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# State, Waterways, and Patriarchy: The Western-Himalayan Legend of Walled-up Wife

Mahesh Sharma

There are poignant western Himalayan ballads that narrate the tales of women who were immured at the foot of a waterway (*kulh*), to ensure a steady supply of water. In this paper we probe how the early legends of walled-up women were linked to state formation and how ruling elites later used such events to move up the social and political ladder.

The paper also explores how pervasive the patriarchal hold over the lives of women was, how nuanced was the power of patriarchs, and how death became a spectacle, echoed in the ballads of walled-up wife. The focus is not only on narrative representations. Rather, we presume that like all narratives these ballads too are rooted in specific historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. We ask, therefore, what ideological goals and rhetorical strategies may have contributed to representations within the cultural reality of the narrators and audiences. Also, how does this exceptional portrayal

function within the 'unified narrative' and its overall conceptualization of women beyond the walled-up wife?

Crucial to understanding these issues are the dominant gender discourses that were prevalent in the culture-scapes in which these ballads were formed. While recounting some of these ballads, therefore, we chart out the trajectory of their progression as a genre, which eventually binds them as a meta-narrative reinforcing the patriarchal values rather powerfully. It might be of some interest to note that there are similar ballads and folktales in eastern Europe and other parts of India as well, which open up the questions about how pervasive and insidious such practices were, and how entrenched the patriarchal values were.

**Keywords:** *kulhs*, irrigation, woman sacrifice, waterways, state formation, rituals, clan, honor-killing.

## Introduction

In most of the erstwhile western Himalayan states, the new-year begins in the month of *Chait*, March-April, according to the lunar reckoning. It was, however, a taboo to take the name of the month before it was announced by the low caste *Dumna* artisans, who were the basket-makers. The *Dumna*, also called *Dom*, were bound by the reciprocal *jajmani* relations with the village, whereby they received a fixed amount of grain at the end of each harvest for a customary/agreed amount of goods and services provided to each household. They also doubled up as musicians (*dholaru*, or those who beat the *dhola*-drum), singing the marriage of Siva and Gauran. While the man played on the drum, usually the husband-wife duo sang and announced the beginning of spring to their landed patrons. It was believed that Siva then ascended to the higher mountains, to return again in winter, along with his bride Gauri. It was only after cementing the bond between the divine couple towards the end of this marriage song, that the name of the month, *Chait*, was announced. The *jajman* made a donation or *dana* of grain to the *Dumna*, who offered in return the leaves of *drub*-grass as token of good wishes for the upcoming year. Thereafter, the *dholaru* sang the *kulh*, the heart-rending ballads of walled-up wife—women who were entombed alive at the foot of a waterway—and other ballads of women’s death at the hands of, or behest of Rajput-warrior patriarchs.

The earliest available evidence about the *Dumna* singers in the western Himalayas is a ca.1735-40 painted narrative from Guler. In the second of the two painted pages of the “ballad of the princess and the drummer boy” (Acc. Nos. 172 and 173), one can see the *Dumna* husband-wife duo singing the ballad to the raja of Guler (Figure 1). While the actual ballad is lost (it is no longer sung and there is no written documentation), the painted narrative gives us the outline of the story. It is a story of the renegade Rajput princess who fell in love with the low-caste drummer boy, and eloped with him. The painter likely mirrored the narrative structure of the ballad. Thus, in the first painting (Figure 2), the narrative runs over three time frames: first, the drummer boy, belonging to the low unclean-caste, sees the princess bathing, is enamored and they fall in love; second, the discovery of elopement is made, when the unslept bed is found; and, third, the lovers are hounded and chased by the Gaddi army of hardy mountain shepherds.

The narrative is continued in the next painting which shows the renegade princess and the daring low-caste drummer boy hacked by the ferocious Gaddis (Figure 1). Like this painted reference, the *Dumnas* sang other ballads in which women were killed by Rajput patriarchs, the most

prominent being the ballads of the walled-up wife.<sup>1</sup> Such ballads, sung by the *Dumnas*, give us a graphic depiction of gender prejudice, notions of honor that were tied to the body of woman and resulted in violent death, or the merciless ‘honor-killing’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, such ballads are not only about woman’s death, but also how death is turned into an event that enunciates/upholds normative values to define patriarchy: a pervasive control over not only women’s body, sexuality, and life, but also death. The dramatization of death as a spectacle is explicit in the ballads of walled-up wife, wherein death as ‘sacrifice’ plays pivotal role in state-formation, in redefining honor, in achieving upwards social mobility, and obliquely pronouncing the evolving Rajput-warrior perceptions of gender—both femininity and masculinity.

In this paper, we chart the development of the ballad of ‘walled-up wife’ from a simple narration of the entombment of woman at the foot of a waterway by the local Rajput chieftain (the frame-story) to later additions that dramatize the immurement at each subsequent retelling, spread over chronological and across geographical expanse. We consider these additions, resulting in variants of this ballad, to pinpoint how small changes in the body of the text firmed-up over time to make a powerful meta-narrative that is sung today across the larger cultural space of western Himalayas.<sup>3</sup> Since women were sacrificed<sup>4</sup> to ensure steady water supply to the larger population, and this is the recurring theme of all the ballads discussed below, we will examine briefly the history and significance of these waterways and the concept of sacrifice generally associated with water, discussed in the second section of this paper. Tangentially, we hope to demonstrate how the body of sacrificed women itself becomes a metaphor for water-bodies (and vice-versa), and the act of sacrifice connotes not only control over water, which is a scarce resource in the hills, but also over the bodies of women.

The focus of the paper is not only on narrative representations. Rather, we presume that like all narratives these ballads too are rooted in specific historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. We ask, therefore, what ideological goals and rhetorical strategies may have contributed to representations within the cultural reality of the narrators and audience. Also, how does this exceptional portrayal of entombment function within the ‘unified narrative’ and its overall conceptualization of women, not only the walled-up wife? Crucial to understanding these issues are the dominant gender discourses that were prevalent in the culture-scapes in which these ballads were formed. While recounting some of these ballads, therefore, we will analyze the historical trajectory of their progression as a genre, which eventually binds them as a meta-narrative





Figure 1. Princess and the Drummer Boy. [ca. 1730-40]. Acc no. 173. Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.



Figure 2. Princess and the Drummer Boy. [ca. 1730-40]. Acc no. 172. Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.

reinforcing the patriarchal values rather powerfully. It might be of some interest to note that there are similar ballads and folktales in eastern Europe and other parts of India as well, which opens up the question about how pervasive such practices were, and inevitably, how entrenched the patriarchal values were.

### The Frame-story

There is a 10th century CE legend that goes back to the founding of Chamba-Town. The ruler of Chamba, Sahila Varman, tried to construct a water-way from the nearby Sarohta stream to supply water to this township. But he was unsuccessful. He was advised to offer a sacrifice of his son, or his queen (Hutchison and Vogel 1933: 283). According to another version, which reverberates throughout the Chamba and Kangra hills, the king or his *brahman* priest had a dream in which he was directed to sacrifice “the one his heart loves best”. Being an heir, the son could not be sacrificed, so his mother was substituted (Vogel 1911: 163). On the appointed day, she was buried alive at the mouth of the stream. Immediately after her burial, it is said that “the water began to flow and has ever since flowed abundantly” (Hutchison and Vogel 1933: 284). Even today, the legend is sung in the rainy season by the local bards. In one such song, the bards pray for water before the sacrifice is made in an elegy, sung as *Sukarat* (the night of atonement):

O, brother clouds, rain your fill  
In the country of the queen of Chamba.  
How shall I rain, the sky  
Is full of twinkling stars?

After the sacrifice was made, it goes like this:

From where came these black clouds,  
From where the rain, O clouds.  
From the heat of heart  
Black clouds were formed,  
Tears ushering from two eyes  
Converted into rain (Sharma 1991: 58).

Similarly, consider the variant of this song, sung during the times of *Sukarat* performance. This song is sung as a joyous song where *Sukarat* is taken to mean ‘the night of happiness’ (at getting water). However, this song simulta-

neously conjures the mood of sadness and is also rendered as ‘atonement for the sacrifice’ made by the queen:

Come for the night of atonement, O girls, O birds,  
(*kudiyo, chiddiyo*)

Tonight we grieve at the courtyard of the raja of  
Chamba (*raje de dehre*)...

Come for the day of happiness

At the mouth of the new water-spring (*nahauna*).

How can we drink the cool water

Without tears in our eyes?

We live by feeling the tears in your eyes (*tere naina  
heri heri jeena*).

So comes the day of happiness, O girls, O birds...

The sacrifice was sanctified and a *mela* (fair) held in commemoration ever since (Sharma 2001: 46-47; Hutchison and Vogel: 283-284). Over a period, Suhi (literally, the red, the bride) metamorphosed into a deity, Sati—the consort of Siva who immolated in Daksa’s sacrifice to protest against the ill-treatment meted out to her husband. Legend has it that Suhi was buried while suckling her infant boy, the successor to the royal throne named Yugakara Varman (r. 940-960 CE). In the only inscription where Yugakara mentions his parents, he names his mother as Nenna Devi (Vogel 1911: 159-164). There is, however, no textual allusion to the sacrifice; nor is it mentioned in the copious royal genealogy, which was compiled in the mid-17th century (Sharma 2009: 65-72). Incidentally, the word Suhi means “progenitor”, which is perhaps a later gloss; and as such, Suhi grants children to women, is exhorted as the protective deity of the new born and young, and guards against witchcraft and evil influences. A shrine was built to her in the periphery of the town. Perhaps it was not as frequented because only towards the end of the 18th century were the steps to the shrine constructed by rani Sharda, the wife of raja Ajit Singh (r.1794-1808) (CDG 1910: 74). The shrine of Suhi is, however, out of bounds for men. It is a sanctuary, as it were, for women: the solidarity of crying, wailing women who recall her sacrifice, who celebrate her valor, and who dance in her honor—a dance of frenzy, trance and ultimately a dance that understands and shares the pain of womanhood (Sharma 2009: 363-367).

Traditionally, the festivities at the shrine began after Suhi was worshipped and commemorated by the daughter of the reigning raja, both in the personal shrine in the palace and at the shrine built on the site of live-entombment, overlooking Chamba-Town. The silver mask (*mohra*, the com-



memorative icon) was then brought from the palace to the temple, which houses the flat stone at the site of burial, in a procession to begin the ceremonial. Then the *nahun* (holy-dip) takes place. The holy-dip is not typical of this shrine only, but is a common spring celebration associated with water bodies, like lakes (*dala*), and waterfalls throughout the western Himalayan hills. Earlier, caste considerations were also kept in mind while formalizing a schedule for this fair. The first five days of the second-half of *Chait* were reserved for the lower castes to pay their obeisance; then, the maidens, for the next five days; and finally, the women of the upper castes for the last five.<sup>5</sup> The girls usually sang the songs of *Sukarat* from the 21st day of *Chait* to the beginning of *Vaisakha* at this shrine, offering vermillion, flowers, pendants, *trisula* (tridents) and pennants (Singh 2003: 72-79).

There is, however, a parallel legend whereby the sacrificial complex is extended to the daughter of the raja, named Champavati, after whom the town was allegedly named. According to the myth of Champavati (literally, the daughter of Chamba), she was of religious disposition and used to visit Charpatnath, the paradigmatic Siddha associated with Chamba according to the royal *vamsavali* (genealogy) that was compiled in the mid-17th century. Somehow, the raja became suspicious of an illicit relationship between the two and once followed her with a sword drawn in his hand. On entering the room, however, he found it empty and heard a voice stating that the child “had been taken from him as a punishment” for unfounded suspicion. Consequently, the raja erected a temple in her memory, the shrine of Campavati or Camasani, modeled as goddess Mahisamardini—the slayer of the buffalo-headed demon. This is regarded as the family shrine of the Chamba rajas, where a fair is held from the first of *Vaisakha* to the twenty first (CDG 1910: 74-75), immediately after the fair of Suhi. The royal genealogy, though silent on this incident, refers to the foundation of the town and to the ritual sacrifice of a buffalo that was made on this occasion (vs. 69-70).

...the king [SahilaVarman] defeated the *ksatriyas* [of the opposite camp] in battle and founded on the banks of the *Iravati* [river Ravi] the town of Campa, which was before adorned with *campaka* trees and guarded by the goddess Campavati, having slain the buffalo and others (Vogel 1911: 92-93).

Even if it is difficult to harmonize these two legends, which are not corroborated by any textual evidence, they do however point to the significance of feminine sacrifice in early state formation. How women’s bodies are associated with water and what role this plays in the formation and sustenance of the state would be therefore worth exploring.

## **Kulh: The State, Waterways and Ritual Sacrifice**

The ballad of Suhi, irrespective of its historical veracity, suggests the queen’s sacrifice played an important role in the early state formation of Chamba by providing a steady water supply to the town. Such ballads of married women’s sacrifice to gain water were called *Kulh*, a word that literally means ‘waterway.’ These songs are about the waterways, an organic conception, whose body is sustained by the live entombment of women. Just as the tomb represents the confinement of woman, her body is represented by the flowing water, which nurtures the fields but is controlled within the banks of the waterway. Not all the waterways, however, were sustained on the edifice of woman-sacrifice. The sacrifice was provided in only the prominent ones, those that proved difficult to build or challenged the skills of excavators and engineers. These sacrifices were then commemorated in song by the Dumna in the entire area through which the waterway traversed.

In the Kangra valley, these waterways (*kulh*) were the agriculturists’ lifeline, irrigating the paddy fields. Each of these waterways started at a higher altitude from that of the major river and ran across the breadth of the valley (Baker 2005). The construction of these waterways was an arduous task, usually accomplished by *corvée/forced-labor* (*Begar*). For instance, the local people of Palam or the rice producing areas recall that the construction of the Neugal-river waterway, the ‘Rani *Kulh*,’ lasted for twelve years—an imaginary time frame for the long duration commonly prevalent in the western Himalayan hills. Irrespective of the duration, the hardship was immense, so much so that there is a saying amongst the Gaddi shepherds that “the forced labor [where only coarse millets, *mandala*, were provided for meals] fragmented the families and destroyed homes” (*Mandala di begari/ ditte ghar-bar ujari*).

Though the region had abundant river resources, the steep gradient of the terrain however made it difficult to harness this resource for irrigation and drinking purposes. Thus in the areas of settlement, which were traditionally at a higher elevation than the water table, there was little or no water. These water resources were, therefore, stringently regulated and controlled. The state took an initiative by constructing wells, fountains and water-tanks, as well as ponds and gravity flow canals—*kulhs*—for the purposes of irrigation. Indicative of the scant resources are the numerous fountain-stones dedicated to the water deity, Varuna, particularly between 1050 and 1250 CE. These also impacted social values, as the construction of such ponds, tanks, cisterns, fountains, and springs earned their commissioners’ merit and ensured them of a place in heaven (*devaloka* or the world of gods) (Sharma 2009: 40).

The economy was further controlled by the ruler exercising his rights over “trees, pastures, forests, mines, stone-quarries; water-channels for both irrigation and setting up water-mills” (*gharata*) (Sharma 2009: 48). By 1874, the titles for streams too were defined, as also the “permissions” for fishing or setting up of “chip or fish-weirs” (Lyall 1874: 47). Control was, moreover, exercised by clearly enunciating the rights of usage and evolving fiscal measures to sustain such usage. Therefore, when land-grants were made, they clearly spelled out the concomitant rights. For instance, a land-grant comprised the rights to “grass, grazing and pasture-ground, together with fruit-trees and with the water-courses and channels (*kohlīka*)....” (Sharma 2009: 27).

Like in Chamba, the state in Kangra too took initiative in constructing such waterways. The long waterways in Kangra were constructed by the members of the Katoch dynasty in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries (Baker 1997: 200). There is, however, no instance of sacrifice of a Katoch queen. According to the 1915 document, *Riwaj-i-Abpashi* (“Book of Irrigation Customs,” 1916), the two of the largest waterways, the ‘Dewan Chand *Kulh*’ and ‘Kirpal Chand *Kulh*’ were constructed in 1690-97, and respectively measured about 25 and 33 kilometers in length. Similarly, the queen of Ghamand Chand got constructed a 12 km long waterway, called ‘Rani-*Kulh*’, that irrigated about 550 hectares of land. Barnes, in 1852, observed that Kirpal Chand sponsored the *kulh*’s construction because he was childless and desired to undertake a public works project to perpetuate his name—a theme that finds resonance with the construction of fountains in early Chamba. Barnes also mentions that Kirpal Chand was “munificent” in his “liberality to the people employed,” a statement that runs counter to the Gaddi-shepherds’ memory of such projects where they considered themselves lucky if they survived the construction<sup>6</sup> (1852: 111).

According to the *Riwaj-i-Abpashi*, there were more than 715 *kulh* that irrigated multiple villages; and about 2,500 *kulh* that irrigated single villages by 1915. More than 30,000 hectares of land was thus irrigated by these waterways. In fact, between 1850 and 1890, 146 acres of uncultivated area was converted into agriculture and the renewed irrigation needs were either met by extending the existing waterways or constructing new ones (O’Brien 1890: 4). Forty-one new waterways were constructed between 1850 and 1916 (Baker 2001: 55). One may, however, bear in mind that even if the longish and difficult waterways were constructed by the state—some of these bear the sacrificial legend—they only make about 3% of the total waterways constructed (19 *kulh* as against 549 constructed by the non-state agents in Kangra and Palampur region according to the *Riwaj-i-Abpashi*). Resultantly, the association of the liberal state, as perhaps a context to the sacrificial legend might suggest, must not be

blown out of proportion. As we shall see, these legends had a conspicuous social role to play in the upward mobility of clans within the larger Rajput hierarchy, as also in patriarchal aggrandizement.

The construction and sustenance of the waterways was an arduous job. For example, the *kulh* that was built by the queen of Ghamand Chand of Kangra (r. 1750-1775) was destroyed by floods around 1798-1802. Subsequently, a rani of Sansar Chand offered to sponsor the reconstruction of the waterway on the condition that village Saloh, which was irrigated by this *kulh*, agreed to remit Rs. 1,400 annually toward the support of the Narbadeshwar temple in Tira-Sujanpur (built ca. 1802), the seat of Sansar Chand’s political power and the center from whence he ruled (Middleton 1919). Such negotiations underline the necessity and economic dimension of the *kulh*, as also a way to punish or soften the inimical people and territories. In this context, the significance of these waterways in the lives of people must be emphasized. They not only irrigated the fields, but also provided power for the flour mills (*gharata*) in the villages. The *kulh* were the lifeline of the villagers for all domestic chores, except for drinking and cooking purposes.

Barnes also observed that the smaller canals, serving a group of four to five villages, were constructed by the villagers themselves and were facilitated by the local chieftains, usually the kin of the raja or his courtiers (1852: 166). These *kulh* were regulated and maintained by the villagers themselves. Usually, every village appointed a supervisor (*kohli*), who was responsible for organizing the maintenance work, regulation and distribution of supply particularly during the paddy sowing season, patrolling the course of the canal and plugging leakages, acting against theft and pilferage. The maintenance work was undertaken by the villagers who contributed their services according to an agreed upon roster (Barnes 1852: 167). The bigger projects were, however, initiated by the state. For instance, in order to take the water to Haripur, the waterway had to be cut through limestone hills, which was a difficult task. The waterway eventually irrigated more than 15 villages. It is with the body of waterways of such dimensions, and particularly those that provided such challenges, that the woman-sacrificial legends are associated. Similarly, the Sapparhul-waterway could only be accomplished with the help of local chieftains (who sacrificed one of their daughters-in-law at the mouth of the dam) as it was cut through the rocky surface (*sappar*) in the Palampur-Kharot region. Such *kulh* also required larger supervision and were staffed, as in the case of Haripur *kulh*, by a superintendent, eight deputies (*batwal*), and eight excavators (*beldar*). In each of the 15 villages, however, the *kolhi* was responsible and coordinated with the above officials. The people were taxed according



to the water consumed, or the size of their landholding. The money thus raised helped in the payment of the supervisory and maintenance staff, while the remainder was used for the upkeep of the canal (Barnes 1852: 168-70).

In order to keep the waterways standing, the people offered a prayer ritual or *puja*, accompanied by animal-sacrifice. The animal-sacrifice (*bali*) was made to ensure that adequate water flowed into the waterway during the dry season before the onset of the monsoon and that its walls will hold during the rains. The object of devotion in most cases was the guardian deity, the *mata* (goddess) of the *kulh*. Baker, during the course of his fieldwork in Kangra in the 1990s, observed that the offerings consisted of clothes (*chadar* and *choli*) and a red-flag, along with vermilion, incense and oil-lamps (2001: 71). Such worship is homologous to and perhaps modeled after the early-medieval practices mentioned in the *Kashmiri Nilamata Purana*, wherein the birthday (*Vitastajanamadivasam*) of the river *Vitasta* (Jehlam) is celebrated, as a veritable purifying goddess akin to Ganga. The river was propitiated by offering perfumes, garlands, eatables, earthen-lamps, flags, red threads, bangles, various fruits, offering 'gratifying fires' (*yajnas*) and donations made to *brahmanas* (Sharma 2008: 137-138).

While the *puja*, ritual propitiation, at the mouth of the smaller waterways was simple, the larger *kulh* required the substantive propitiation of presiding deities, particularly those where a woman was believed to have been sacrificed (*bala*). A *mela* (fair) was held at the mouth of such waterways, where a shrine in the honor of the 'walled-up' was usually built. In 1852, for instance, Barnes observed that at the beginning of the rainy season, a fair was held at the mouth of such a waterway wherein five heads of animals were offered as *bali* or sacrifice, perhaps a symbolic recapitulation and projection of the original female-sacrifice. These five offerings consisted of a male-buffalo, a goat, a ram, and a cock, along with a pitcher of wine. These offerings were then distributed among the supervisory staff of the *kulh*. The excavators, usually the members of the ritually unclean castes, had a hereditary claim over the buffalo; the deputies took the ram, the cock, and the wine; while the goat was the prerequisite of the superintendent (1852: 168-70).

The concept of sacrifice to the guardian deity of the waterways, however, relates back to the foundation of Chamba-Town. Not only were the guardian deities of the waterways worshipped annually, but also the water deity Varuna was propitiated by offering a buffalo-sacrifice. For instance, Chamba-Town celebrated the *Minjar Mela*, held on the third Sunday of the rainy month *Savan*. A critical ceremony of the *mela* was an offering of a male-buffalo as a sacrifice to the river deity, Varuna, which was thrown alive into the river

Ravi. Hutchison observed the ceremony in 1910:

The Raja gives the signal by throwing into the river a coconut, a rupee, *drub* grass, and some flowers, and thereupon the live buffalo is pushed into the flood. The Raja throws his *minjar* (a silk tassel) in after the buffalo and all the people follow his example...[the buffalo is] carried away and drowned, the event is regarded as propitious, the sacrifice having been accepted. If it crosses the river and gets out on the other bank, this also is propitious—the sins of the town having been transferred...but if it emerges on the same side, coming evil is portended to the state (CDG 1910: 214-15).

The cases of the walled-up wife in the western Himalayas too may be seen within this larger complex of rituals and belief in *bali* (sacrifice).

What is also significant is to remind ourselves how waterways became symbolic of the feminine body. This body is sought to be confined and controlled, just as water is harnessed and controlled, yet exhorted for nurturance: for irrigation and drinking, for children and protection. How interesting that the woman sacrificed at the mouth of the waterway in turn is worshipped and annually offered an animal sacrifice in order to keep it humored, and thus to receive its benediction in ever flowing water.

### Ballad Variants and Family Honor

It is vital to understand that the evolution of the *kulh* singing genre is intrinsically tied to notions of honor and mobility within larger Rajput clans. We must also contextualize these ballads in the social ambitions of local chieftains claiming Rajput-warrior norms, inspired by and emulating the Rajput clans of Rajasthan. It would be worthwhile to note how these western Himalayan states, struggling against the hegemony of the Mughal Empire in the 16-17th centuries, consciously emulated and borrowed from the north-Indian polity, and appropriated the glorified Rajput-warrior norms of valor and kingship. It may be observed that in the post-15th century Chamba inscriptions, and later in the mid-17th century genealogy that was inspired by Mewar, a conscious effort was made to successfully bring about this transition. The local roots were thus shed and eventually the Rajput epithet of 'Singh' (literally, the lion) was added, replacing the earlier clan names. Genealogical claims were made, associating the ruling clan with the solar or lunar Rajput clans (Sharma 2009: 65-72). The local warlords, the Ranas in particular, also competed to effect such transitions that provided upward mobility within the larger Rajput clans and inner caste hierarchies, which had a bearing on matrimonial relations as well. Such mechanisms resulted

in the construction of, or redefinition of gender, of both femininities and masculinities, as socially produced embodiments made distinct by attitudes, mannerisms, speech, gestures, and interactions. Such constructions are stark, not only in relation to ‘females’ but also in relation to other males.<sup>7</sup> There is, thus, a pronounced ‘feudal’ emphasis on the chauvinistic, valorous, and virile (incidentally both represented by word *vir-ya*) warrior living and fighting for the clan and obeying the patriarch, his personal emotions and attachments notwithstanding. Within the larger clan, family-honor took precedence and women were the carriers and symbols of this honor. They were confined, immobilized and protected, even if derided or killed within the household walls. Thus, the son-of-the-family would not demur in either laying down his life or that of his wife should the state, clan or patriarch so demand. From the masculine perspective, therefore, bricking alive the wife, as in the *kulh* legends, was projected as an honorable deed that augmented the honor of the family and clan. In the commemoration of sacrifice therefore, the family or clan located its glory and honor.

Rajput women too were indoctrinated and raised in the compelling patriarchal values of honor, family, clanship, and kinship (Parry 1979); a gendered construction of femininities, distinct from other females. Subordination and curbs placed on their sexuality, mobility, and choices were internalized. Marriage thus was an arrangement contracted by the patriarch, where the status of wife-takers took precedence over that of the wife-givers, also because of the rule of hyper-gamy (girls marrying into a family higher in status than that of their parents). Obviously, the women as well were expected to lay down their lives to uphold the honor of the family, clan, or state, raised as they were with the warrior-Rajput tales of death for honor and prestige, the tales of *Jauhar*: women immolating themselves collectively and safeguarding ‘honor’ at the prospect of defeat, rather than being at the enemy’s mercy; even Sati-immolation on the funeral pyre of husband. Such incidents kept on growing as the Rajput clan-based states gained dominance in north India. Like the immolated Sati, the walled-up wife was also called Sati, who gave up life for the honor of family and clan, just like the woman embracing death at the pyre of the deceased husband. It is in the body of women—hence ritual embodiment by walling-up or immolation—that the conception of honor was located. Thus, both events were made into a grand spectacle, perpetually commemorated in edifices, ballads, and rituals.

In the remainder of this section, we will chart chronologically the evolution of these by analyzing the textual strategies that were used in developing the structure of the ballad. The Suhi ballad, which is a simple narration of the entombment of the queen at the mouth of a waterway, is the earliest

known song which provides the frame-story for the subsequent narrations. The subsequent ballads worked upon this story and embellished it to bring about dramatic affects to the story. The evolution thereafter, as discussed below, may be seen in the late-17th century ballad of the Gaddi shepherds, followed by variants from the 18th century Guler’s *Rulahan-di-kulh* and the late-19th century ballad of Chari-Gharoh, and its variants, such as the *Sapparuhl*.

Not far from Chamba, the Gaddi shepherds sing a legend bemoaning the forcible sacrifice of a Gaddi woman by the local chieftain, the Rana of Chanair, to ensure a steady supply of water to his principality. As this area was opened to agriculture only after the 1650s, this composition may be safely dated to no earlier than 1650. This ballad seems to build upon the straightforward account of the Chamba burial, by adding to its narrative structure the heightened emotions of immurement by dramatically recounting the piecemeal bricking of each body-part. The strategy of piecemeal bricking—feet, waist, breast, face, eyes—brings the enormity of sacrifice and the extent of pain and torture involved to the forefront, thereby taking the performance of the ballad to an altogether different scale. The aim is to get the singers and audience sympathetically involved with the subject, as if living through and witnessing the pain of being bricked-up alive. Significantly, within the larger structure of this ballad, the emotional play of piecemeal immurement may also be conceived as a part of protest, which is clearly manifest in the refrain line: “All have the right to live, my brother/ All have!” (*Sabhan ne jina bahi Ranyo/ Sabhan ne*)

We build a new water stream,  
Your good days end;  
We build a new water stream,  
The Rana wants you to dance.  
All have the right to live, my brothers,  
All have!

Bury my entire body, O brother Rana,  
But please,  
Do not bury my feet in stones.  
On this path my brothers may come,  
They shall touch my feet.  
All have the right to live, my brothers,  
All have!

Bury my entire body, O brother Rana,  
 But please,  
 Do not bury my breasts in stones.  
 On this path my son might come,  
 He will need my milk.  
 All have the right to live, my brothers,  
 All have!

Bury my entire body, O brother Rana,  
 But please,  
 Do not bury my tongue in stones.  
 On this path my soul-mate may come,  
 To him I will tell my joys and sorrow.  
 All have the right to live, my brothers,  
 All have!

Bury my entire body, O brother Rana,  
 But please,  
 Do not bury my eyes in stones.  
 On this path my parents may come,  
 I want to see them one last time.  
 All have the right to live, my brothers,  
 All have! (Sharma 1991: 58-59)

Invariably, at the mouth of a major waterway, as evident in the above legend as well, the construction was sustained by bricking a woman alive as *bala* (sacrifice).<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice was then commemorated in Chait, a time when these waterways were mended before the beginning of the summer harvest season, followed by the sowing of paddy in Kangra. In the singing and transmission of these ballads, perhaps, one may also perceive the poignant echo of protest, more so, as the *kulh* are not written but orally transmitted by the low caste artisan-singers, the Dumna. But there are abridged *kulhs* also, called *Nidhuls* (literally, that which does not flow!), which are sung by the misty eyed kinsmen of the sacrificed woman on special clan/family occasions, as is the case with the Gaddi ballad produced above, or the Rajputs of Guler or Chari-Gharoh singing the legend of *Rulahan-kulh* or the *Gajj-kulh*, the other two areas of such sacrifices. In both these ballad 'frames' (the *kulh* and *nidhulh*), however, one can discern

a shift in the focus of the narrative that moves in a subtle and unobtrusive manner to become a patriarchal text, invoking different questions regarding gender, the metonymic perceptions of the feminine body and the responsibilities or the valorization of masculinity, as we shall discuss later.

Let me first recount the *nidhulh* or the shorter version from Guler (approximately dated to ca. 1780-1800), which adds further to the evolution of the *kulh* genre by bringing in directly the agency of family to the structure of the lore. In this *kulh*, the Rana ordered his daughter-in-law to be immured at the construction of the Rulah-di-kulh waterway. This ballad is also significant because unlike the other two examples from Chamba, where the husband is instrumental in the sacrifice—or in Brahmaur, where the chieftain is responsible for sacrificing his subject—the father-in-law in this ballad orders his daughter-in-law to be immured while the husband's voice is conspicuously absent. This would be a strategy whereby the patriarch decided the structures of everyday life, in as much about death, without questions being raised against him by men or women, just like the ruler of the patrimony or the state. Such nuances of power relationships (command and obedience complex) help us in relocating the notions of patriarchy as an engendering ideology that fashions and defines femininity. Such notions are not static, but rather dynamic. By invoking dynamism within the larger patriarchal structures, one is emphasizing the shifting nature of gendered positions and therefore the relationship of power as well. Let us, however, first turn to the legend of the *Rulahan-di-kulh*:

The sleeping (*sutte ta*) Rana has a vision

That Rulah-di-kulh seeks a human-sacrifice (*bala*).

The enormity of sacrifice is underpinned by using the masculine form of word for sacrifice, *bala*, in the body of song. At the same time, a fine distinction between the bloody animal sacrifice, called *bali*, and bloodless human-sacrifice is also made by such linguistic reflection. It is interesting to observe how the patriarchal underpinning of such songs worked in the western Himalayas, wherein the enormity of feminine sacrifice is highlighted by masculinising the word. The song however continues:

In the middle of that very night

The Rana issues a decree (*hokum*). He dispatches his messengers (*pheriya*),

That the *jatra* (pilgrimage-procession) reaches Rulah-di-kulh.

Having written a missive (*parwana*), the father-in-law (*Sauhre*)

Sends for his son's wife (*Nuhan*).

The *jatra* of Rulah-di-kulh has begun.

The fact that the pilgrimage procession 'has' reached the site is an interesting textual strategy of recounting the sacrifice as if the sacrificed is actually re-living and participating in a procession set out in her honor. This certainly is a radical evolution from the earlier types of *kulh* narrations in Chamba and Brahmaur. The subsequent narrations should be seen, therefore, from this vantage point, of the foreknowledge of the event: where she is addressing the birds; goes to fetch water when in a hurry to leave for her husband's house; and the ironical hope of publically talking to her husband who fails to protect her. Such sarcasm, at a time when genders were not only segregated but public exhibition of affection was also censured and strongly castigated, subtly sheaths the protest that is mutely couched in these ballads. The protest is not so muted, however, when it is pronounced that the husband will find another wife, but the parents will not get back their daughter.

Sitting by the side of an earthen-lamp (*diye-di loi*)

The young-woman reads the paper (*kagad*),

Tears start flowing unceasingly from her eyes  
(*naina ta chham chham roi*).

Picking up the pitcher (*ghadolu*) the young-girl  
(*gori*) goes to fetch water

The bitter-voiced enemy (*bairi*) caws atop the tree.

Why do you cry hoarse, O bird of the forest (*bane dai penthiya*),

I have indeed received the letter (*da likhya*)

That my father-in-law wrote.

Hand me, O mother, the clothes that cover my body  
(*ange diya lidayan*)

The pilgrimage-procession has reached Rulah-di-kulh.

Do not leave us today, O my eldest daughter (*jethiye dhiye*),

Journey on the day-of-Mars (*Mangalwar*) brings hardships (*karda*).

Had my mother-in-law (*Sassu*) written the letter,

I would have said no right away (*maudi phejdi*);

How can I say no to that which (*vo kiyan*)

My father-in-law has ordered (*modana*).

The four-litter bearers (*charan-kaharan*) carry the palanquin (*dola pidiya*)

Inside the young-girl (*roi vo rehiyan*) cries unceasingly...

Brick my legs (*lattan*), brick my waist (*dhikkan*),

But, do not hurt my shoulders (*mundheyan*), O brothers;

On this way my parents (*mapeyan*) shall come

Let me put [my] arms (*bahiyeen*) around their necks (*galle*) before departing.

Brick my waist (*lakke*), brick my shoulders,

But, do not hurt my face, O brothers;

On this way my husband (*kandhe*) might come

Let us talk to each other before departing (*jandiya bar*).

Now flow to the brim (*bhari bhari vageyan*), O sister rivulet,

Flow brisk, O my nemesis (*balla*), O Rulah-di-kulh,

The water-canal has got its sacrifice!

Why do you cry, O birds of forest (*bane de penthiyo*)

Drink your fill in the Rulah-di-kulh.

The father-in-law shall find many wives for his son,

The mother and father shall not get their daughter back.

The parents will not get their daughter back.

All the *kulh* ballads conclude in a sacrifice and deification of the sacrificed, except the one at Chari-Gharoh, which is also the most recent, the incident having taken place around 1870-90 (removed by four generations from today). In this *Gajj-kulh* legend, translated by Kirin Narayan (1996: 109-20; Vyathith 1980: 38-49), a plot of retribution is added. The brother of the walled-up woman kills her husband and father-in-law to avenge the 'murder' of his sister. This



ballad, with an added plot of retribution, would form the third frame-story in the *kulh* ballad genre. This frame-story ends in the cremation of the 'victim', a radical departure from earlier legends in which the 'sacrificed' is denied death-rites. Rather, the sacrificed is a sort of living-dead/dead-living, who has been metamorphosed into the tutelary deity of the waterway.

Of all the ballad forms, this ballad of *Gajj-kulh* is the most evolved. Structurally, the plot consists of a solid beginning, an objective, actions leading to a climax, and then resolution, which is retribution in this case. Yet, it is the most patriarchal of all the ballads, set as it is against the backdrop of core Rajput values and the social-arrangement of male-honor, female seclusion, village and clan exogamy, and hypergamous caste endogamy (Narayan 1996: 110). These ideas are also mirrored in its variants, like the *Sapparuhl*. The variants, without the plot of retribution, deliver the patriarchal message of the text even more forcefully. In the opening lines of this ballad, perhaps the most trenchant comment on patriarchy is made in the abject demeaning of femininity, so much so that the woman—who was eventually bricked—is treated as a crass 'object' that is valued lower than everyday household objects. After it was understood that a 'sacrifice' was required to sustain the construction of the waterway, though who was to be sacrificed was not yet decided, it was suggested that a cat, a broom, a measure for grain, a pumpkin or a horse, a grandson, or a daughter may be sacrificed. Negating all these as indispensable, it was decided that the daughter-in-law would be sacrificed. The reasons given for not sacrificing other objects of daily use, or vegetables or animals are also significant. Not only do they tell us about the belief system that is invoked in augury, but also of the textual strategy around which this narrative is cleverly weaved. Thus, one is reminded that killing a cat carried the shame of "murder" that affected seven generations, while the 'broom' constituted the "household's good fortune" that cannot be squandered away; the weighted-measure, similarly, was the "household's storekeeper", while pumpkin its largest fruit; horse was the mount, son/grandson were the future rulers, and the (the unmarried, still living with parents) daughter was the honor of the family. Thus, by way of negation, only the daughter-in-law or wife was dispensable. Such was her shame. She is objectified to an extent that even an everyday consumable, like a pumpkin, has precedence over her. Such crass objectification not only provides a revealing insight into how gender relations were constituted, but also about how sexualities and reproduction were controlled, exhibiting the extent of patriarchal dominance in the gross demeaning of womanhood.<sup>9</sup>

The ballad, nonetheless, discretely suggests that the walling-up was done with the tacit permission of the sacrificed. She worshipped the waterway, whose guardian deity she would become. Her head was shaved off, just like an ascetic. She was ritually purified before the sacrifice. Yet after her piecemeal immurement—the bricking of each body-part invoking a particular emotion—she casts a curse on her husband's country. As is the case with chieftaincy, clan and country are synonymous. She, moreover, blesses her father's clan. The honor of natal kin, clan, and family also rests on her reputation for valor and obedience. By sacrificing herself she not only augmented the honor of the clan or family that she got married into, she also became an exemplar for the natal clan. This act, thereof, would raise their apparent status and political prestige.

As you brick me up, my brothers, I give you a  
mighty curse.

In my father-in-law's country, may just  
Weed and intoxicants grow.

In my father's country, may the finest rice grow  
(Narayan 1996: 116).

The curse, however, is a subtle protest, added to the body of the text, which prepares the audience for an anticipated revenge that is subsequently taken by her brother, who avenges his sister by killing both her father-in-law and her husband (Narayan 1996: 117). The brother, in fact, is informed by the horrified son of his dead sister, Ghungharu. The furious uncle, as the ballad informs, raised the army of clansmen which raided and killed the perpetrators of the walling-up to avenge their sister's 'sacrifice'. Let me reproduce the protest lines, as translated by Narayan, from the Chari-Gharoh ballad.

He [her brother] rounded up a huge army and went  
to the waterway.

He rounded up a huge army and went to the town  
of Chari

He burned up the town of Chari.

He surrounded the waterway.

He killed the father-in-law, Jhaspat, at his sister's  
head.

He killed her husband, Sangara, at her feet.

Then he also killed the laborers.

And the four masons.

For two and a half moments, the blood flowed down  
the waterway.

After that, cold water flowed.

He dug out his sister and embraced her close.

'If I had known this was to happen I would never have  
allowed her to be married here.'

'Your revenge, O Sister, is still fresh.

Your revenge, O Sister, I have just taken'....  
(Narayan 1996: 117)

The way the protest is conceived is also indicative of the ties of honor and blood-feuds, which define the Rajput notion of valor and justice. Even today, the Rana-Rajputs of the Daadi-Sidhpur area of Dharmasala—whose ancestor was the *Gajj-kulh* victim—do not allow the *kulh* to be sung in their area. They do not, consequently, have matrimonial relations with the Rana families of Chari-Gharoh, the perpetrators of immurement.

### Conclusion: The Walled-Up Wife in Comparative Context

In 1599, Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, walled-up alive the love of his son's life. Anarkali was the slave girl whose love was reciprocated by prince Salim (later, Emperor Jahangir). Her father-in-law, the Emperor of India, did not approve of the debasing relationship and had her immured between two walls. She was, however, not deified like the walled-up wives of the western Himalayan ballads. Rather, she became an exemplar of the punishment to be meted out to a low status partner in an unequal relationship. This *qissa*-legend of dubious historicity, nevertheless, brings to the forefront the role of the state in controlling sexuality and death—reduced to a spectacle in which the state was the chief participant, just as in the ballad from Chamba. This spectacle was given a twist when sixteen years later the Emperor of India, Jahangir, allegedly built a magnificent mausoleum in the memory of Anarkali. On the sarcophagus he inscribed his name as '*majnun*'—the impassioned lover (Desoulières 2007: 67-98).

The twist is celebrated as a tale of unparalleled love of a prince for a commoner. While the plot of a prince standing up against his father and Emperor for his love is celebrated in numerous plays and movies, the live-entombment of

Anarkali slowly receded to the background. This, in fact, became the love-ballad of the prince. As has been suggested by Dundes (1996b), the perspectives from which the ballads of walled-up wife are presented and read influence our differing interpretations. In eastern Europe, similarly, the ballad is read from the perspective of the 'husband' (the hapless perpetrator), as the narrative focuses on the love of the master-craftsman Manole for his wife.

The eastern European versions of the walled-up wife are many, and spread over a large geographical expanse. There are about 700 versions in the Balkans alone, known variously as the 'building of Skadar' in Serbia, the 'Clement Mason' in Hungary, the 'bridge of Arta' in Greece, or 'master Manole' in Romania. The plot typically consists of the sacrifice of the first woman (always the wife) who happens to visit the building site of a fort, bridge or monastery. The sacrifice is made to ward off the impediments caused to the site of construction. Usually, the construction would be undone during the night, thus halting the progress of any work, which could be completed only by providing a human sacrifice.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in Arta it is the voice of bird that advises the necessity of a woman's sacrifice:

A bird appeared and sat on the opposite side of the  
river.

It did not sing like a bird, nor like a swallow,  
But it sang and spoke in a human voice:

"Unless you sacrifice a human, the bridge will  
never stand.

And don't you sacrifice an orphan, or a stranger, or  
a passer-by,

But only the chief mason's beautiful wife,

Who comes late in the afternoon and brings his  
supper" (Brewster: 41)

Similarly, in the Romanian legend of the chief-architect Manole of Curtea de Arges, the construction work could make little progress as the walls kept on crumbling. Eventually, he was advised in a dream that he should immure the first woman to visit the building site in the morning. Incidentally, he had to wall-up piecemeal his wife Ana, who was pregnant, just like the legend of the queen of Chamba. There is however a significant difference between the two. Unlike the European ballads where the entombment of women is congealed in solid structures (castle, bridge, monastery), the 'sacrificed' women in the western Himalayan ballads is associated with the harnessing of water bodies, a scarce resource for drinking and irrigation. As is the case with rivers, which are conceived in femi-

nine form and thus deified—the river goddesses Ganga, Sarasvati, Yamuna, for instance—these waterways are also homologous to the body of women sacrificed at the mouth of its creation. This relationship between the sacrificed woman and the waterway is firmed-up by metamorphosing the sacrificed-woman into “goddess”, invoking thereby the symbol of fertility. The sacrificed woman is therefore propitiated to seek children, just as her body, the waterway, nurtures the area by irrigation.

Further, there are analogous examples in Santal stories<sup>11</sup>, or such Kannada folklore as ‘the feast of the well’, according to which the sacrifice is carried out at the behest of the territorial chieftain. In most cases, except where the husband himself is the chieftain (as in the case of Chamba, for example), the voice of the husband is muted. In eastern Europe, the husband’s voice is muffled by using the strategy of coincidence (prior decision that the first to visit the site would be immured). That she ‘happens to be’ the wife of chief-architect is inadvertent; in the chronologically later ballads of the western Himalayas, this decision is rather unabashed and direct, carried through the agency of the victim’s father-in-law. In all these stories, the woman to be sacrificed has no alternative except to witness her slow entombment. In all these cases, the dead comes ‘alive’ through the structure it ‘guards’—the waterway, bridge, monastery, or castle. These comparative examples, nevertheless, illustrate just how patriarchal the state was. These ballads/stories/anecdotes also demonstrate how the cultural narratives of gendered dominance are created as a new signpost of tradition to draw sanction from and then to legitimate the absoluteness of patriarchal control.

The western Himalayan walled-up-wife ballads, unlike their counterparts in Europe, evolved over time into a meta-narrative that is sung to further entrench core patriarchal values by correlating honor and death. The obedient daughter-in-law who embraces death (like her husband in war?) becomes an exemplar of the heroic warrior tradition. She places the honor of her husband, family, and clan above her own life; she therefore becomes the honored one, the goddess. This ‘honor’, however, runs counter to our opening story in which the Rajput princess and her low-caste lover were hounded and murdered because the princess exercised her choice in contravention of the accepted practice whereby the patriarch arranged for her husband. Within the context of larger Rajput polity, marriage constituted an alliance that outlined the political proximity of the clan to other ruling clans. By exercising her choice, the princess therefore challenged the rights of family and clan. Her violent death sets an example, a terse reminder of the ‘punishment’ meted out to those who

contravene the patriarchal notions of honor and prestige, much like the present day honor or shame-killings. Both examples however share a common thread. As the feminine body was responsible for the growth of clan, it was the protected ‘site’ on which the purity of clan depended. The body of the woman, therefore, was perceived as belonging not to an ‘individual’, but rather as a host through which the communal rights of the family or clan were asserted. The body of the woman was thus tied to the honor of family and clan. Both these examples however establish the extent of patriarchal control over the bodies of women: their lives as well as their death.

These stories are not sung by women but are transmitted by the professional balladeers, the Dumna. Like the songs of immurement, the patriarch, as evident in the painting produced above (Figure 1), takes immense satisfaction in listening to the Dumna singing the ballad of the ‘princess and the drummer boy’, as well as in indoctrinating his young bewildered daughter, who sits with him listening to this story about the lore of ‘honor’ and ‘shame’. Ironically, in both the cases, death rather enhances the honor and prestige of the patriarch, who takes an inordinate pride in upholding and furthering the social norm—a norm that defines warrior-Rajput masculinity. In contradistinction, how these two orally transmitted genres defined the conceptions of femininity and honor is interesting. In the walled-up case, the woman is objectified but honored in death; in the princess’s case, the shame of contravention makes for an example to be set in violent death. The patriarchal control over sexuality, represented in symbols of fertility, defines the tradition anew, while, the challenge of choices is a crime, punished and banished. Acceptance of death is honor; deviance is shame, met with punishment. Normatively, there might be a chasm between the two cases; ontologically, there is little to separate between the two except for the way the memory of the event is constituted. However, the state—a patriarchal instrument of control and dominance—makes capital out of both the events. One is reminded, in this context, of the spectacle that the Rajput patriarchs made out of Sati: a woman being immolated on the funeral pyre of her husband. Violent death makes a grand spectacle, an event that presupposes interested onlookers. The state took advantage of the event to make some radical statements; the death becomes the site of a new frontier of tradition, a spectacle that reinvigorates the instruments of gendered domination and control. The ballad of the walled-up wife is sung every year to commemorate the divine marriage (of Siva and Parvati) and to celebrate woman’s death, yet also to nudge farther the cultural boundaries of gendered dominance.

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## Endnotes

1. A practice wherein the wife was bricked alive (buried alive, in other words) in the edifice being constructed and was thereafter worshipped as the guardian deity of that structure, the water-channel in the case of western Himalayas.
2. In this painting the princess was hacked for falling in love which was not an accepted norm for girls. Normatively, the princess could only fall in love with her husband, and the marriage arranged by her parents in which she had no choice. While sexualities were vigorously controlled by the patriarch, the rules were severe for girls. Ever since, this practice is called honor killing, whereby the honor of a family/clan is tied to the body of women and the family/clan considers it its duty to guard this honor. It is in this context that one thinks of gender prejudice in this painting, where a princess is punished because she dared to assert her choice, challenging the authority of the patriarch to control her affections. Similarly, the drummer boy is punished because he dared to engage with a woman way above his caste and class station.
3. The cultural space is bound by linguistic affinity, generally known as the Pahari cultural region, literally the mountainous cultural zone. Specifically, this would include the areas of Jammu, Chamba, Kangra, Guler and Mandi, where the variants of the walled-up wife ballad are sung.
4. The live-entombment of women is called sacrifice, even though sacrifice is generally understood in terms of shedding blood. Rather, the giving up of life for a larger cause is the context in which the word sacrifice is used. This creates interesting theoretical possibilities as not shedding blood enables the sacrificed to metamorphose over time into a local deity, the guardian goddess of the waterway.
5. In the 1890s, an adaptation of the Suhi ballad was recorded by the Anglican Christian Missionaries. While this adaptation narrates plainly the sacrifice as sung in Chamba, it adds to the body of the ballad the ways of commemoration and worship by the town-girls. Obviously, the exhortation of Suhi is not a part of the original ballad, which is very indirect, minimalistic in structure and content. The fact that it mentions the steps climbing to the shrine, we know that the variant from which it was adapted can only be post-1800s. The song suggests a vigorous routine in spring time around the shrine of Suhi (TRS 1898).
6. Barnes informs that Kirpal Chand provided to those who worked on the *kulh*, "six seers of rice, half a seer of *dahl*, and the usual condiments", additionally every pregnant woman employed received "an additional half allowance in consideration of the offspring in her womb" (1852: 111).
7. As argued by O'Hanlon (1997:1), post 16th century masculinities may be construed as the socially produced embodiments advocating specific psyche and cultivation of physical skills that developed in the changing nature of employment avenues based on cultures of the bodies. The conception is dynamic and changing, such as in the colonial discourse of 'effeminate males' and 'martial races'. The constructions, however, locates trajectories "at what psychic and social investments sustain their sense of themselves as men, at what networks and commonalities bring men together on the basis of shared gender identity, and what hierarchies and exclusions set them apart" (O'Hanlon 1997: 1).
8. Such traditions have been recorded for the digging of wells and ponds in the western Himalayas. For example, there is a similar legend of Rukmani-Kund, sung by the people of Bilaspur. According to it, the people of village Barsand had no water supply. The local Rajput chieftains therefore decided to dig a pond but could not find water. Then the chieftain had a dream in which he was directed to sacrifice either his son or daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law, named Rukmani, was sacrificed and ever since there has been abundance of water. The said kund-pond was named after her (Thakur 1997: 69-61). Similar to this is the Kannada legend of 'Kereghera' (Dundes 1996a: 121-125), where the youngest daughter-in-law becomes the 'feast of the well', claimed by the surging water of the recently dug well, that would not water up without such a sacrifice.



9. One must however note that womanhood described here is deeply implicated in social norms and values. Thus, the daughter who is not married, a virgin, cannot be sacrificed as she is being raised for the prospective family of her future husband. The natal home and kinsmen are responsible for her wellbeing, in body and soul, as the custodian of a family and clan into which she would eventually get married. In that sense, the virgin live-in daughter represents the family honor that needs to be guarded, while the out-married daughter-in-law as the member of a family is dispensable, at least for her host family. It is in the sacrifice of the daughter-in-law therefore that the family honor rises across political and social spectrum.

10. Some interpretations have been forwarded, such as the myth-ritual theory as the motivator of the sacrificial complex (Zimmerman 1979: 379; Parpulova 1974: 427-435; Eliade 1996: 71-94); as also that these ballads mirror the contemporary social reality of masculine control “over woman’s sexuality and fertility” (Mandel 1983: 182). Dundes proposed the feminist reading of these ballads, arguing that the plot plays on the “metaphor for marriage” in which the freedom and mobility of wife is curtailed. There is severance of ties with the natal-world and she is expected to “become fully assimilated and integrated” into the world of her in-laws. The piecemeal immuring—feet, waist, breast, face—is indicative of such restrictions (1996b: 200). Parpulova agrees that immuring is indicative of “the inevitability of a woman’s fate: to be transformed into the foundations of a new construction, a new world, a new family that is not always very pleasant” (1984: 433).

11. The Santal story is about the burial/drowning of the sister by her brothers, who ask their unmarried sister to dress up in bridal attire and jewelry before fetching water from a tank that would not yield water. She is the sacrifice that the tank accepts and with her drowning the water is filled forever (Campbell 1891: 52-56; 102-110; Bompas 1909: 102-106). Also, in Kannadiga folklore, ‘Kereghera’, the daughter-in-law is made to become a sacrifice to the well which was otherwise dry (Dundes 1996a: 121-125).

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