

Marriage, Honor, Agency, and Trials by Ordeal:

Women's Gender Roles in *Candimangal**

Introduction

This essay discusses women's gender roles as they were imagined and debated in a Bengali text written towards the end of the sixteenth century. Efforts to reexamine precolonial gender roles and debates about them are important for three reasons.¹ First, that large body of research on gender which begins with the colonial period often has

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obscured elements of continuity between colonial and precolonial discourse on gender in South Asia, and often exaggerates or misstates both the degree of consensus about gender in the precolonial period, and the nature of change in the colonial period. By attending to precolonial debates about gender, this essay will help to clarify continuity and change in colonial gender debates in Bengal. Second, when scholars have examined precolonial gender roles, often they have chosen to investigate only elite women, or only those issues which became subject to debate in the colonial period. This essay attempts to examine as a whole gender roles and dress and modesty codes for all grades in a status hierarchy of women in late sixteenth century Bengal, and it includes issues that were not debated in colonial times. Finally, existing scholarship on gender in precolonial South Asia has focused on the nature of gender roles, but not on how gender itself was constituted. This essay suggests that there may have been a fundamental change in the way gender was constituted in Bengal if, influenced by British gender discourse, Bengali reformers and nationalists began to use binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms to describe what should be 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

As do most scholars working on gender in South Asia, I define gender as culturally constituted and subject to change, rather than as naturally determined. I use the term 'gender forms' to mean the whole complex of kinship, age and occupational roles, and associated dress and modesty codes appropriate for men or for women in different jati and at different stages of life. I assume that 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender forms were mutually defined and must be studied in their mutual relations; that they were related to ideologies of power and honor and were implicated in other social and political hierarchies; and that they were maintained in processes of contestation which included the use of force and violence, as well as ideological debate and various strategies of resistance.²

As they are reflected in middle Bengali literature, debates about gender forms often were debates only about women's dharma, about what should be regarded as right conduct for women as genus (*stri-jati*). In part, these debates may have been a reaction to patterns of seclusion, dress and modesty codes in elite Bengali Muslim society,³ and to participation of some elite Hindu families in the culture of the Mughal empire. But seclusion, dress and modesty codes were only one set of topics debated in middle Bengali

literature. Other issues included the propriety of consummation of marriage before a bride had reached puberty, and the capacity of women to defend their own honor in their families and in jati councils. Some debates about women's dharma seem to have been related to debates about the validity of a martial code of honor for Hindu Bengali males, but the latter is a topic that I explore more fully elsewhere.⁴ This essay attempts to clarify positions in debates about gender roles and dress and modesty codes for women. It also shows that the terms of these debates excluded women of the lowest jati and economic status in sixteenth-century Bengal. At the lowest levels of Bengali society, women who labored outside already were invisible, long before Western orientalist and Indian nationalists began imagining an ancient golden age for elite 'Aryan' women.⁵

The sources I will use for this paper are *mangal-kabya*, a genre of middle-Bengali devotional verse narratives, and within that genre, *Candimangal*, verse narratives which justify worshipping the goddess Candi. To be sure, middle-Bengali devotional literature has long been mined by social historians for 'facts' about Bengali society.⁶ Instead of attempting to isolate social 'facts' in literary garb, I read *Candimangal* as dramatic

representations of arguments, one of which was about proper gender roles for elite Hindu women.

Among *Candimangal*, I will concentrate on a single version, that by Mukunda or Mukundaram Cakrabarti,⁷ a man widely acknowledged to have been the best author of all *Candimangal*, if not of all *mangal-kabya*.⁸ Mukunda's *Candimangal* probably was written towards the end of the sixteenth century.⁹ During the period of Mughal rule in the following century and a half, it became well known and widely copied throughout Bengal. Although new *Candimangal* continued to be composed in this period, many later poets closely followed Mukunda's model, at least in the region of Rarh, the deltaic plains south of the Ganga and west of the Bhagirathi rivers.¹⁰ Mukunda was a Brahman who had left his home village near the south-eastern boundary of undivided Bardhaman District, West Bengal, in the heartland of brahmanical settlements along the Bhagirathi, Hugli, and Sarasvati rivers; according to a widely accepted story, he had done so because the Muslim governor in his locality was oppressive.¹¹ He found a patron in the prince of 'Brahman'bhum', a little kingdom in undivided Medinipur District, West Bengal, and in what

then was in a frontier zone between Bengal and Orissa.¹² Perhaps his poem similarly moves away from some of the central categories of brahmanical thought.

One of the narratives of *Candimangal* tells the story of the second marriage of the merchant Dhanapati. The honor and shame of men and women in Dhanapati's family are central themes of this narrative. An elder wife destroys the honor of her younger co-wife, and thereby she enables attacks upon the honor of Dhanapati her husband. The younger co-wife, supported by the goddess, restores her own honor and her husband's as well.

I approach this text with three reading strategies. First, I read the poem for the rhetoric which persuades the reader or auditor to make particular judgments about particular characters and their actions.¹³ In the case of female characters, this is a rhetoric based upon distinguishing between true and false honor and between virtuous and unvirtuous action, and it is developed in the narrative by the aligned characters of the goddess Candi and her heroine Khullana, and by Khullana's unvirtuous antagonist, her elder co-wife Lahana. Mukunda's poem affirms the agency—the knowledge, power and freedom to act—of both wives, while it distinguishes between the virtues of the one and

the vices of the other. Second, I will read the poem for its implicit assumptions. I argue that, making possible the argument in favor of the agency of virtuous women, and at the same time limiting its scope to women of high status and to a narrow range of actions, are implicit assumptions which link gender, economic status, and jati in related hierarchies of power and honor. Finally, I will read this poem for its acknowledgment of counter arguments.¹⁴ I argue that Mukunda's poem seems most concerned to refute counter arguments expressed by the female antagonist of its narrative, counter arguments thus located within women's culture.

A Household Economy, and Gender Roles in a 'Scale of Transactions'

In this section I argue that in Mukunda's poem gender forms were not constituted by means of binary, opposite, and mutually exclusive terms. I therefore avoid the term 'gender categories'. I argue that 'gender forms' were scalar; for example, both masculine and feminine 'gender forms' included multiple occupational roles, and those roles were ranked by their degree of 'masculinity' or 'femininity', and therefore by their appropriateness for different kinds of men or women. Further, some occupational roles—

buying and selling, for example—were shared by masculine and feminine gender forms, rather than belonging exclusively to one or the other.¹⁵ Finally, men and women were imagined as having the capacity to shift among roles within their respective gender forms, and therefore as having mutual relations which could change. A ‘scale of transactions’ which defines multiple and ranked gender roles in a household economy is introduced in the poem’s first human narrative. This narrative tells the story of Kalketu, a ‘base-born’, ‘rude’, and ‘untouchable’ hunter in forests of the Chota Nagpur peneplain west of the Bengal delta. To support his family Kalketu hunted the animals of Biju (‘desolate’) Forest. His wife Phullara in turn sold meat, hides, skins, tusks and other animal products in local periodic markets, and with the cowries received in payment she purchased daily provisions for their household.¹⁶ Phullara’s buying and selling also transformed the conditions of that hunting, making it possible for Kalketu to exploit the animals of the forest without limit; for by themselves they could not have used the animals he hunted so prodigiously.¹⁷

‘Hunting’ (*byadh*) and ‘buying and selling’ (*kena-beca*) therefore can be seen as mutually

dependent, and gendered economic roles of this household; ‘hunting’, a ‘masculine’ role, was complemented by the relatively ‘feminine’ role of ‘buying and selling’.

The animals therefore supplicated Candi, and the goddess in turn hid the animals from Kalketu. When Kalketu could find no animals in the forest to hunt, his family was confronted with an economic crisis, for they had no store of provisions, and except for Kalketu’s bow and three arrows, no valuable articles to pawn.¹⁸ In this crisis Kalketu temporarily assumed Phullara’s role in the marketplace to sell what was left of his previous day’s catch. He told Phullara to visit her friend, to give this woman *siuli* flowers as an ‘offering’ (*bhet*), and to ask her for a loan of broken rice grains and salt.¹⁹ This extraordinary shift in household economic roles defines a third kind of transaction: making an offering, *bhet*, which acknowledges the superiority of the one to whom *bhet* is given, and then petitioning and receiving assistance from that superior.

When there is a clear distinction, superior roles in this scale of transactions are more ‘masculine’ ones, and inferior roles are more ‘feminine’ ones. In hunting, the superior, usually a male, seizes and expropriates an inferior. In the transaction initiated by

bhet, the inferior gives an offering and makes a petition, and the superior, here a female but usually a male, responds by giving something of greater value than the *bhet* received.²⁰ The superior's role in the transaction initiated by *bhet* therefore is the opposite of his role in 'hunting', and the two suggest, respectively, the exploitive and beneficent roles of a 'masculine' ruler.²¹ 'Buying and selling' seems to occupy a middle position, perhaps neutral with respect to power, hierarchy and gender, or, more likely, with potentials for either forcible expropriation or beneficent gift. In any case the couple's joint shift to new roles in their household economy shows us that 'buying and selling' is not a role unmarked by gender. It is a feminine role with respect to 'hunting', and nevertheless a masculine one with respect to the role of giving *bhet*, petitioning, and receiving benefaction.

The whole scale of transactions has an aspect of gender, because in it roles which have superior power in a relationship are gendered as more masculine.

In the scale of transactions no role can be identified as exclusively masculine or feminine. In Mukunda's poem one woman, Lahana, is described by a metaphor which suggests the cruelty of a huntress²² (but only with respect to another woman); both men

and women buy and sell in markets; men as well as women offer *bhet* to superiors (but men only offer *bhet* to other men); and two women, Phullara's friend and Lahana's friend, receive *bhet* and offer assistance (but only with other women). Finally, in this household economy the relation between masculine and feminine roles changes when characters jointly change positions on the scale of transactions. Kalketu, in the role of buying and selling, is still 'masculine' relative to his wife Phullara, in the role of offering *bhet*, but he must be 'masculine' in a somewhat different sense than when he was a hunter and she bought and sold in the market. Because this scale of transactions structures much of the poem's plot, we will have occasion to notice it in the poem's second human story, that of the merchant and his wives.

If we turn to the merchant's family whose narrative will be the focus of this paper, again we see shifting gender roles in a household economy. Dhanapati twice was summoned by his king to go on a mission of royal trade. Journeying abroad to engage in trade for his king was a more martial and more masculine activity for a merchant than trading at home on his own account, and merchants who stayed at home as if in seclusion

were called 'wives'.²³ We must imagine a permutation of the scale of masculine gender roles we found in the household of Kalketu, that is, from 'buying and selling' at home to something more like 'hunting' abroad. Dhanapati's wives also shifted gender roles during his first journey abroad. The senior wife, Lahana, assumed management of his household and its economy, and forced her junior co-wife to assume the role of a servant laboring outside.²⁴ Again the relation between masculine and feminine roles changed as characters shifted to new roles in the merchant's family; and again we see a middle position on this scale, managing the economy of a merchant's household, which could be performed either by the family's senior male or by its senior female, as circumstances required or allowed. Throughout the analysis of this text I will suggest that women's agency was imagined, at least in part, as a capacity in extraordinary circumstances to shift to roles which overlapped with those ordinarily assumed by men. The connection to agency makes it important to look for multiple and ranked gender roles, for some gender roles which were shared by masculine and feminine gender forms, and for a capacity to shift to new gender roles, rather than looking for binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms constituting 'gender

categories'. We now may turn to the fundamental problem represented in the narrative of the merchant's family.

Patriarchal Ideology, Subaltern Agency, and Khullana's Problematic Marriage

As the narrative of the merchant's family begins, we are told that the goddess changed her purpose from introducing her worship in kingdoms and among men to introducing her worship among women.²⁵ In arguing the benefits to be derived from worshipping Candi, Mukunda's text, unlike many other Bengali *mangal-kabya*, locates problems which the goddess will solve not in malign acts by the goddess herself, but in human agency, and this is true of both men and women. It should be no surprise that for women the problems which worship of Candi can solve are located in relationships of marriage and family. We can identify in the narrative of family problems an ideology of patriarchy which the poem assumes. At the same time Mukunda's poem portrays women's 'subaltern agency' resisting the patriarchal hierarchies which his poem upholds.

To arrange the actions of this narrative Candi summoned a heavenly dancing girl who would become its mortal heroine, contrived a 'fault' in her dance, and condignly

cursed her to life as a human girl, Khullana by name, born to a merchant family. Her family's Gandhabanik jati was linked to trade in costly unguents and other royal insignia.

Almost immediately we also meet this child's husband-to-be, Dhanapati, a wealthy merchant from the river port of Ujain, on the Ajay River in Bardhaman.²⁶ Khullana's natal and affinal families were Sudras, but wealthy and 'pure' Sudras; people, that is, for whom Bengali Brahmans could perform sacrifices and from whom they could accept water.²⁷

Because it treats a second wife in a family of Sudras, this narrative cannot focus on requirements for a wife's performance of Vedic sacrifices with her husband.²⁸ Rather, its problems are the mundane ones of happiness, power, honor, and love in a polygamous family.

Her father, pressed for time by Khullana's advancing age (she was ten), hastily arranged her marriage to a groom already married to Khullana's 'cruel' cousin, Lahana.²⁹

Khullana's mother compared marrying Khullana into a polygamous family with Lahana, to giving a tiger the offering of a deer as *bhet*, an image which immediately suggests the

problems of violent expropriation in Kalketu's narrative. Her father replied that the

astrologer had discerned in his daughter signs that she would become a widow.³⁰

Widowhood, of course, might threaten unhappiness and shame greater than those of having a cruel co-wife in an unhappy marriage. At least with a co-wife the onus for a husband's death which attached to widows would be shared ambiguously between this groom's two wives.³¹

After they had completed the rites at Khullana's father's house and passed the first night of the wedding, the new couple went to Dhanapati's house for the wedding's second day.³² On the morning of the third day Dhanapati went to the king's assembly, whence he was sent directly to Gaur in the king's service before this day's wedding rites at his house could be performed.³³ The omission of the third day's rites is crucial. Khullana was neither introduced to nor accepted by Dhanapati's assembled kin, who ordinarily would have approved the marriage by accepting cooked food from the new bride on the third day.

Nor was the wedding completed by sexual relations between husband and wife, which could have happened only on the third night or thereafter.³⁴ By her husband's abrupt departure Khullana's status in the household was left ambiguous: sons born to her might

not be accepted as sons of Dhanapati's lineage. Khullana's hasty, ill-considered and incomplete wedding raised questions of honor and shame for the bride which a proper and complete wedding ought to have resolved.

Having established Khullana's marriage as the locus of its problem, the plot of the narrative then uses three devices to open a space for the agency of its female characters within a patriarchal Bengali family. First, it depicts a minimal family, consisting of a husband, two co-wives, and one maidservant, a family apparently without living members of the generation of the husband's parents, without brothers of the husband and their families, and initially one without children. Second, it arranges for a prolonged absence of the husband, leaving the senior co-wife to run the household on her own. Third, by the device of an incomplete wedding it makes the two co-wives more unequal in status and power than a first and second wife inevitably would be. These plot devices make it possible for Candi to intervene in problems which arise among women, and initially she acts authoritatively, as a good mother-in-law would, to restore the wives of this family to harmonious relations.

Mukunda's poem does not suppose that harmonious relations were impossible when a woman ruled a household of women. Initially Mukunda depicts the co-wives' relation in Dhanapati's absence as one of love and harmony.³⁵ The plot carefully makes Dubala, the household's scheming maidservant, responsible for introducing discord. Because Dubala believed her own self-interest was threatened when these co-wives did not quarrel, she contrived to cause the elder wife, Lahana, to doubt her future position in the household upon the merchant's return: would not her young and beautiful co-wife steal his affections?³⁶ Certainly this plot device is a representation of Dubala's 'subaltern agency', and it suggests as well an 'economic' calculation of self-interest as Dubala's motive for acting, but her agency is represented only vis-à-vis other women, and is condemned by the poem. Therefore the poem's representation of Dubala's subaltern agency may be understood to support hierarchies of patronage and patriarchy.³⁷ Maidservants like Dubala, of course, may have listened to this story in a rather different way.

Lahana then became obsessed with a similarly self-interested calculation of her own happiness in marriage. According to Lahana the happiness of a wife required her

husband's affection, and that in turn required youth and beauty. Her own happiness therefore seemed to be as fleeting as youth.³⁸ Nevertheless, we immediately learn that youth and beauty might not be necessary for a wife to secure her husband's affection. 'Charms' or potions might suffice, but the best charms were smiling while serving a husband, not being loud and quarrelsome (*mukhar*), and not being given to unpleasant speech (*apriyabadani*).³⁹ Lahana, however, did not want to have anything to do with modest speech (*binay bacan*). She was accustomed to being independent (*svatantra*) and to having her husband under her own control (*adhin*). She used to rebuke him and he used to submit.⁴⁰ Despite the loss of her youth and the presence of a co-wife to compete for Dhanapati's affection, Lahana hoped to retain that independence and control. Again we may regard her plans as a 'subaltern agency' with respect to her husband, and one which the poem condemns. Apparently, by the ideology of patriarchy which the poem assumes, a wife should get happiness in marriage not by seeking power over her husband, but by speaking modestly and sweetly instead. Nevertheless, we already have seen a variety of 'charms' in the women's rites of Khullana's wedding, charms designed, in part, to insure

the bride's power over her husband because of his sexual desire (*kam*) for her.⁴¹ Again we must imagine different ways of hearing this story.

Lahana turned to an easier stratagem than gathering rare 'charms', one by which she could destroy Khullana's beauty, and so prevent Dhanapati's future affection for this rival.⁴² To remove Khullana's beauty, Lahana planned to remove her 'luxuries' (*upabhog*), and to do this Lahana had to find some 'fault' (*dos*) in Khullana to be a pretext for her 'dishonor' (*apaman*). As a punishment for Khullana's fault, the removal of luxuries would cause loss of honor, loss of beauty, and loss of affection. But by the poem's ideology of patriarchy, only her husband could decide to dishonor a wife; Lahana could not appear to implement her plan's first and crucial step.

Therefore, she arranged for a forged letter from Dhanapati, which alleged that a fault in Khullana's horoscope had caused the merchant to suffer an economic disaster in Gaur. The forged letter directed Lahana as follows:

Take Khullana's eight ornaments. Take all her adornments, and employ her in herding goats. Give her a flaxen cloth and a coarse shawl to wear. Give her the husking shed to sleep in. Have her herd the goats for one year. Allot half a *seer* for her daily provisions. I tell you, dear, observe my commands! If you do not truly observe them, I shall shave your head.

The girl is a night-prowler, she has great faults. The planets will be appeased by her dishonor.⁴³

As one might guess, the forged letter soon would become evidence in proof of Lahana's deceit, turn her stratagem against herself, and re-establish Dhanapati's authority. Relying on it as a two-sided plot device, Mukunda's poem reinforces the two assertions of patriarchal ideology that we have identified: that for women happiness and power in the marriage relation are in conflict, and that a woman by herself does not have the authority to bring dishonor upon a co-wife. Any married woman in Khullana's *jati* should have had both honor and signs of that honor: ornaments of her hair, neck, arms, wrists, and ankles,

silk saris, comfortable quarters, and luxurious food. All these Lahana finally removed, by force alone rather than by authority, leaving Khullana only the iron bangle that barely indicated her married state, and a coarse flaxen cloth (*khuya*) to wear.⁴⁴

Women's Status Grades and Dress and Modesty Codes

It is necessary here to analyze the dress and modesty codes which Mukunda's poem assumes, for Khullana was dishonored, in part, through the violation of proper dress and modesty codes for a woman of her jati. The coarse flaxen cloth given her in exchange for her sari covered only the lower body.⁴⁵ An eighteenth-century version of *Candimangal* by Ramananda Yati suggests more directly that the short cloth (*khadi*) given her shamed Khullana by leaving her naked.⁴⁶ Mukunda, who in contrast seems to have cared less about nudity of a woman's upper body than did Ramananda Yati, locates the offense to Khullana more in the occupation of goatherd, her wandering in the forest, and the dangers of death and loss of jati to which she thereby was exposed.⁴⁷ Still, after Khullana had returned from her first day of herding, when Lahana came out to give her a

meal, Khullana put her hands to her breast (*buke diya hat*), apparently in a self-conscious gesture of modesty.⁴⁸

There is evidence that, when Mukunda's poem was written, in Bengal neither men nor women who labored in the fields usually wore garments on their upper bodies.⁴⁹ The dress and modesty codes which this poem assumes distinguish between those women who labored outside and whose upper bodies were uncovered in public, and those women who wore saris. Of course, as a goatherd Khullana also was given other articles of the ordinary costume of women who labored outside, including a basket-like hat (*da*) to wear on her head, as well as the particular instrument of her new occupation, a cane stick (*chat*) for driving the goats.⁵⁰ Both the flaxen loincloth, the sign of violation of Khullana's modesty, and the cane stick, the sign of her outside labor, would later serve as evidence of Lahana's mistreatment of her co-wife.

In this story of a wealthy merchant's family from the Rarh, we meet no women whose ordinary course of life required them to labor outside and to wear only a loincloth. It goes without saying that such women would have belonged only to the lowest jati. At

the lowest levels of the jati hierarchy in Mukunda's world, the dharma of field laborers and other 'untouchable' women inverted the dress and modesty code for high-jati women, requiring the former to appear in public in a way that would have been immodest for the latter.

Lahana forced Khullana to labor beyond the agricultural fields, in the uncultivated 'forest' used by villagers and townfolk as a common pasturage.⁵¹ This 'forest' is depicted as a site of hunting, and Khullana is imagined in the forest as subject to hunting by predatory animals as well as by men.⁵² Khullana also is described as having 'cane in hand and basket on head, like a mad person' (*paga*), and as wearing a 'begger's dress' (*kangaler bes*).⁵³ Mukunda's poem suggests that below the lowest level of women who labored outside there were women who were 'mad' or who had been reduced to begging.

Labor in the fields or, worse, in the 'forest' beyond them, and an inverted dress and modesty code constituted social invisibility for women of the lowest jati status, and an absence of personal identity almost equal to that of utter destitution and madness.⁵⁴ The

sign of this social invisibility was a coarse cloth worn only on the lower body, the *khuya* or *khadi*.

The poem defines two other statuses and dress and modesty codes for women, and links each of them to distinctive locales. At the opposite end of the status hierarchy were 'lineage wives' (*kul'badhu*) of wealthy and high-jati families. We see lineage wives in the kitchens, sleeping rooms and courtyards of their affinal homes, and in the courtyards of their friends, but at least on the occasion of special celebrations we also see them in town and village lanes.⁵⁵ Mukunda's poem does not insist that wealthy wives of high status always should stay in seclusion. Neither is there mention in his poem of veiling the face. A strict modesty code for high jati women is contested in a later episode of the poem, when Khullana believed her son had disappeared, searched the village for him, and even addressed his Brahman teacher to find out news of him. On this occasion Lahana gossiped maliciously about her co-wife's behavior when in public.⁵⁶ As violations of a strict modesty code for high-jati women, Lahana emphasized not binding and covering the hair when in public,⁵⁷ not being careful to cover the breasts before 'commoners and elders'

(*ganagarbita*),⁵⁸ and habitually visiting public places like the town market square (*nagar catar*) ‘dressed like a prostitute’.⁵⁹ Khullana, however, effectively countered this gossip by asking: ‘What kind of anger is this, and from what kind of shame are you speaking out? Because in the society of Ujain it is well known what my intentions are and that I am a virtuous woman!’⁶⁰ For Mukunda a wife’s virtue was more important than strict observance of modesty codes.

Dubala, the household maidservant, belonged to a status midway between lineage wives and women who were outside laborers.⁶¹ Unlike lineage wives, she was sent outside the household on a variety of errands in the town. In particular, she performed the household’s marketing, and so went both to the town bazaar and to a local periodic market (*hat*). Attached to a wealthy household, Dubala wore saris; in fact, when she went to market, she wore one made of wild silk (*tasar*). Her status as a household servant was visibly different from those women of the lowest jati who labored outside. Still, a few details are meant to represent her relative immodesty, appropriate to her status below that of lineage wives: going to market, she chewed catechu to stain her lips red, and

vigorously swung her arms to show off her ornaments.⁶² Perhaps the public locale of her duties necessarily caused her behavior and status to approach those of the 'public wives' (*bar badhu*) who sold themselves in the market. Mukunda's poem suggests no gossip about a dress and modesty code for household maidservants comparable to the gossip about the behavior in public of lineage wives. Their exclusion from such gossip, and their relaxed modesty code may have constituted a degree of social freedom, without the social invisibility of women who labored outside.

Women who had to work in the forest were subject to 'hunting' by wild animals and by human males. Female household servants regularly appeared in the public markets, and engaged in buying and selling as part of their duties. Perhaps themselves sold into service, they could be regarded as similar to prostitutes, who sold their own bodies to men. Finally, lineage wives in courtyards were given protection by men of their affinal families, to whom they themselves came as gifts in marriage. Seen comprehensively, the status hierarchy for women and the dress and modesty codes for each status grade are another permutation of the 'scale of transactions'; for women were related to men by

hunting, or by buying and selling, or by the gift of protection in return for their gift in marriage. In extraordinary circumstances lineage wives may have had to shift positions on this status hierarchy; thus Khullana made the most extreme shift possible when she became an outside laborer. We will see that when this was the case, according to Mukunda's poem, no dishonor should have been imputed to lineage wives, so long as their virtue itself had not been compromised.

A Child-Bride's Agency: Sexuality and Rhetoric

Like being hunted, offering *bhet*, petitioning, and receiving judgment and benefaction is a subordinate role, and therefore one that is part of the poem's feminine gender form.

Usually, the most valuable offering a woman can make to a man is that of her own body.

The same root, *bhet*, is used in the poem as a verb, *bheta*, meaning to meet and welcome, or to give auspicious offerings to a superior. Dressing and ornamenting herself in preparation to meet her husband was itself one form of a wife's offering of *bhet* to her husband.⁶³ Moreover, following an offering of *bhet*, the art of rhetoric used in making a petition to a male superior might include a woman's sexuality and all the arts used to

enhance it, for powers of sexual attraction could be used to help secure a favorable response to her petition. For women, the art of rhetoric in a narrow sense and the arts of sexual attraction were complements in a larger rhetorical whole. In this section I argue that Mukunda's poem tends to affirm Khullana's sexuality while it diverts attention away from a potential for women's agency based on mastery of rhetoric in a narrow sense.

Mukunda's poem symmetrically represents the problem of Khullana's dishonor, which arose because of her own incomplete wedding and her co-wife's desire for both power and happiness in marriage; and the solution of this problem by the grace of the goddess Candi, by the re-imposition of Dhanapati's authority, and by the completion of Khullana's wedding. Left without recourse when Lahana stripped her of her wifely ornaments and forced her to herd the goats, Khullana learned to worship Candi. In return Candi rebuked and threatened Lahana, who restored her co-wife to a position of honor in the household. Summoned home by Candi, Dhanapati arranged for Khullana to feed his friends and relatives, thus completing one of the elements of the third day's wedding rites hitherto not accomplished. Later that evening their lovemaking for the first time completed

Khullana's incomplete wedding, and was the final step of Khullana's transformation to a 'lineage wife'. An erotically charged and beautiful description of their lovemaking ends the portion of the poem recited on the fifth night.⁶⁴ Therefore, the plot resolves the conflict of this narrative, which had originated through Khullana's hasty, ill-considered, and incomplete wedding, by divine intervention of the goddess, and by the sexual competence of a child bride.

Before the resolution of her problematic marriage, Khullana used sexuality and rhetoric in the emotional display of *abhimān* to insist that Dhanapati hear and judge her complaints against her elder co-wife.⁶⁵ Using *abhimān*, a woman may insist on the importance of her honor to a man who has dishonored her, at the same time refusing his sexual advances, so that the man by whom she has been dishonored will have to hear and acknowledge his own wrong-doing. Successful use of *abhimān* thus depends on the sexual attraction felt for her by the very one who has dishonored her.⁶⁶

In the subsequent 'trial' Khullana proceeded as a plaintiff, detailing her charges and submitting direct evidence (*pratyakṣa*) to support them: the cane staff she had used, the

flaxen loincloth she had worn, and most damning of all, the forged letter. Khullana did not simply accuse her co-wife of having mistreated and dishonored her. For rhetorical purposes, she also pretended to treat the letter as genuine, associated Dhanapati in a conspiracy to dishonor her, and impugned his character as judge:

Whoever is an honest person, fearing no one at all, assigns punishments after discerning faults and virtues. But your method is to strike your wife by another's hand, without having thus discerned. Everything of yours is contrary.⁶⁷

When Lahana first had produced the letter, Khullana had inspected its signature and called it a forgery.⁶⁸ By no means, therefore, was her rhetoric in this 'trial' a straightforward representation of the evidence. Rather, by the emotional display of *abhimān*, and by treating the letter as genuine she fashioned a position which put Dhanapati on the defensive.

Dhanapati responded in a masterful and very funny act of rhetoric in which motives of self-defense vied with those of seduction.⁶⁹ He swore by Siva that the letter was Lahana's forgery, and asked for Siva's punishment if this were not the case. Not for the sake of punishment, however, did he ask her to put 'ten thousand and one arrow [glances] to her eye-corners, and pierce the deer of his heart'. Rather, he assured her that she was a 'lineage wife' and 'virtuous' (*punyaban*), and he asked her to put aside her anger, to abandon (*parihara*) her *abhiman*, and to 'bear him upon her two breasts across the [river] of the night'.⁷⁰ As a further inducement, Dhanapati offered to allow Khullana to impose the same conditions of outside labor upon Lahana which she herself had endured.

Was this a responsibility which she properly could have accepted?

Khullana's skill in rhetoric can be located in her awareness that her powers to persuade were enhanced by Dhanapati's unsatisfied desire for her. Maintaining her *abhiman*, while ignoring both the offer to allow her to punish Lahana and the pleas for her embrace, Khullana replied with a song about her year long suffering while herding the goats: her exposure to sun, rain, and cold, to hunger and sleeplessness, and to all the

hazards and difficulties of herding. Nevertheless, the verse describing her eleventh month of suffering ends ambiguously:

In Caitra the swallow begs water from the raincloud,

Pairs of bees welter in the nectar of the lotus,

And love (*madan*) torments the limbs of man and wife.

My limbs were tormented by the fire in my belly.

Cruel the faults of my own fatality,

The god of fate cheated me, you were not at home.⁷¹

Indeed the poem already has portrayed Khullana, when a goatherd, afflicted with springtime's longing for union with her absent husband.⁷²

Subsequent arguments of this 'trial' take place between Dhanapati and Lahana, and resume a debate about the propriety of his having sexual relations with a child bride, a debate already begun between Lahana and Khullana. How we think about women's use of

rhetoric in this poem must be colored by Lahana's use of rhetoric, and by our opinions of Lahana's character and motives. Lahana's arguments also deflect attention from Khullana's use of rhetoric, by returning to issues more directly concerned with sexuality as the ground for any feminine agency.

Lahana's objections to Khullana's lovemaking are opposed by the central role of Khullana's sexuality in the poem's plot and by the ways the poem's eroticism was enjoyable for Bengali audiences. Moreover, Lahana's own language invites the audience to discount her objections as hypocritical.⁷³ Nevertheless, her two, somewhat different arguments deserve serious attention. The most interesting was directed to Khullana. In this context Lahana emphasized the merchant's 'merciless lust', increased by the long period of separation, Khullana's ignorance of the 'arts of love', and her physical immaturity.

You do not have the fault to enjoy the deep pleasure of eros
 (*sringar*). Great will be your sorrow on the ocean of eros. As the hare
 doing battle with an elephant, as the frog the snake catches, as the lion, lord

of beasts, held in the elephant's trunk, as the fly the little monkey catches,
 as the rat the mongoose catches, and as the fish the kite takes, so, co-wife,
 is your lovemaking.⁷⁴

The 'fault' (*dos*) which Khullana lacked was that she had not begun to menstruate.⁷⁵

Lahana argued that because Khullana was physically immature, lovemaking for her would be like an act of hunting or battle, and she would be its victim and suffer injury. Khullana responded, in a speech which authoritatively uses divine examples from the Puranas, that wives do not die from their husbands' lovemaking, no matter how great the male's 'strength' (*bal*) or 'energy' (*pratap*).⁷⁶ Precisely because Mukunda's poem both discounts

Lahana's argument by the judgments of self-interest and hypocrisy which it leads us to make of her character, and then refutes her through the 'voice' of the immature girl

Lahana claimed to protect from being a victim, I suggest that Mukunda did not invent

Lahana's argument. Rather, it seems to me likely that Lahana's argument echoes

women's objections to pre-pubertal sex with child brides in Mukunda's society, so that

refuting it had a hegemonic purpose in and for his society, as well as one within the plot of his poem.

Raghunandana Bhattacharyya, Mukunda's near contemporary and then the foremost *smṛti* commentator in Bengal, had authorized in the *Samskaratattva* a couple's first sexual relations after rituals of the third night of the wedding, rather than later, after the bride's first menstrual period and the rituals of the 'second wedding'.⁷⁷ In this opinion he differed from contemporary non-Bengali commentators on *Dharmasastra*. For example, Kamalakara Bhatta forbade intercourse before a wife's first menstrual period because she would cause a 'waste of semen'.⁷⁸ In the late nineteenth century, avoiding a possibility of intercourse with pre-pubertal brides became the most important reason for supporting the Age of Consent Bill of 1891. But in debate about the Bill only a few Bengali women spoke in support of protecting immature brides from injury by raising the minimum age of marriage.

It is all the more important, therefore, that we give due notice to Lahana's argument that intercourse before puberty would injure Khullana, as an argument that in the late sixteenth century may have belonged to women's culture in Bengal.⁷⁹

Lahana's second objection to lovemaking with a child bride was directed to her husband, to whom she used the insulting *tui* forms for 'you'. Intending to put him on the defensive, as Khullana already had done, she brought a new complaint against Dhanapati.

This accusation approached, but did not quite repeat, the 'waste of semen' argument of *Dharmasastra* commentators who opposed sexual relations with child brides.⁸⁰ We can note that in any proper legal proceeding, Lahana's accusation summarily would have been rejected as improper, for a defendant should not be allowed to raise a counter claim (*pratyabhiyoga*) as long as she has not answered the charge of the plaintiff;⁸¹ and it is so rejected in Mukunda's poem. Lahana's failure to follow correct legal procedures probably would have confirmed suspicions in a male audience that women are likely to abuse their rhetorical powers. In any case, Dhanapati simply handed Lahana the letter, declared it a forgery, and dismissed her, with a threat that he would beat her with his shoe and break her teeth.⁸²

Already found guilty, Lahana finally turned her attention to Khullana, by charging her with shameless displays of sexuality.⁸³ Lahana's speech intimately links shame with sexual

desire and pleasure, and asserts a modesty code for pre-pubertal brides which denies any proper occasion for expression of sexual feelings. Mukunda's poem, however, apparently assumes that a child bride's sexual feelings for her husband are natural and proper.⁸⁴ It constructs a narrative of divine and human agency based upon Khullana's sexual desirability and competence, the divine intercession to which she gains access as a devotee of the goddess, and her rhetorical and negotiating skills. In very difficult circumstances, the child bride of this narrative was able to restore her own honor, but the narrative consistently subordinates her rhetorical virtues to her sexuality as the ground for Khullana's successful agency.

Jati Councils and Trials by Ordeal

New and more serious allegations against Khullana were raised soon after the celebration of her first menstrual period, on the occasion of Dhanapati's father's *sraddha*. With them we turn from patriarchal authority, partially and occasionally shared by the senior female in the family, to the authority of jati councils. Mukunda's poem admits the authority of jati councils to decide disputes regarding jati status, denying that authority to

the Hindu *raja* of Dhanapati's locality. But it makes their judgments problematic, and criticizes excessive and egotistical concerns about the honor of women. At the same time Mukunda's poem affirms the agency of elite Hindu women in contesting unjust decisions of jati councils, by asserting their competence to undergo trials by ordeal. When Khullana undertakes trials by ordeal, her role in them may be a 'feminine' substitute for a 'masculine' role of fighting in battle: ultimately in both cases one's life may be staked for the sake of honor. But as the result of divine intervention by Candi, Khullana triumphs in her ordeals without suffering self-mutilation or self-sacrifice.

This new episode begins with a dispute about honor among Dhanapati's fellow Gandhabanik merchants. Dhanapati had invited one hundred Brahmans and the merchants of his jati to join in his father's *sraddha*. Following the rite, Dhanapati gave presents (*sampradan*) to the Brahmans, including gold, silver, cloths and cows, 'fulfilling the hopes of everyone, whatever he desires'.⁸⁵ After carefully honoring the Brahmans, in the order corresponding to their own well-ordered ranking, Dhanapati filled golden platters with

sandalwood paste and garlands and undertook to ‘worship’ with these lesser gifts his own relatives. But unlike the Brahmans’ ranking, theirs was not well ordered.

Dhanapati selected Cad, the Gandhabanik merchant whose story is told in *Manasamangal*, to worship first as ‘chief of the lineage’, and when challenged he defended this choice by the argument that Cad had ‘seven storehouses of silver rupees in his outer yard’.⁸⁶ An uproar followed, for honor should not have been made a function of wealth.

The complaining merchants asserted that Cad had behaved basely and had been dishonored in his dispute with the goddess Manasa; and Cad defended himself—improperly by legal standards—by lodging counter accusations against his most prominent accusers.

Dhanapati himself could not escape the mud-slinging. An elder merchant replied to a fine speech recalling Cad’s destitution at the hands of Manasa as follows: ‘One who is destitute has (brought) no shame to his jati. But a wife who herds goats in the forest—that is a fault!’⁸⁷

At the end of the *sraddha* rite the Gandhabanik merchants would have been invited to partake of Khullana’s cooking; those who felt slighted by Dhanapati’s choice of Cad as

chief of the lineage implied by allegations against Khullana that they would partake of Khullana's imputed 'faults' by accepting food cooked by her.⁸⁸ They refused to do so, unless Khullana could prove her 'virtue' by trial by ordeal.

For precedent the merchants cited Lord Rama and had a Brahman recite the story of Sita's return and Rama's rejection of her. In this retelling Rama said to Sita, 'I know you as one knows a deer that has eaten food from the hands of a tiger';⁸⁹ that is, survival in such circumstances involves a presumption of guilt. Similarly, no particular offense would be charged against Khullana, beyond the indisputable fact that she had 'wandered' in the forest. It could be presumed that someone had taken advantage of her: 'Fish of a drying pond, and the wandering of a woman: if one gets gold and silver in the deep forest, who leaves them aside if he gets them effortlessly?'⁹⁰ Moreover, in this retelling of Rama's story, Rama himself 'mercifully' invited Sita: 'Take the Fire Trial, if it is your desire to stay with me, and if you are a virtuous woman (*sati*).'⁹¹

We may well pause to wonder whose *Ramayana* this is.⁹² It is not Valmiki's, nor even the familiar Bengali version of Krttibas, for in both of these *Ramayanās*, without any

‘invitation’ Sita herself proposed to enter fire to commit suicide, and thus to remove her ‘dishonor’.⁹³ Worse, although their own altered version implies only that it was the prerogative of a husband to require ordeals of his wife, the merchants have asserted that prerogative not for Dhanapati but for themselves. Immediately afterward, they also suggested an alternative: if Khullana would not take the test, Dhanapati should pay a fine to them of a hundred thousand rupees.⁹⁴ Of course, both the slipperiness of the terms of their argument and the disclosure of their greed can be enjoyed as a satire of any pretensions of merchants to honor.

Khullana’s father, naturally in attendance, proposed yet a third alternative, an appeal to King Vikramkesari, the Hindu *raja* of Dhanapati’s locality, to ‘make a proper judgment’ in this dispute. Because we already have every reason to doubt that the merchants themselves could render a ‘proper judgment’, this alternative must seem attractive, but it was rejected by the merchants, for the reason that although a king may ‘take’ one’s wealth and life, only relatives (*bandhujan*) may both ‘give and take’ one’s jati. For failing to recognize this basic division of authority and so proposing to ‘make relatives suffer royal

power', Khullana's father was called 'mad with royal power' and 'conceited with royal vainglory'. According to the complaining merchants, if relatives are 'affronted and angry', even a king must withdraw his authority to punish.⁹⁵ Again one may enjoy this as a satire of merchants, and read their fine argument ironically, understanding that they themselves have become 'mad with royal power'. Mukunda, however, presents no counter-argument to their position.

The alternative of paying a fine was rejected by Khullana. Khullana argued that the complaining merchants were motivated by greed, that quarrels and rivalries were inevitably a part of the Gandhabanik merchants' assemblies, that as an 'important person' (*bara lok*) Dhanapati would continue to be the target of such quarrels, and that therefore payments of money never would suffice to remove the allegations of her dishonor. Against the possibility of such dishonor, Khullana also proposed suicide exactly as Sita had.⁹⁶

Conflicts about honor must be resolved by 'tests' (*pariksa*), that is to say, by the 'divine evidence' (*divyatattva*) of ordeals, and if they are not so resolved, the only honorable alternative is suicide. Khullana had to undertake trials by ordeal both for the sake of her

own honor, and for the sake of her husband's wealth. In Mukunda's poem, therefore, one sees among Gandhabanik merchants a fetishism of signs of honor, making honor and its signs independent of political responsibility;⁹⁷ a rather chaotic disagreement about proper rank; their refusal to allow the local Hindu king to decide questions of jati for them, as opposed to questions of wealth and life;⁹⁸ and their greed for the payment of a fine as a substitute for undergoing ordeals.

We may infer from Raghunandana's practical treatise on them that ordeals then were used in Bengal to judge disputes 'for matters not to be decided by human evidence'; that is, not by documents and witnesses.⁹⁹ Further, Raghunandana, unlike most other commentators on *Dharmasastra*, argued that ordeals were permissible even when 'human evidence' was available, provided both parties to the dispute agreed.¹⁰⁰ These two provisions opened a wide arena for the use of ordeals.

By the rules of legal procedure Khullana could not have been expected to use human evidence to establish a negative claim. Legal procedure for 'human evidence' specified that the burden of proof belonged with the party seeking to 'claim some positive

or affirmative point'; in this case with the plaintiffs, who had claimed that Khullana somehow must have sinned in the forest.¹⁰¹ 'Divine evidence', on the other hand, was thought to establish both positive and negative claims. The ordinary procedure, therefore, was for the defendant to undergo the ordeal, to establish a general, rather than a specific innocence; and ordinarily the plaintiff in return assumed an obligation to 'partake in the punishment ordered for the matter under dispute (if he is proved wrong)'.¹⁰² 'Divine evidence' could be advantageous to a defendant seeking to establish the falsity of non-specific allegations or of multiple accusers. Nor, in the case of multiple accusers, was it absolutely necessary for them to agree to be punished if the ordeal should prove their accusations false.¹⁰³ In Khullana's case, however, all these ordinary procedures were contradicted by the 'general rule' that women were not supposed to undergo ordeals. In disputes between a man and a woman, the man should have undergone the ordeal, regardless of who was the defendant. Raghunandana himself allowed only one kind of ordeal for women, the 'balance', and that only when both parties to the dispute were women.¹⁰⁴ The practical intent of so limiting women's competence to undergo trials by

ordeal might have been to limit general, irrefutable allegations of dishonor to those which complaining men were willing to prove by undergoing ordeals themselves. Had the complaining merchants known and respected these judgments of Raghunandana, perhaps they would have dismissed the very possibility of ordeals! But historical records of ordeals show that women did undergo them to re-establish their honor when it had been impugned.¹⁰⁵

With the assistance of the goddess, Khullana therefore undertook a series of increasingly more dangerous ordeals, all but the first of which followed the procedures which Raghunandana outlined. Why a series? In each case after her success the complaining merchants alleged that the ordeal could be defeated 'if she has cast a spell' (*barile*). Their expectation seems to have been that a more dangerous ordeal would be harder to subvert by magic power, and therefore more conclusive. In the last of this series Khullana carried a red-hot piece of iron in her cupped hands for a distance of sixteen feet, and then threw it into a heap of grass, which was ignited by the iron's heat. No burns

appeared on her hands, but even this ‘divine evidence’ did not satisfy the complaining merchants.¹⁰⁶

The ‘House of Lacquer’ Ordeal, Divine Intervention, and *Sati*

The merchants insisted again on the authority of what they claimed had been Rama’s and Sita’s example. Khullana should undergo the ‘test’ (*pariksa*) which Sita had passed, a test they began to describe as ‘entering’ the ‘house of lacquer’. Of course, this also would be a fire ordeal: the lacquer house would be set alight with Khullana inside. Their argument has three contexts to which we briefly must allude.

The first is the story of how Duryodhana attempted to murder the five Pandavas by luring them into a ‘house of lacquer’, the fire trap which he prepared for their residence in Varanavata.¹⁰⁷ By (falsely) linking the motif of a ‘house of lacquer’ to Sita’s ordeal, the merchants inadvertently reveal their own intent, as murderous as Duryodhana’s. The second context is the story of Sita’s rejection and her fire ordeal, already recounted. In the merchants’ rhetoric the ‘house of lacquer’ replaces the funeral pyre which Sita mounted to reclaim her honor. By insisting on the authority of Sita’s example to impose

their ‘house of lacquer’ ordeal, the merchants exceeded the ordeals allowed by *smrti*; in fact, Sita’s fire ordeal does not meet the ritual requirements for ‘lawful ordeals’ set out in Raghunandana’s treatise,¹⁰⁸ nor is it mentioned therein. Of course, this ‘excessive’ fire ordeal also serves as a contrast to the ‘lawful ordeals’ already portrayed, by which Khullana already should have proved her virtue.

The third context is the story of Sati, divine model of a virtuous and perfectly devoted wife. In immediate succession the word *sati* is used three times in the episode to call Khullana a virtuous wife.¹⁰⁹ These uses of *sati* recall the story of Sati, divine daughter of Daksa, a story the poem itself already has recounted during the first day’s recitation.

As related by Mukunda, Sati’s story emphasizes suicide as a means of preserving honor:

Daksa, Sati’s father, refused to invite her husband Siva to his sacrifice; and Sati in response decided to commit her body to destruction in its internal fire by means of yogic meditation. Mukunda also emphasizes ‘egotism’ and its exaggerated and excessive concerns for wealth and external signs of honor in his retelling. So, justifying her suicide, Sati argued that by calling Siva’s poverty dishonorable, her father had become ‘utterly

stupefied by wealth' (*sampade bimurhamati*). She resolved to punish him and to take revenge for his 'egotism' (*ahankar*) by taking her own life.¹¹⁰

Taken together, all three stories suggest a theme criticizing 'murderous' suicide: suicide that has been coerced by false, one-sided or unproved accusations of dishonor. When more ordinary means failed, only suicide could refute such accusations by its insistence that honor was more valuable than life. The emphasis given by Mukunda's poem to this theme suggests that women in his society commonly found it necessary at least to threaten suicide to refute allegations of dishonor.

I think Khullana's ordeal in the 'house of lacquer' almost calls to mind as well the ritual of *sati* burning, the immolation of a virtuous widow on her husband's funeral pyre, or on a fire kindled at some later time to substitute for it. Was Sita's fiery trial, the text the merchants claimed as their authority, already associated with and used to justify immolation of the *sati*?¹¹¹ In any case, Mukunda's description of the burning of the 'house of lacquer' with Khullana inside may recall ritual immolation within a funeral pyre, which sometimes was constructed so that the woman entered rather than mounted it.¹¹² Nevertheless,

Dhanapati had not died, the 'house of lacquer' was not a funeral pyre, and Khullana did not commit suicide, but triumphed. The episode does not represent a widow's ritual immolation, but, like Siva's rampage following Sati's death, it may be a systematic reversal of the motifs of *sati* burning. Representing a triumph that could not have occurred in ordinary life, is such a reversal only 'useful for inscribing women's ideological self-debasement?'¹¹³

Earlier in the poem women twice had approached self immolation, but they were allowed to avoid it through the mercy of men who refused to follow blindly a martial code of revenge. When the leader of the army of Kalinga finally captured Kalketu, he promised Kalketu's wife Phullara that Kalketu would not be executed, so that Phullara would not immolate herself.¹¹⁴ Later, Kalketu, returning home to be invested as a *raja* subordinate to the king of Kalinga, met on the way the many women whose husbands he had slain in battle. They were preparing for the rite of *anumarana* (entering a pyre built after disposal of their husbands' bodies), but he felt overwhelmed by pity for them, prayed to Candi, and she stopped their preparations and raised their husbands from the dead.¹¹⁵ Although

Mukunda did not explicitly criticize *sati* burning, he narrated ways to avoid it, by providing 'merciful' alternatives to the martial code of revenge, a code complemented and reinforced by the self-immolation of widows of the defeated.

The 'house of lacquer' ordeal explicitly represents Khullana's triumph in her suicidal ordeal by divine grace, secured by Khullana's worship of Candi. In fact, all of her actions to restore her honor, from the point when she learned to worship Candi while herding goats in the forest, were preceded by worship, and throughout she had been surrounded by a nimbus of divine power. Until the ordeal of the 'house of lacquer', however, Khullana's actions might have remained within the expansive limits of human agency, as Mukunda's audience understood those limits. But only divine power could explain her triumph in this ultimate ordeal.

As in other episodes, here Mukunda's poem recommends human and institutional changes to solve a problem which arose out of flawed human agency. After Khullana's triumph, the merchants fell at her feet and begged her to forgive and not to curse them.

They recognized her as a *sati*, a perfectly virtuous wife, and as more than human. More

important, they agreed to receive her cooking without any signs of honor and ‘at once’ (*ek'bare*); that is, without the distinctions of rank constituted by sequential distributions.¹¹⁶

Of course, the poem thereby teaches us the power of Candi's intercession. It also explicitly represents a lesson taught the complaining merchants. The merchants recognized that their unspecific and unproved allegations against Khullana, and their repeated refusal to accept the ‘divine evidence’ of lawful ordeals were ‘sins of egotism’ (*ahankar pap*), sins that might provoke a *sati's* curse.¹¹⁷ One moral of this episode complements that of the former episodes; it portrays the humbling of men who have insisted on dishonoring a woman regardless of reason and evidence, and who thereby have put her life at risk.

Mukunda's text expanded the agency of women by not questioning their competence to undergo trials by ordeal. At the same time it registered discomfort with false accusations against women and with the potential for ordeals to result in ‘murderous’ suicide. To obviate this potential, however, it proposed no changes in the way chaste women were signs of patriarchal honor, nor in the competence of jati councils to decide

disputes about a woman's honor. Instead it proposed replacing the 'fetishism' of rank in Dhanapati's jati council with a rule of solidarity and equality, so that, after having been humbled, everyone might agree to eat 'at once'.

Conclusion

This essay argues that Mukunda's *Candimangal* did not constitute gender by means of binary, opposite, and mutually exclusive terms. Instead in Mukunda's text masculine and feminine gender roles were imagined as multiple and ranked within each gender form.

Much of Mukunda's narrative is structured by a 'scale of transactions' which defines and genders economic roles within a household economy. The scale of transactions includes 'hunting', 'buying and selling', and the gift of *bhet* in exchange for benefaction from a superior. Roles in the scale of transactions are gendered because more powerful roles are more masculine ones. 'Hunting' was a more masculine gender role, offering *bhet* and petitioning for assistance was a more feminine role, and 'buying and selling' were roles filled by men or women as circumstances required or allowed. We noticed a permutation of this scale of transactions in the roles within the merchant's household when Dhanapati

had to journey abroad on the king's business, and became something like a warrior, and his senior wife assumed management of the merchant's household economy, and his junior wife became vulnerable to hunting as a goatherd. Both men and women had the capacity to shift to new roles, and for women, the capacity to shift to roles ordinarily assumed by men was an important aspect of their agency.

This essay raises questions for further research. Was this poem's assumption of multiple, ranked and overlapping gender roles for each gender form common to middle period debates about gender throughout South Asia? Did Indian reformers and nationalists begin to use binary, opposite and mutually exclusive terms to define gender categories instead? Gender categories are suggested, for example, by the series of gendered dichotomies which Partha Chatterjee has identified as the 'ideological framework within which nationalism answered the women's question': material/spiritual, outer/inner, world/home and Western/Indian.¹¹⁸ Or did Indian reformers and nationalists continue to use scalar gender forms, by which 'buying and selling' could be gendered as either masculine or feminine? Scalar gender forms might better explain both the entry of Bengali

women into middle-class employment, and the very limited roles which were opened to them; for it hardly seems true that 'in this construct [the material/spiritual dichotomy] there are no specific signs which distinguish men from women in the material world'.¹¹⁹

Another permutation of the scale of transactions can be seen in the status hierarchy of women assumed by the poem, for women might be related to men by being hunted, by buying and selling, and by being given in marriage. Mukunda's poem assumed inverted dress and modesty codes for women who labored in the fields, codes which constituted social invisibility for laboring women. It assumed relaxed modesty codes for maidservants who did the marketing for elite families, allowing them relatively public roles and relatively immodest behavior. It assumed strict dress and modesty codes for lineage wives, but, unlike in north India, lineage wives were not required either to be secluded or to veil their faces in public. Moreover, Mukunda's poem suggested that women should be allowed to adopt more lenient dress and modesty codes, if circumstances made such a shift necessary, without being dishonored. At the same time it portrayed intense gossip about the behavior of lineage wives in public places, gossip which in social life must have

encouraged strict seclusion. Mukunda himself favored an emphasis on virtue rather than on such external signs of honor. But the gossip which his poem portrayed may be taken as a sign of contested modesty codes for lineage wives. His poem did not represent similar gossip about the conduct of maidservants or women who labored outside. They already were excluded from the debates about women's dress and modesty codes which his poem portrays. Mukunda's poem helps us see and ask about an important subsequent change. When, where and how laboring women came to wear sari should be as important a topic for social historians as the introduction of new dress codes for middle class Bengali women in the nineteenth century.¹²⁰

In Mukunda's *Candimangal* female characters, like male characters, were given capacities of reason, will and action. Moreover, both women and men could learn to worship the goddess, and both could acquire by devotion a nimbus of divine power which allowed them to transcend ordinary human limitations. Nevertheless, in this poem the ordinary capacity of women to act tends to be located in offering *bhet* to a superior and in petitioning for benefaction. Women's rhetorical skills in turn were both linked to and limited

by their sexuality and the sexual attraction men felt for them. As an example of a wife's capacity to act within her affinal family, this poem celebrated the sexual competence of a child bride, not her mastery of the art of rhetoric. Was women's use of rhetoric usually represented as without virtue, or less important than her sexuality? Further research is needed to clarify links between the art of rhetoric and feminine gender roles in Bengali culture. Finally, because Mukunda's poem denied any legitimacy to Lahana's argument that pre-pubertal sex is dangerous to child brides, I suggest that arguments like hers probably were a persistent feature of women's culture in Mukunda's time. This suggestion also requires further research.

Mukunda's poem gave to jati councils sole authority to decide disputes about jati status and family honor, denying that authority even to local Hindu *rajas*. Without a *raja* to judge for them and to link their rank to royal service, in this poem Dhanapati's Gandhabanik jati continually were engaged in disputes about the rank implicit in their own sequential distribution of signs of honor. In such disputes the honor of a family's women was equated with the honor of the family itself. In Khullana's case multiple and

nonspecific allegations of dishonor were irrefutable by human means. The 'divine evidence' of ordeals was necessary.

Smṛti commentators had argued that ordeals should be undergone by the one upon whom the burden of proof would lie in an ordinary trial (ordinarily the plaintiff), unless the parties agreed otherwise. Raghunandana further had argued that women were competent to undergo no ordeals except the ordeal of the balance, and the balance should be used only in cases of disputes between women. Without noticing either of these arguments Mukunda's poem asserted the competence of women to establish their honor in jati councils by the 'divine evidence' of trials by ordeal, and by the divine assistance of the goddess. Whose account of women's competence in ordeals reflected Bengali social practice, Raghunandana's narrow one or Mukunda's expansive one?

A woman's suicide for the sake of honor could be seen as a kind of ordeal.

Directly in the case of suicide, and perhaps obliquely in the case of *sati* burning,

Mukunda's poem registered discomfort with fraudulent and escalating allegations made by

men, and with the resulting pressure upon women to undergo suicidal 'ordeals'. It

proposed, however, no changes in the way chaste women were signs of patriarchal honor, or in the competence of jati councils to decide disputes about a woman's honor. Instead, Mukunda's poem proposed solidarity and equality within Dhanapati's jati council to minimize their disputes about honor, after they had been humbled by Khullana's triumph. In this way also it supported the institutions of patriarchy which it marginally had criticized.

¹The following remarks have been guided by four important critical bibliographic studies: Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy, 'In Search of Our Past: A Review of the Limitations and Possibilities of the Historiography of Women in Early India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Apr. 30, 1988, WS-2-10; Barbara Ramusack, 'From Symbol to Diversity: The Historical Literature on Women in India', *South Asia Research* 10,2 (Nov., 1990): 139-57; Aparna Basu, 'Women's History in India: An Historiographical Survey', in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, ed. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 181-209; and Janaki Nair, 'On the Question of Agency in Indian Feminist Historiography', *Gender & History* 6,1 (Apr., 1994): 82-100.

²Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, 'Introduction', in *Recasting Women*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 1-27. See also Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (New Delhi: Kali for Women,

1997) pp. 7-12.

³Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), pp. 227-31.

⁴See 'Kings and Commerce on an Agrarian Frontier: Kalketu's Story in Mukunda's *Candimangal*', in this volume, and 'Battle and Self-Sacrifice in a Bengali Hero's Epic: Lau Sen's Quest to be a *Raja* in *Dharmamangal*', forthcoming.

⁵Uma Chakravarti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Das*?', in *Recasting Women*, pp. 27-87.

⁶For a brief history of the use of *mangal-kabya* by Bengali historians, see Aniruddha Ray, 'Middle Bengali Literature: A Source for the Study of Bengal in the Age of Akbar', in *Akbar and his India*, ed. Irfan Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 225-6.

⁷I have cited throughout as CM the following edition: Kabikankan Mukunda-biracita, *Candimangal*, Sukumar Sen sampadita (Nay Dilli: Sahitya Akademi, 1975). For variant

readings I have consulted the Calcutta University edition: *Kabikankan-Candi: Dhanapati*

Upakhyān, Bijanabihari Bhattacharya sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyālay, 1966).

This is a much shorter text, and its readings, when they differ, are frequently simpler than

those of Sen's edition. I also have consulted *Candimangal: Mukundaram Cakrabarti*

biracita, bhumika o sampadana Pancanan Mandal (Kal'kata: Bharabi, 1992).

⁸J.C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press at the University of Oxford, 1948), pp. 69-74.

⁹Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay summarizes the controversies about Mukunda's dates; see *Madhyayuger Bamla Sahityer Tathya o Kalakram* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk Stal, 1993), pp. 121-35. Sen ('Bhumika', in CM, pp. 28-29) argues for a date of 1555/56 when Mukunda's poem first was sung; most other scholars favor a date towards the end of the century.

¹⁰Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*, Vol.

1 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1978), pp. 60-2 lists more than 60 dated and complete manuscripts, and more than two hundred undated and/or partial manuscripts. For a discussion of Mukunda's influence on later authors of *Candimangal*, see Asutos Bhattacharya, *Bamla Mangalakabyer Itihas*, sastha samskaran (Kalikata: A. Mukharji and Co. Private Limited, 1975), p. 540.

¹¹Sen, 'Bhumika', in CM, pp. 19-24, discusses the more certain information about the poet's life which is distributed among signature lines in his poem, and the much less certain information to be found in an account of his life, included in some MSS as an explanation of how he came to compose the poem. This account is at CM, *pad* 6, pp. 3-4; variants are provided in the appendix, 'Pathantar o mantabya', pp. 310-13.

¹²Sen, 'Bhumika', CM, p. 20.

¹³Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). See also Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 37-97.

¹⁴Compare Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?' *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992):1-26.

¹⁵See Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 22-33. For the idea of 'overlapping classes' on a 'scale of forms', Inden (p. 25, fn. 28) cites R.G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971; 1st pub. 1942).

¹⁶CM, *pad* 73, p. 44.

¹⁷For example, Phullara 'sells baskets of ivory tusks at wholesale as peasants sell radishes'. Some passages indicate the 'social' nature of demand: horn players buy the horns of wild buffalo; boys buy tiger claws; pilgrim *sannyasins* dressed in ocher garments buy tiger skins; and Brahmans buy rhinoceros horns to make ancestral offerings.

Nevertheless, the scale of Kalketu's own consumption of the animals is heroic; see CM,

pad 74, 75, pp. 44-5.

¹⁸CM, *pad* 73, p. 44.

¹⁹CM, *pad* 92, p. 54. *Siuli* is *Nyctanthes arbor tristis*.

²⁰Phullara ‘begged a loan’ [*magila udhar*] of two measures of rice, promising to repay it the next day, but she also received a ‘gift’ of parched rice. See CM, *pad* 92, p. 54.

²¹Important examples are: Kalketu gave royal favors after receiving *bhet* from Bharu Datta, who petitioned to become his ‘minister’, CM *pad* 128, p. 76; Kalketu gave tax free land to other Kayasthas after they have given him *bhet*, *pad* 134, p. 79; and the king of Simhala did not give permission for the exchange of tribute goods, despite the receipt of *bhet* from Dhanapati, *pad* 361, p. 203.

²²CM, *pad* 197, p. 115, Khullana’s mother to her husband: ‘You have not considered these words, that in a house where Lahana is co-wife there are the same

customs as where a tigress has eaten. But blind in judgment, you have bound her feet to her neck, and have given away Khullana the deer, as *bhet*.’

²³See “Tribute Exchange” and the Liminality of Foreign Merchants in Mukunda’s *Candimangal*,’ in this volume. To indicate Dhanapati’s new status as a royal minister, the king gave him ‘a horse to mount, armor and a two edged dagger’, as well as money for investment in trade and ornaments for his body; see CM, *pad* 331, p. 188. Stay-at-home merchants are called ‘wives’ at *pad* 329, p. 188.

²⁴While it is clear that Lahana assumed this role, the poem does not explicitly say that Dhanapati deputed to her more than responsibility for taking care of her co-wife. Compare CM, *pad* 221, p. 128 and *pad* 231, p. 133, the forged letter ostensibly from Dhanapati: ‘The responsibility of my household falls upon you, dear’.

²⁵CM, *pad* 181, p. 107.

²⁶CM, *pad* 182-185, pp.108-09; *pad* 188, pp. 110-11.

²⁷The status of Gandhabaniks has been contested especially in the period of the censuses by caste. I give the view of Brahmans; see *History of Bengal*, Vol 1, *Hindu Period*, ed. R.C. Majumdar (Patna: N.V. Publications, 1971; 1st pub. 1943), p. 573.

²⁸Contrast *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman according to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan*, introduction and translation by I. Julia Leslie (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁹CM, *pad* 196, 197, pp. 114-15.

³⁰CM, *pad* 197, pp. 114-15.

³¹Unfortunately, in his haste her father also paid insufficient attention to unfavorable astral conjunctions for the date of the wedding. See CM, *pad* 204, p. 118.

³²CM, *pad* 212, pp. 122-3. The text makes no mention of wedding rites for this day, beyond stating that Dhanapati's relatives gave the new couple 'wedding presents' (*jautuk*), and he in turn feasted them and distributed gifts to them; but nothing more would

have been necessary for a wedding to a second wife. For rites performed with a first wife of a twice-born couple, see Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 44-50.

³³CM, *pad* 212, p. 123, *pad* 219, pp. 126-7.

³⁴Inden and Nicholas, *Kinship*, pp. 50-1.

³⁵CM, *pad* 221, 222, p. 128.

³⁶CM, *pad* 222, 223, pp. 128-9.

³⁷Compare Janaki Nair, 'On the Question of Agency', p. 93. We never are told

Dubala's jati.

³⁸CM, *pad* 225, pp. 130.

³⁹CM, *pad* 227, p. 131.

⁴⁰CM, *pad* 228, pp. 131-2.

⁴¹CM, *pad* 208, pp. 120-1. Contrast Inden and Nicholas, *Kinship*, pp. 42, 44.

⁴²CM, *pad* 230, 231, pp. 132-4.

⁴³CM, *pad* 231, pp. 133-4. ‘Half a seer’ was approximately one pound of dry grain.

⁴⁴CM, *pad* 234, p. 135.

⁴⁵See CM, *pad* 287, p. 163, where Khullana calls it *khuya dhuti*, a flaxen loincloth.

See also the illustration labeled ‘*Dhire dhire rama laiya chagal, Ram’jay-samskaraner citra’*, CM, facing p. 259. Khullana, wearing a loincloth and a small short cloth over her shoulders herds the goats. Below it, an illustration from the same source shows Bhabani, the goddess disguised as an old Brahman woman, wearing sari.

⁴⁶Ramananda Yati, *Candimangal*, Anilabaran Gangopadhyay sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1969), p. 221: ‘The lineage wife, wearing the coarse loincloth, nearly dies of shame’ [*kul’badhu khadi parya laje mrtapray*]; and Khullana to Lahana: ‘Give me a cloth, elder sister, and prevent my shame’ [*bastra diya kara didi lajja nibaran*].

Khadi, the term here translated 'loincloth', is defined both by its coarseness and by its small size.

⁴⁷CM, *pad* 253, pp. 145-6, Candi to Lahana.

⁴⁸CM, *pad* 240, p. 138.

⁴⁹Abu'l Fazl 'Allami, *The A'in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann and H.S. Jarrett, 2nd rev. edition by D.C. Phillott and Jadunath Sarkar, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989; 1st pub. 1927-49) 2:134.

⁵⁰CM, *pad* 241, p. 138.

⁵¹For a description of Khullana's route through agricultural fields, and then across the Ajay River to the forest, see CM, *pad* 238, p. 137.

⁵²CM, *pad* 253, p. 145, and *pad* 316, p. 180.

⁵³CM, *pad* 238, p. 137; and *pad* 253, p. 145, the goddess (Parbati) to Lahana.

⁵⁴For a more general discussion of the relation between madness and the inability of the destitute to regulate interactions between self and environment, see Deborah P.

Bhattacharyya, *Pagalami: Ethnopsychiatric Knowledge in Bengal* (Syracuse: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1986), pp. 149-66.

⁵⁵For a conspicuous example, see the women's rites celebrating Khullana's 'second wedding' following her first menstrual period, CM, *pad* 296, 297, pp. 168-9.

⁵⁶See CM, *pad* 393, 396, pp. 218-20. In a seventeenth century version of *Candimangal* from Chittagong, however, she also insists upon seclusion of lineage wives in courtyards. See Dvija Ramadeb biracita, *Abhayamangal*, Asutos Das sampadita (Kalikata: Kalikata Bisvabidyalay, 1957), p. 303, Lahana's complaint to Khullana: 'Which lineage wives go outside the courtyard? But when one explains, you don't understand the facts'.

⁵⁷CM, *pad* 396, p. 220; Khullana's hair is described by the opposite term, *adur*, unbound and uncovered.

⁵⁸Compare CM, *pad* 265, p. 152, Dubala falsely describing Khullana's behavior to Lahana: 'With commonfolk and elders looking, she doesn't put a cloth to her breast'. The line is repeated by Lahana to Dhanapati, *pad* 291, p. 165; and the accusation is made absolute after Khullana searches the town for her son, *pad* 396, p. 220: 'She does not [ever] put a cloth upon her breast'.

⁵⁹CM, *pad* 396, p. 220.

⁶⁰CM, *pad* 397, p. 220.

⁶¹The clearest expression of a great difference in status between household maidservants and outside laborers is found in Dvija Ramadeb, *Abhayamangal*, p. 153, Khullana to Lahana: 'I cannot, elder sister, I cannot herd goats. Put aside your anger, keep me in the house, and I will do the work of a maidservant'.

⁶²Dubala's marketing is described at CM, *pad* 271, pp. 154-5.

⁶³CM, *pad* 262, p. 150: Dubala to Khullana on Dhanapati's arrival: 'Take a vase of

auspicious water to offer [*bhetibare*] to the merchant'. See also *pad* 265, p. 152, Dubala to Lahana: 'She goes to meet [*bhetibare*] the merchant without your permission'. In both cases Khullana's special dress and ornaments are described.

⁶⁴CM, *pad* 293, p. 166.

⁶⁵CM, *pad* 285-288, pp. 161-4.

⁶⁶For other examples of *abhimān* see: CM, *pad* 203, pp. 117-18, Lahana to Dhanapati; and *pad* 296, p. 168, again Lahana to Dhanapati.

⁶⁷CM, *pad* 286, p. 162.

⁶⁸CM, *pad* 233, p. 134.

⁶⁹CM, *pad* 288, pp. 163-4.

⁷⁰CM, *pad* 288, p. 163: *kuler banita tumi kulabati jaya*. This statement implies that Khullana's sons will be recognized as sons of the lineage because she comes from a good

lineage herself, her conduct has been without flaw, and she has been properly married.

⁷¹CM, *pad* 289, p. 165.

⁷²CM, *pad* 241-5, pp. 139-41.

⁷³CM, *pad* 279, p. 159: ‘Listen friend for life [*praner sai*], I speak to you without deceit [*akapate*], I know about our lord’. One must recall that Lahana’s forged letter earlier had been described as a ‘deceptive stagem’ [*kapat prabandh*]; CM, *pad* 231, p. 133.

⁷⁴CM, *pad* 280, pp. 159-60.

⁷⁵Mention of this event is at CM, *pad* 293, p. 166: *ayas alas ghume, premalape basadhame, kutuhale gela ek mas/ sadhu sange sahabase, purus-paras’rase, svayambhu kusum parakas/ /* [In exhaustion, lethargy and sleep, in conversations of love and an abode of perfume—thus one month passed in pleasure. In dwelling with the merchant, and by the nectar of a man’s touch, her self-born flower appeared.]

⁷⁶CM, *pad* 281, p. 160.

⁷⁷For a convenient edition see Heramba Chatterjee Sastri, *Studies in Some Aspects of Hindu Samskaras in Ancient India in the light of Samskaratattva of Raghunandana* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, [1965]), p. 46. Raghunandana's probable dates are 1510-1580, but he may have died as late as 1610. See *The Divyatattva of Raghunandana Bhattacharya: Ordeals in Classical Hindu Law*, critically edited with English translation by Richard W. Lariviere (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), 'Introduction', p. 58.

⁷⁸P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 vols. in 8, 2nd edn. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968-75) 2, part 1, p. 446, fn. 1159, citing Kamalakara Bhatta's *Nirayasinhu* (dated 1612). Kane summarily rejects the idea that child marriages ever were consummated before puberty: 'Besides it must be remembered that when marriages of girls of tender years took place they were purely a sacrament. There was no question of consummation which took place only after puberty'.

⁷⁹Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, p. 170; Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 126-9. On the other hand, the way Mukunda framed Lahana's argument was similar in one way to masculine debate on both sides about the Age of Consent Bill. Lahana also denied Khullana a voice in 'consent', by making her suitability for marital intercourse a function only of her physical maturity.

⁸⁰CM, *pad* 290, p. 165: 'You play upon an [unopened] flower bud. . . You are like a blind and greedy bee that sits on a silk-cotton tree, having failed to discern its nectar's scent. . . For its dignity (*gaurab*) is removed from a swallow who begs water from rainless clouds'. Bees proverbially avoid the silk-cotton tree (any of several trees of the family of *Bombacaceae*); compare *pad* 227, p. 131.

⁸¹Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* 3:302.

⁸²CM, *pad* 291, p. 165.

⁸³CM, *pad* 291, pp. 165-6.

⁸⁴As a goatherd Khullana met 'Indra's daughters' after being oppressed by separation from her husband amid springtime's signs of renewed sexuality. These celestial women rejoiced in her beauty, and taught her to worship Candi for the sake of the return of her husband; CM, *pad* 242-245, pp. 139-41; *pad* 248, p. 142; *pad* 250, p. 143.

⁸⁵CM, *pad* 307, pp. 174-5.

⁸⁶CM, *pad* 308, p, 175.

⁸⁷CM, *pad* 308, p. 175.

⁸⁸Inden, *Marriage and Rank*, pp. 142-3.

⁸⁹CM, *pad* 311, p. 177.

⁹⁰CM, *pad* 316, p. 180.

⁹¹CM, *pad* 311, p. 177.

⁹²Paula Richman, 'Introduction: the Diversity of the *Ramayana* Tradition', in *Many Ramayanas*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 3-21.

⁹³In Valmiki's version Sita commands Laksmana to build the pyre, and Rama silently indicates his consent. See *Ramayana*, Yuddhakanda, 119. In Krttibas's Bengali version as it has been elaborated, Sita proposes suicide, and Ram explicitly agrees, giving his brother the command to prepare the funeral pyre: 'There is no purpose in Sita's life, brother. Light the fire and let her die. And let my shame depart'. Somewhat contradictorily, this version does also let Ram 'know in his heart that Sita judges, "Fire will witness that [I am] pure".' See: Krttibas pandit biracita, *Ramayan*, sampadana o bhumika Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay (Kalikata: Bharabi, 1980), p. 302.

⁹⁴CM, *pad* 311, p. 178.

⁹⁵CM, *pad* 312, p. 178. The text says: 'If relatives are affronted and angry, Garuda's feather falls out.' Indra struck Garuda with lightning as he was stealing the

gods' elixir, and one of Garuda's feathers fell out. Seeing this inauspicious sign, however, all the gods acclaimed Garuda as divine, and even Indra had to ask for his friendship.

⁹⁶CM, *pad* 315, pp. 179-80.

⁹⁷See Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1993), pp. 339, 356-7. Dirks, however, applies the term 'fetishism' only to the colonial regime of the British.

⁹⁸Compare Inden, *Imagining India*, p. 82; *Marriage and Rank*, pp. 77-82; and contrast V.S. Kadam, 'The Institution of Marriage and Position of Women in Eighteenth Century Maharashtra', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25,3 (1988): 341-70.

⁹⁹Lariviere, 'Introduction', p. 60, *Divyatattva* 3.2, p. 79; 'Translation', p. 159.

¹⁰⁰*Divyatattva* 3.3-4, p. 79, 'Translation', p. 159; Lariviere, 'Introduction', p. 21.

¹⁰¹Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* 3:298-9.

¹⁰²*Divyatattva* 4.3, p. 79; ‘Translation’, p. 160.

¹⁰³Lariviere, ‘Introduction’, pp. 21-22; *Divyatattva* 7, p. 80; ‘Translation’, p. 160.

¹⁰⁴*Divyatattva* 34, 35, pp. 87-88, ‘Translation’, pp. 165-6, Lariviere, ‘Introduction’, pp. 25-6,

¹⁰⁵The poem portrays no awareness of the principle that women should not undergo ordeals. Despite the consistent judgments of *smṛti*, there are historical records of women undergoing ordeals in disputes with men. Lariviere (‘Introduction’, p. 25) records an interesting account of a woman of Mithila, who in 1313 successfully underwent the fire ordeal only after modifying the statement she wished to prove from, ‘I have not been with an impure man’, to ‘With the exception of my husband I have not been with an impure man’.

¹⁰⁶The series of ordeals are described at CM, *pad* 318, pp. 181-2.

¹⁰⁷*Mahabharata* 1(8):129-138. I am indebted to Vidut Aklujkar, who reminded me

of this context and its murderous implications.

¹⁰⁸Lariviere, 'Introduction', p. 35.

¹⁰⁹Before entering the 'house of lacquer', Khullana praised Candi to secure her assistance. In this prayer, she said of herself, alluding to a 'virtue' which perhaps included devotion to Candi: 'This one who thinks of you with pure intent is a very virtuous wife [*mahasati*]. Preserve virtuous wives [*satijan*] as your ornament'. Candi responded to her praise by summoning Fire, whom she commanded to prevent Khullana's fear. Fire answered, 'Seeing a virtuous wife [*sati*] I become supremely cool. Your command specifies the utmost good'. CM, *pad* 322, p. 184.

¹¹⁰CM, *pad* 18-19, pp. 12-13.

¹¹¹Burton Stein, *A History of India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 223, note to Plate 21.

¹¹²Dorothy K. Stein, 'Women to Burn: Suttee as a Normative Institution', *Signs* 4,2

(1978):255.

¹¹³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 307.

¹¹⁴CM, *pad* 160,161, p. 94.

¹¹⁵CM, *pad* 170,171, pp. 100-01.

¹¹⁶CM, *pad* 325,326, pp. 185-6.

¹¹⁷CM, *pad* 325, p. 185.

¹¹⁸Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 116-32.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹²⁰Himani Bannerji, 'Textile Prison: The Discourse on Shame (*Lajja*) in the Attire of

the Gentlewoman (*Bhadramihila*) in Colonial Bengal', *South Asia Research* 13,1 (May, 1993):27-45.