of them. Sunita, for example, was a very old woman. She had given birth to two daughters, but both of them died during childhood. After her husband died, she was allowed to live in a small room at her *jethani's* house, and she was allowed to keep to small fields to cultivate and live off. But there was no one to feel responsible for her, take care of her and help her. I saw her slowly walking to her fields every morning working hard to get a handful of food with this work. I tried to help her, but the other villagers forbade me to do any work for her. She came to my room every day to have some tea or coffee and talk about her and her life. She was always worried that anybody would see her in my room, therefore we had to close the door. She thought that if the other villagers saw her in my room, they might think that she was stealing from me or taking alms and that would bring her in even more trouble she had already been in.

Among the Dalits, widowhood is not in itself as inauspicious as it is among the higher castes. If a high caste woman becomes a widow, when she is young and childless, she usually cannot remarry today. A Dalit woman can remarry as long as she has no male children. Widows are not invited to marriages and other auspicious festivities among the higher castes in Chamoli, and higher caste widows should not get possessed by a deity at festivals and on other occasions. If a deity dances in her, people turn their back to her and ignore her. Her body is seen as inauspicious and should not get in contact with anything auspicious. This is different for Dalits. While they are also not invited to join a wedding lest they might bring misfortune to the couple, they are free to join most other festivities at the village. A deity can dance in them, and they remain respected members of their community as long as they have children. A middle-aged widow told me,

Why should people treat me badly? I have to earn and eat and feed my children.

I do not go and ask people for anything. I work and I eat and my children eat. That is it. If a deity chooses to dance on me, then people will respect that because it is the deity's choice, not ours, and we have to respect that.

However, there are always also those young widows who were mistreated by their in-laws when their husbands died while they were young and their children still small. Yashoda, for example, had only been married for a year when her husband died in an accident. She was pregnant when he died. Her parents-in-law and her husband's brothers wanted her to leave the village after the accident. They turned so violently against her that she eventually fled to her mait. Her husband had been employed at a government school, and widows usually get a job at the same school when an employee dies. Therefore, Yashoda had no financial worries. The village council decided to grant her some village land so that she was able to build her own house. However, most women become widows when they are middle-aged and their children are already married or just about to be married. And they do not necessarily lose their status as powerful middle-aged women. As long as such a woman can still work and direct her daughters-in-law to work, she will have the most powerful position in the household, and in the village community of Dalits, widows are not usually treated as outsiders.

5.2.2 Old Men and Old Women

Both old men and women spend a lot of time in the house, sitting and watching the world pass by, they are less engaged in village politics, and they start to detach from the world. Their kinship networks loosen and most do not consider them important any more. However, men and women are not considered to become alike. They both change, and some of the changes are considered to be similar. But men always remain men and women remain women.

This became most explicit during village and family rituals of the deity Bhairav. During these rituals a ritual specialist and his assistant played the drum (*hudaki*) and a metal plate (*thali*) and sang songs to call the deities. The main deities were expected to dance first, and they were expected to dance in the bodies of male

elders. There was always also a time when the deities descended on women. It was unthinkable that a woman, even if she was a very old and respectable woman, would dance first or in the period that was reserved for male dancers. There was always a time for women to dance, but they should not dance before the main deities had appeared on the scene in senior men.

It is true that older and elderly women moved more freely and displayed no shame to talk or even sing in front of men. But Chamoli women did not change their style to dress as drastically as Lamb described for Mangaldihi. They continued to wear their dhotis, and they all usually wore blouses.

5.2.3 Loosening Power and Providing Honour

Sometimes I was invited to the meetings of the women's village group at Kamala's village. The women who took part were always the old and the middle-aged women of the village. Their *bvaris*, or the *bvaris* of their *bvaris*, came only if they had also already reached a considerable status. Otherwise, they would be walking past the meeting point demonstrating how busy they were with their work. Often, those meetings were held at times when the young *bvaris* had left the village to collect firewood, cut grass, or were busy with any other work.

The difference between the old and the young women, so they used to say, is that *she (the bvari) has to do the work now. We do not have to work that much any more. The bvari will work for us now, and if we do not like what she does, we do not give her any food!*

Every time the women said that to me, they started laughing. The middle-aged women had the power over their own households. They did not listen to their mothers-in-law any more. As one of them said during such a meeting,

The young one learnt with the old one how to treat her own bvari. She will behave exactly in the same way as her sas treated her when she first came. And she will not listen any more to what her sas tells her. She is the leader of the house now. But she will always give food to her old sas. It is bad to treat old people badly. We have to feed them, otherwise their ahamkar will befall us. We think that if we do

not give them food, we will bring great misfortune over ourselves. But we no longer listen to what they tell us about the work and what we shall do. If the old woman says something, we simply reply: "Shut up. I will do whatever I think and if you want that done, do it yourself!" We have become a sas ourselves, and the obedient times are over.

If an old woman's sons want to gain honour, they will treat their mother well. They do not like her to leave the house to visit other people. If she eats too often at other people's houses, other people may think that her sons do not treat her well. As Kamala said about her mother and her brothers,

My mother comes here quite often. Her sons don't like when she goes here and there too often; they tell her off! "Why do you live in your daughter's house? This is your home!" That is why she does not live here too long, but she comes every now and then when she misses me (khud lagti hai).

Thus, old people can add to a family's honour. To treat old people well in their son's household is not only a duty, but has also become a sign of sophistication and wealth. Sharing is misrecognized as altruistic behaviour. At the same time, it can help a family gain social and symbolic capital through honour. This, like all honourable practices, is linked to practical kinship networks and the marriage option for the unmarried children of the household. If an old woman leaves her son's house too often to stay with her daughters, her family thus runs the risk of getting a reputation of neglecting their old people. Therefore, while the personal relationship between a powerful bvari and a mother-in-law may be bad, it is always favourable to look after the old woman in terms of honour. Rajeshwari, for example, who had often told me about her bad relationship with her mother-in-law, made her mother-in-law responsible for her husband's accident and refused to re-unite the family through a family ritual as we have seen in chapter four. She told me that she nevertheless looked after her mother-in-law when she got sick.

Then my sas became sick, and I started to look after her. I never said, "My sas

has done this and that to me, so I won't look after her." I never said that. I just thought, "She is like my father and my mother." And I said to her, "You are my mother. It does not matter what you do to me. You are my mother." She became so sick that she could not hold her urine or her feces. It was my duty to clean up, to wash her, and to feed her. I did everything. She had fallen from the roof and injured herself. If such an old person falls from the roof, it is bad, it gets them harder than us. She had to lie in bed. I fed her medicine. I brought bandages and changed them myself. I washed her clothes. She vomited, too, and I also cleaned that up. The old woman vomited, and she could not hold any urine any more. I was constantly washing her clothes. I said, "You are my sas and I am your bvari. I am with you. I will not leave you alone. I will never say, you have done bad things to me and then leave you in your pain." She is still not well, she is still sick. Just a few days ago, I brought thirty rupees worth of medicine for her. I gave her food and drink and fed her with my own hands. I washed her, washed her clothes, and looked after her. I said to her, "You are like my mother. That is why I cannot leave you as you are. Whatever you have done to me, you have done it just as much to yourself." Sadness is part of my life (dukh to mera jivan sati hai). When god gave me this life, he first gave me sadness and sorrows. "You have come into this life to suffer (jilna) pain and experience trouble. You have to stand the pain and the trouble." And that is what I do. (yeh mera nasif hai, mera kismat hai aur mera takrir hai).

So, while it was impossible to unite the family while Rajeshwari's mother-in-law was still powerful and physically strong, it became an issue of honour and pride for Rajeshwari to look after her mother-in-law, and talk about it, when she was sick and unable to work and move. It seems that she needed to lose her power first before the family could become "united" again.

Throughout a Chamoli person's life, she undergoes a constant development of her gendered identity and her conceptions of bodies through gendered performative practices. At the same time, she builds up physical and affectionate relationships with places, spirits, and persons throughout her life. The relationship to people, places, and spiritual beings is, as I have shown, also highly dependent on age and gender in the sense that Chamoli people consider children, young girls, and women as more open for the exchange of substances with other people, spiritual beings,

and places. For this reason, they are in more danger of damage by people and spirits than older people and male adults. At the same time, they are able to establish enduring physical relationships with people and places that go beyond the ability of adults and older male persons. This openness enables women, for example, to be deeply connected to two places and have a physical bond with their natal as well as their marital kin. As I have argued in chapters three and four, these connections become important in terms of practical kinship relations that support the young bride in the often hostile environment of the sauryas which are needed for the arrangement of honourable marriages of children and can be utilised in times of economic need. These networks and relationships are constantly becoming more complex as the person gets older and moves through her wedding, childbirth and her children's marriage. While the relationship to places is usually restricted to two places, the networks of practical kinship and the exchange of substances with other persons go beyond that and constantly increase in the sense that they include children, children's spouses and their natal families as well as their children. In a Chamoli woman's life, the peak of all the connections she builds up during her life is reached after her reproductive years are over, when her children are married and she does not only utilise her kinship networks to help her and her own family unit, but is also able to reach out and help others, her daughters, her sisters and other relatives with money, time, and support. These relationships to people and places are important throughout a Chamoli person's life. However, they cease to be important for old people. Old persons who have become dependent on their sons and their wives to feed them usually do not even get involved in village issues any more. Old women might come to the women's meetings, but they do not join the discussion or show interest in other people's affairs. Older persons are expected to detach from worldly affairs, and the practical kinship networks that were so important during the first years of her marriage for the arrangement of children's marriage and during the years of power, now become a source of shame for their family. An aging woman should not visit her mait anymore, she should detach from her networks of kinship and friendship. Sax (1990) reports that an elderly female informant said that she would not visit her mait anymore as her parents and her brother had died. She also said, "Here my three sons' wives take care of me; why

should I go elsewhere?" (Sax 1990: 498). In light of my experience with elderly people in Chamoli, I interpret this as honourable actions of an old woman. Old people should remain at home, they should not get involved in worldly affairs any more, and they should not eat at other people's houses. To do otherwise would mean to make an unfavorable statement about their sons and their wives. Aging Chamoli people are also expected to get detached not only from their natal family, but also from their children, as well as other worldly things such as good food, fancy clothing, jewellery, and other decorations. Lamb (1997) made a similar observation among elderly people in West Bengal. She reports that the detachment from worldly affairs assures that the soul (*atma*) can ascend after death and does not linger in the world of the living as a ghost (*bhut*). In chapter three, I described that Chamoli people have a similar understanding of the ascending soul and ghosts. It is therefore considered dangerous to remain too attached to their family or any other worldly affairs. It is even more dangerous to make old people angry or jealous by not sharing food and material goods with them. If a dead person's *atma* cannot ascend because he or she is attached to the world by hot feelings, such as hate or jealousy, her family will be in danger for many generations.

Chapter 6

Reflections on Agency and Performance

Throughout the chapters of this work, I have primarily been concerned with two theoretical issues. I wanted to show how Dalit females in Chamoli are engaged in the process of constant development of gender identity and how conceptions of bodies change along with gendered performative practices. People's movements, talk, friendships, dress, work, and daily interaction constantly construct and reconstruct their gender. In this sense, my ethnography is another example to prove that gender is not fixed, but fluid and multivocal, and that age and aging play a major role in conceptions of gender. The second theoretical concern that has led me through this work has been to question the assumptions that Indian females are mute and powerless, and that their agency is restricted to resistance.

I examined Butler's assertion that gender is not only a process, but also an effect of local discourses of power, and combined this with the Bourdieuan idea that embodied practices produce the social world. In chapter two, I described how children learn to perform and embody kinship and hierarchy through practices, and how they become gendered persons through practices of naming, dressing, and embodied ideas of age and gender. This becomes particularly clear in Chamoli people's assumption that children establish a physical relationship with places and people more easily than adults due to their relative openness. At the same time, they are always in danger of being afflicted by spiritual beings, and this restricts their

movements and defines their embodied practices. During childhood practices produce social persons who slowly develop a practical mastery for everyday situations which becomes gendered as soon as the children have achieved a certain stage of development. Greetings, work, dress, and speech can all be interpreted as gendered performative practices that do not only constitute the gender of a person, but also her relationships with others. At the same time, I argued that a Chamoli person never exists as an individual. She is always part of a unit, and most often her practices and strategies aim towards the well being of that unit and not of an independent individual being. In Chamoli, children are socialised in a way that always subordinates them as individuals to the family. Thus we can see that gendered performative practices perpetuate hegemonic structures, and that the subject is indeed the effect of discourse. Gender performativity is one of the vehicles that produces a gendered subject.

This constructionist view of the production of the subject (Butler) and of the social world as an effect of practices (Bourdieu) has widely been criticised as denying human agency. If identity, gender, and even subjectivity itself, are nothing more than the effects of discourses, then where is agency to be found? I presented my ethnographic data in chapters three, four, and five to show that females do indeed actively create and recreate their worlds. In chapter three, I focused on gendered performative practices that strengthen family units in exercising collective agency. Marriage negotiation in this sense can be compared to Bourdieu's "game", a social field with its own rules that are embodied and perpetuated through practices. Every player knows what to do at every stage of the game without having to consciously and strategically think about it. And the practices of the game are highly gendered. Mothers, for example, connect families and use their kinship networks to start the negotiations, but they would never make the first visit to the bride's home to engage in official negotiations. That is clearly men's work. But a favourable outcome of the negotiations requires the joint efforts of the men and women of the family. In addition, men and women in a village always join their efforts, for example, to protect their honour. If a young unmarried woman behaves in a way that endangers her family's and the village's honour, the people of the village will try to keep it a secret, and if a wedding takes place in the village, every family will contribute food

and work to make sure that the wedding includes a generous feast. In this way, the village exercises collective agency. I used these examples to show that agency is not the same as resistance. As I said in the introduction, I understand agency, following Sax and Inden, as the ability to shape the world.

In addition I wanted to show that agency in Chamoli is rarely limited to individual persons, but should rather be understood as collective agency exercised by groups of persons. Mariott and Inden (1977) defined Indian persons as individuals in contrast to the western person, who is understood as an independent individual. This connection with other people is not only a physical and mental connection, but translates into joint agency of husband and wife or collective agency of units such as an extended family or a village. While the actions and practices described in this context are clearly no resistance to hegemonic structures, Chamoli people can still be seen to shape their world actively. Together, they make decisions about alliances, protect their children, and defend village and family honour.

However, the focus on collective or joint agency does not necessarily rule out the possibility for personal will and agency. In the end of chapter three, I introduced a particularly powerful performance of gender that adds to a young woman's capital of honour and can therefore enhance her personal agency. At the moment a bride leaves her mother's village, she usually weeps very loudly. This weeping is repeated every time she leaves her mother's village in the first years after the wedding. The weeping, so I said, is much more than a simple expression of grief about the changing life situation. It becomes a performance that is based on gendered performative practices. This performance of gender shows that the young women are able to reflect about their gender and the resulting expectations and then use this knowledge to perform certain roles. The weeping is the performance of a bride and a loving daughter as well as the performance of an embodied connection to the place of the *mait*. The weeping, this performance of gender, increases a young woman's agency in the sense that it reinforces networks of kinship and trust. If a woman does not weep, she can dishonour her parents and express her dislike towards them, or she can make the non-weeping a performance of modernity. Highly educated and rich young women, for example, said that they considered the weeping to be a symbol of old fashioned traditions.

In chapters four and five, I further concentrated on manifestations of performativity and performance, especially in the context of female honour. Chamoli women, I said, have a sense of pride and honour that is specifically female and is perpetuated through everyday practices. In many ways this sense of honour – the effect of certain gendered performative practices – and the performance of honour through work add to the collective agency of Chamoli women with their natal kin and their nuclear marital families. Here I extend Bourdieu’s and Butler’s theories by saying that not all practices of habitus and gender performativity are unconscious or misrecognized. People are able to strategically perform their age, gender, and status, as good daughters, good wives, good daughters-in-law, good hosts – and, of course, their opposites. Most women in Chamoli are well aware of their restrictions, and it is true that these are most often naturalized. However, they also know that through performance they can control many situations, keep peace in their families, show affection, gain honour and so on. While not all performances may lead to an immediate change in people’s lives, they usually have favourable long-term effects. Therefore gendered performative practices may be understood as perpetuating hegemonic norms and hierarchies of age and gender, but at the same time performances of gender add to women’s agency.

It is clear, that gender is one of the most important factors that structure the social world, and it is also clear that gender is rarely free of hierarchy. Following Moore (1994), who argued strongly for a “Passion for Difference” in gender studies, I see gender not only as a social construct, but also as one closely connected to power relations. Similar to class, caste, and race, gender is a social construct that serves the dominant power structures. In emphasizing physical differences and attributing certain features of character to them, while these features of character are naturalized in the body at the same time, a system of domination is established and maintained that is not easily overcome. One of the major questions in Moore’s research

is the problem of how we construct and acquire identities, and how well these processes are captured by current theories in the social sciences (Moore 1994: 3).

Gender identity, she argues, and the multiple nature of subjectivity

does not have to be conceived of as a fixed and singular identity, but can be seen instead as one based on a series of subject positions, some conflicting or mutually contradictory, that are offered by different discourses (Moore 1994: 4).

In the course of this thesis, I have described how female identity in Chamoli is in constant flux, an effect of gender performativity and habitus. Even though I agree with Lamb that we should not think of gender as a binary opposition, it is clear that people in Chamoli themselves distinguish between male and female and attribute distinct practices to them. But neither maleness nor femaleness is static during a person's lifetime. Gender is, as Butler argues, a process. Thus, a young woman has different gendered performative practices than an old woman or an old man. And young people have a different view on things, such as education, occupation or family unity, than old people. In chapter four, I described the conflicts of young married women with their marital families, and the separation of extended family units that has become common among the Dalits of Chamoli today. These separations are, in my view, not a sign of individualism and westernization, but a result of different understanding of family unity. While a mother-in-law has an interest in keeping her sons and their wives under her control and her family united, the young daughters-in-law have an interest in strengthening the collective or joint agency of what they consider to be their family unit, their husbands and children. It is these conflicting viewpoints that can lead to bitter fights and even cursing.

Our aim as scholars of gender in different societies should not only be the complication of our understandings of gender relations in the sense that we acknowledge the multiple and competing ways that people imagine, interpret, resist and criticize dominant ideologies of gender and the ways gendered bodies, identities, and power change over the course of a person's life. We should also question our own assumptions about gender and gender relations. It is likely that gender will always be seen as one of the most important principles that structure and order societies. However, Western feminism has been so concerned with the construction and reconstruction of the category "woman" that it failed to acknowledge different discourses of power and gender in different societies and, therefore, often denied female agency or even put forward a theory of the mutedness of women as a marginalized group. In think

that this is deeply true of Western academic discourses that are in turn influenced by Western feminism. To me, it is not enough to show how Indian women fight patriarchal and hegemonic structures that force them to lead a life of subordination. On the contrary, I wanted to show that the women of Chamoli have agency without having to oppose the basic structures of their society. To them, life is not a fight between the binary opposition “male” and “female”. On the contrary, as Chamoli women do not see themselves as independent individual beings, it is more important to them to establish and maintain collective and joint agency than individual and gender-dependent agency.

I wrote this thesis to counter the stereotypes of Indian women as muted and powerless victims of their patriarchal society without restricting female agency to resistance. I wanted rather to understand female life in Garhwal as agentive in its own terms. This agency, like all agency, should be understood as embedded within an embodied framework of norms and practical reason that is based not only on the cooperation and mutual dependence of males and females of one generation, but also on the hierarchical organisation of people of different generations. Chamoli women see themselves neither as passive subjects of their men, nor of any other active agents, nor do Chamoli men see their women as passive subjects. Accordingly, Chamoli women neither express nor experience their everyday agency as “resistance”. Indeed, they do not feel the need for resistance, because, in their social world, they already are agentive. In Chamoli, agency is not primarily linked to individuals, but is always exercised in connection to others, for example, parents, husbands, siblings, friends, super-natural beings and so on. In other words, agency in Chamoli is always distributed or collective (see Sax 2002a).

Both Butler’s and Bourdieu’s theories have been criticised for their apparent denial of human agency. I think that the idea of collective agency corrects this problem. To me, gendered performative practices constitute persons and identities, but at the same time they make room for performance as strategic agency. In this sense, my formulation of agency in connection with gendered performative practices and performances of gender is a response to those colonial and local accounts of South Asian women as sufferers, bearers of oppression, and subordinated to men. This representation of Indian females, and especially Dalit females, as submissive,

docile and obedient, which is in turn based on a certain understanding of a static femaleness in South Asia, became unsatisfactory for me as soon as I got to know the women of Chamoli. I wanted to present them in a way that acknowledges the specific processes of femininity in Chamoli that leads to Chamoli women's active agency. Of course, the Dalit women of Chamoli live in a society that is dominated by patrilocal and patrilineal practices, and I do not want to deny the power relations at play in Chamoli society. However, I wanted to show that Chamoli and India are not as exotic as especially Western feminism would have it. Mohanty (1984) criticises that many Western feminist writers present the women of India or any other country of the "South" "as victims of male control and of an unchanging tradition" (Rajeha and Gold 1994: 8). Women, according to Mohanty, were one of the subjects through which the moral superiority of the developed world over the patriarchal Third World was expressed. Colonial descriptions of Indian women and local discourses which oversimplify and misinterpret the role of women in India and make general statements about women's consciousness based on political texts, such as *Stridharmapaddhati* discussed by Leslie (1989). These texts are read uncritically and taken for granted in order to establish the exotic and inferior "other". However, as Chakravarti argues, a close examination of these texts indicates that they cannot be taken for face value because, above all, they play

a crucial role in the "taming" of women. Once internalised by them it also makes them complicit in their own subordination. Ultimate social control is effectively and imperceptibly achieved when the subordinated not only accept their condition but consider it a mark of distinction. What the eighteenth century *Stridharmapaddhati* also unwittingly indicates is that not all women at all times accepted their condition nor considered it a mark of distinction: Hence the need for repeated reiteration of the duties of women, including the exhortation to women to mount the husband's pyre. The *Stridharmapaddhati* was a complete manual on the way women "ought" to behave, written in order to counteract the potential or actual "recalcitrance" of women. (Chakravarti 1991: 185)

And while anthropology does not follow these understandings of Indian women uncritically anymore, much of the literature on Indian women and femaleness in India still displays a paternalistic moralism reflecting a Western feminism that degrades the women of rural India to irrational, passive victims of their overwhelmingly dominant, powerful and violent men.

In contrast I postulate a view of agency which acknowledges that the men and women of Chamoli form a society in which both male and female persons make decisions and are expected to be submissive at times and decisive at others. This view of agency also acknowledges that the practices that form the rules of their society – or, to use Bourdieu’s terms, the practices of “social fields” that constitute their habitus – enable them to lead an honourable and meaningful life in their own terms. We should not assume women in India or any other country to be mute and powerless just because they have a different way of expressing themselves than men (a comment that Edwin Ardener already made in 1976, but was never taken seriously until the mid–1990s) or Western feminists. More recent ethnographic works on Indian women emphasize women’s resistance and describe the alternative discourses through which they create definitions of autonomy and power that enable them to direct and shape their lives (see e.g. Raheja and Gold 1994; Lamb 2000). These works have challenged the rather universal arguments regarding the ideological subordination of women in Hindu society. Especially feminist scholars like Raheja and Gold (1994) and Trawick (1990) have argued that the characterizations of South Asian women as repressed and submissive are one-sided because they merely concentrate on the male view of things, or worse, on an understanding of power and influence that is deeply grounded in Western scholarly and feminist tradition. In their view, submission and silence can also be read as conscious strategies of self-representation, deployed when it is expedient to do so before particular audiences and in particular contexts. I agree with them in the sense that many female practices that can be interpreted as shyness may also be interpreted as strategies to perform a femininity that is advantageous. Instead of interpreting a woman’s behaviour as submission to domination, this woman can simply be seen acting in a way that she knows will make people think she is “a good woman”. These strategic actions are not necessarily conscious practices. Throughout the chapters of this work, I have

shown that Garhwali females and males often act in a way that is strategic and profitable to them, without thinking about the profit their behaviour will bring them. Rather, such an action is a form of habitus, an “embodied knowing” of what to do in a particular place at a particular time according to one’s age, gender, and social status.

The theoretical framework of Bourdieu and Butler enables me to see the agency of Garhwali women in a different way. To me, “agency” is not simply resistance, but rather the capacity to actively take part in the creation and recreation of one’s world. I wanted to recover the agency of females in Chamoli and to see them, like males, as active creators of their own world. This manifests itself the strongest, when people reflect about their own gender and use the performance of gender as conscious strategic actions. In this way, I see agency as constructed through a mix of constraint by gender roles, habitus, and gender performativity on the one hand, and strategic, creative performance on the other hand. I see this formulation of agency as grounded firmly within the agency discussion in the discipline of anthropology over the last decades. It has always been a debate about the relationship of individuals and social structure in connection to the question about the role of consciousness (see e.g. Giddens 1979). Generally, agency refers to a capability to be the source and originator of acts. In his formulation on practices as the originating principle of social life, Bourdieu wanted to escape from those mechanistic models of socio-cultural determinism which understood agency and all human actions as constrained by structures and structures as the primary principle to regulate human actions. Instead, he postulated an approach to the principles of the regularities of social life that neither preferred individual will and consciousness over structures, nor the other way round. He denied a simple binary relationship between consciousness and structures. Instead, he developed his concept of “habitus”. Practice and habitus mutually influence each other. People become competent social actors by embodying the social world through practices of everyday life. A competent social actor does not have to consciously think about his or her actions. As a competent player of the game, his body automatically knows what to do in any given situation. Conscious decisions are not necessarily needed for strategic action. To Bourdieu, structures are influenced by human actions, and human actions are in-

fluenced by embodied practices that are informed by structures. They mutually influence each other. Bourdieu provides a compromise in the structure – agency debate with this structurally causal model based on reified abstractions and materialist determinations. But this model, runs the risk to reduce agency to a passive reaction to social-structural prerequisites. While I agree with Bourdieu that most of human action is part of the habitus, I consider his solution to the agency – structure debate as lacking an understanding of strategic and goal oriented action that is not automatic, but conscious. However, this does not mean that I want to equal agency with free will. As Ahearn (2001) pointed out during the discussion of agency within the discipline of anthropology there has been a tendency to conflate agency either with “free will” or “resistance” (see also Keane 2003). Throughout this work, I have shown that “free will” as an unconstrained decision of an individual and independent being is an ideological illusion of Western scholars by invoking Judith Butlers notion of gender performativity. To Butler, the imagined “core” of a person that is thought to constitute the psychological and independent “I” that is imagined capable to make independent decisions cannot exist, because before a social person is able to make conscious decisions, he or she is already subject to constraining discourses that constitute this very subject.

Another concern throughout this work was to show that female agency is not restricted to resistance. But, if neither free will, nor resistance constitute agency, then what does? I think the answer to this question, at least for the case of Chamoli, lies in Marriott’s notion of Indian persons as individuals. In his “ethnological model”, he describes the Hindu person as not only connected to other people and the environment but as being composed of shifting and inherently unstable substances. That means that Hindu persons do not share the same view of Self that assumes the existence of an independent acting individual. Throughout this work, I have not only shown how Chamoli persons are created by discourses and practices, but also that Chamoli persons see themselves and their bodies as part of family units. While most writings about agency assume that it is a power exercised by individual agents, I understand agency – the capability to influence and shape the world – not as restricted to individuals. Instead, I follow Sax who argues that, “Agency is distributed in networks and is not necessarily (or even usually) a property of

individual persons” (Sax 2002a: 5). Chamoli persons act as part of a unit. Any ‘political’ or ‘strategic’ ends are directed not towards the well being of a single individual person, but towards the well being of a group of people – a family.

In other words, I understand Chamoli persons as subjects who are the effects of local discourses and practices. As such, they do not share the Western notion of individuality, but see themselves as part of a unit. After their marriage, young women are in conflict with their feelings of belonging to their parent’s family and the expectations to join their husband’s family unit. Dalit people often solve this conflict by creating a new unit, consisting of husband, wife and their children. But these units are never independent. The wife’s and the husband’s parents and siblings still play a major role in the everyday life of young couples. Agency is exercised within these complicated networks. A Chamoli person, as any social person, is deeply embedded within the social world that is as much influenced by people as it creates people. I argue that people are able to increase their collective agency in those moments when they are able to consciously reflect about their situation. This reflection – about their gender, their age, their status, or their role – enables them to perform as, for example, daughters, wives, or mothers and thus not only act strategically but also consciously. But this performance of course happens within a framework of common understanding within a social world. Meaningful actions, and creative actions of agency therefore need to occur within – and are for this reason restricted by – such a framework of common understanding. And this common understanding is based on gendered performative practices. It is important to underline again that there is a great difference between gender performativity and performances of gender. Gender performativity is one of the practices that produces a social person, while the performance of gender is the effect of reflection and a strategic, intentional manipulation of the world.

In this sense, my understanding of agency does not follow the lines of feminist arguments that call for resistance or revolutionary change in society. Instead, I am concerned with people’s agentic possibilities in Chamoli society within a set of practices, the framework that has historically developed and that constitutes their world. I used Bourdieu and Butler to show how gendered habitus and performativity “create gender” in a specific way in Chamoli. I disagree with both when they insist

that everything that constitutes the habitus and performativity is unconscious. I rather argue that people in every society are given a range of resources and tools to be used when suitable and set aside when not. When such resources are used in a strategic way, this is agency because it changes people's worlds. This understanding of agency is based on the assumption that all human beings are active participants in their world and that all persons constantly create and recreate their worlds. On the basis of my experiences in the field, I agree that gendered identity is a process, constantly changing and never entirely coming to an end. However, I think that gendered performative practices are only partly unconscious. Agents, I argue, whether male or female, act in most everyday situations according to their learned gendered performative practices without consciously deciding what they do, nor does a single individual in Garhwal or elsewhere in the world consciously decide on her or his sexuality or gender identity. However, people sometimes become aware of certain features of the specific gender performativity of their own social field, and when they do, this opens the possibility of using these features in an agentive and consciously strategic way.

Gender and personhood in Chamoli are constructed through gendered performative practices. The specific local discourse and practices of Chamoli construct persons in such a way that they do not understand themselves as independent agents of individual free will, but always as parts of units that exercise collective agency. It makes little sense in this logic to speak of male or female agency, because they are usually combined in units of collective or joint agency. When these units break down, when individual women, young widows or childless and sonless women like Prema, are pushed to the margins of their society and therefore their world, there is little they can do. Neither is individual agency usual in Chamoli, nor is it commonly accepted. Women's (and men's) ability to shape their lives depends on them being part of an agentive unit. This can be their own nuclear family, their parents' family or their husband's extended family. These networks of agency are complicated and never exclusive, but they are the basis for an honourable and satisfied life in Chamoli.

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