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**Negotiating New Rules and Values:
Four Generations of Rural North Indian Women¹**
Susan Snow Wadley

Numerous examples of the changing roles of Indian women abound. But while the more celebrated lives of urban women and movie stars or beauty queens indicate a vast change in women's roles and lives in India, we know much less about rural women. What are the effects of the media, of fashion, of schooling, of urbanization, of globalization on their lives?

The global forces of modern capitalism are often critiqued for their power to create a homogenous world order, one that will erode the local cultures with which it comes into contact. Simply put, globalization can usefully be conceived of as the product of the "myriad linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the modern world system" (McGrew 1992:23). Although these linkages move ideas and traditions between first world and third world, and back, the consumer culture and cultural norms of the western (Euro-American)² world have tended to dominate this cross-fertilization. But to believe in the all-consuming power of global forces is to deny any power and agency to local cultural traditions and to the people who enact them (see especially Appadurai 2000; Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997; Hall 1998; King 1998), to deny people's abilities to accommodate, to resist, or to reject the ideals, symbols, practices, and goods emerging from the cultural and material 'supermarket' (Mathews 2000) of the globalization process. As numerous scholars have pointed out, localization involves multiple, divergent interpretations of what is 'global'. Rather, facets of a global culture provide new materials with which peoples can forge new identities and new traditions.

I approach these questions of globalization and localization by examining the changes in the lives of four generations of upper caste, relatively well-off women in one rural village in northern India. I pay special attention to the current generation of teenagers, for it is this group, in marked contrast to their elders, who are manifesting most clearly the changing value systems regarding women and women's lives in rural north India: it is this group, in particular, which is claiming a new space for themselves, where they are able to articulate a sense of self-identity that is qualitatively different than that of their elders.. It is this group who will be reaping the effects of changes over the past years: some of these may be beneficial. Others will definitely not be.

Generation One

Amma, the great-grandmother of this family, was born about 1915 and married at age 11 in 1926. Her husband's family is Brahman, one of the 24 caste groups in Karimpur at the time of her marriage. Karimpur is a village where the majority of the land is owned by Brahmans who dominated the village politically and economically until the 1990s. Amma's family had more than 50 acres of land, much of it given out to sharecroppers. Bullocks were used to plough the land and irrigation was through a Persian wheel or through lifting water from the village ponds. Though land rich, the family was labor poor, with only two adult males at the time of her marriage. Like everyone else of her generation, Amma's family lived in an adobe house, one made of mud bricks, leading the Wisers to title their first book, Behind Mud Walls.

Although married at 11, Amma only started living with her husband's family after she reached puberty at age 14 (her marriage was consummated in a second ceremony called *gauna*). At the time of her marriage, the family was headed by her husband's uncle, and her husband's

older brother and his wife also lived with them. Life wasn't easy, especially for the women. Amma had her first child at age 15 and by 22 had three living children. She bore seven children: four sons and one daughter survived. For her generation, this was actually a high survival rate: almost 50 percent (430 per thousand) of Karimpur's children born before 1950 died by 5 years of age (see Chapter 5 and Wadley 1993a). Moreover, most of her children, and the two who died, were born during the rainy season (July-October), a period of high vulnerability for animals and humans. This also reflected a high seasonal birth rate, ruled in part by the norms of the time: husbands and wives were less likely to sleep together during the rainy hot season: cohabitation resumed as the weather turned cold, and the result was a peaking of births in August.³

Since her husband's brother and wife died young, by the time she was thirty, Amma was the sole adult woman in her household. By then she had three living children. She had two more children in her thirties. Her oldest son was married at age fifteen as the family desperately needed another set of female hands because the work done by the women of farming families was enormous. They ground all the grain on large grinding stones, often beginning at 4 in the morning. Prior to grinding, the grain had to be cleaned and winnowed. The corn kernels had to be rubbed off the ears of corn kernel by kernel (giving many a blister). Women would clean mustard seed for the oil press, husk and winnow lentils and rice with a pestle, grind spices. Every day they had to make cow pats to set in the sun to dry and use as fuel. This job usually fell to the oldest woman or daughters as it involved working in the cattle yard where the woman was more visible to passersby, and for the upper castes strict purdah or the seclusion of women was maintained. This meant that none of the women in Amma's family ever worked in agriculture, though the women of their lower caste tenants frequently did.

Other tasks included sweeping, replastering the floor regularly with a mixture of cow dung and straw, preparing dough, cutting vegetables. Cooking for a large family was a slow process, with each bread taking 2-3 minutes to make and bake, and each man consuming up to 15 breads a day. Amma sometimes had help: her family was closely connected to a set of *kamins*, or service families, through the *jajmani* system, a system of hereditary patron-client ties. The Water Carrier⁴ woman who served the family, for because of purdah Amma could not leave her courtyard to go to the well, would bring water and, when asked, wash dishes with ash. Amma had special ties with a few other very poor women, including the wife of the Flower Grower who would often help with grinding grain in return for extra food and grain.

Amma was actually lucky in that her family initially had another woman and that her husband lived until she was nearly 70. Karimpur's family structures in the 1920s, just 6 years after the influenza outbreak that killed millions around the world and India and with an average life span of a mere 25 years, give us a pattern of subnuclear households – without a married couple – and supplemented nuclear households – a married couple and a widowed father or mother, or uncle or aunt. True nuclear households and joint households were the rarity (See Chapter 3).

Amma never attended school, though her husband had an 8th grade education, as did her sons. Four percent of the village women had some education at this time: four Brahman daughters got some basic schooling while ten high caste women who had married into Karimpur had received some schooling. The only school in the village was for grades 1 and 2, and girls were not allowed to travel with the few boys who attended school in a village two miles away for higher grades.

Generation Two

The situation for Amma's oldest daughter-in-law, Maya, wasn't much different. Maya too was married while very young and moved almost immediately to her in-laws, as her help was

desperately needed since by then Amma had five children, the oldest (Maya's husband) about 16. She too bore more children than survived. Like Amma, Maya had no education – most of her age mates were also illiterate. And like Amma, Maya lost several children, but only girls.

Whereas for Amma's children, survival was problematic for any child, by the 1950s when Maya's children were born, some allopathic medicine was available and illnesses like pneumonia could be successfully treated if the family sought medical care. Unlike the very poor, Maya's family could afford medical treatment. But her family didn't pursue medical care for its girls, and two of her daughters died, leaving her with three sons and one daughter. Other daughters were also dying, and Karimpur's juvenile sex ratio went from 900 females per 1000 males in 1925 to 790 in 1968 (Table 3.1, page ??).

Maya's children did go to school – two sons went to high school and her daughter finished 8th grade. A primary school was built in the village in the 1940s, and in the mid-1960s, a middle school was opened. This allowed girls to go past 5th class without having to travel out of the village, a practice most families would not allow. In 1968, three girls, including Maya's daughter, became the first village females to graduate from 8th grade, aside from one of Amma's old friends Mausi, a woman who had been raised an only daughter of a widow and given educational training by her brothers. Mausi thus became the first, and until recently, only woman in the village employed in a non-labor or non-agricultural job. But even in the 1960s, most daughters of the village were not educated: by 1968, only 30 percent of Brahman females were literate while female literacy overall was only 9 percent. Fourteen of the 24 caste groups still had no literate women, and no daughters in school. By now, 37 percent of the men were literate (Table 3.4, page??).

One of Amma's greatest sorrows was that her third daughter-in law, though married and brought to the family while young, was fractious and difficult and after ten years, forced her husband to separate his family. They built a basic mud brick room off the cattleyard adjoining Amma's house and worked and ate separately. Ritual separation, however, came only years later as it would have brought great shame to the family if they were not united at least ritually. But this family was also representative of a pattern of increasing nuclear families in the village, although the demographics also supported more joint families, still very much the ideal (Table 3.2, page ??).

The family was able to find girls with 5th grade educations as wives for Amma's grandsons. So while Maya remained illiterate, her sons' wives were not. The differences between illiterate mothers-in-law and educated daughters-in-law grew more marked as girls got increasingly educated, so that by the 1980s, the women sang songs with lines such as "mother-in-law, gone, oh gone is your rule. The age of the daughter-in-law has come. The mother-in-law grinds away at the grinding stone, and the daughter-in-law watches." As we shall see below, education brought yet other changes that also affected the relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Maya, though hard working and burdened by offspring, was very religious (although she seldom had time to perform even the smallest of rituals beyond the daily feeding of the first bread cooked to the cow). But in the late 1960s, she began to worship the new goddess, Santoshi Ma, goddess of benevolence. Santoshi Ma protects women whose husbands are away, and as Maya's husband began to spend more and more time in the nearby towns, Maya found worshipping Santoshi Ma especially appealing. So every Friday Maya and whatever women and girls were around would fast. Some literate girl (sometimes the visiting anthropologist) would read Santoshi Ma's story from a pamphlet that Maya had bought at the yearly district fair. Unlike most rituals performed in the family, this one honored a goddess who had been unknown a decade before, and her story was in print (an early sign of globalization), rather than in memory,

and therefore had to be read rather than told. Maya was also an expert singer, often called upon by the other women to perform at women's song fests.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Maya's daughters were growing, they and the other girls of the village from all castes yearly performed a girls' traditional folk ritual called *neothar* or *simara-simariya* (see Chapter 7). This girls' ritual took place during the period of Navratri, the nine nights of the goddess, every fall. Through the mid-1980s, images of a male and female were made on the walls of the courtyard and worshipped early every morning by the teenage girls of the family in order to aid them to obtain good husbands. The girls would make clay pots and other utensils as "dowry", as well as elaborate figures for a marriage procession. On the ninth day, a lavish marriage of this pair (also made as stand-alone clay figures) was held: one of the brothers would act as priest, while sometimes the village Barber's wife, a servant to their family, would come and play the role that she played in real marriages. The ceremony would conclude with a meal cooked by the girls in the courtyard and shared amongst their kin.

Maya dressed differently than Amma had as a young woman. When young, Amma wore a heavy skirt, long blouse, and headscarf (as does Shrimati, Chapter 6), except for cooking, when she would follow rules of ritual purity and wear a clean cotton men's *dhoti*. By the 1950s, most women had shifted to the *dhoti* and a long blouse for everyday wear. Shorter than a sari (which is 6 yards long), the 5 yard *dhoti* was wrapped differently than the urban "sari", and the woman's head was always covered. Strict purdah was maintained, so that if a man older than the husband, or an older respected female relative, entered the courtyard, the wife would immediately draw the *dhoti* over her face. Through the 1960s, the *dhoti* was made of handloom cloth, usually white or pale blue, with a narrow woven border. Most women owned only one or two, and possibly one better one for special occasions. For most of her life, Amma wore this style. Maya did also, until rather recently. But as we shall see, her daughters-in-law, the third generation, broke new boundaries.

Generation Three

By the time Maya's children were teenagers, her husband and other village farmers had begun to plant the new seeds and use the fertilizers associated with the green revolution. By the mid-1980s, these practices were commonplace. In addition, enough families had purchased tube well engines and drilled enough bore holes that irrigation had spread from less than 1/3 of the village fields to all. This transformed farming, as it was now possible to make a living off of the fields. A few richer farmers, including Maya's family, bought tractors which they then rented out to neighbors for plowing and transport (soon, marriage processions that moved the groom and his male kin to the bride's house for the ceremony itself would mostly take place in tractors, trucks and buses, rather than bullock carts). Although the labor needed for farming had not declined significantly, despite the mechanical innovations, the growing population meant that sharecroppers and day laborers were less and less in demand, forcing many of the poorer men into seeking other work. Whereas Amma's generation had only one male who survived and reproduced, in the next generation the land was split amongst four sons. They in turn had ten sons who would share in the land and who were available to farm it.

By 1980, Maya's middle son, Sunil, had sought a job in Delhi, 150 miles away. Several other Brahman young men had made contacts there that eventually led to their setting up as labor contractors – they would work with general contractors and provide day labor for specified jobs. Sunil was finally able to move part of his family to Delhi, where they live in one room in a crowded enclave of lower middle class families. They own a TV, gas stove, fridge, fan, and motorcycle. One teenage daughter was left behind to help his brother's wife with the farm chores in the village and to study in the local college.

Maya's oldest daughter-in-law, Sheila, has only a fifth grade education, but wasn't married until she was 16, in 1970. So unlike the two generations before her, child bearing started later. She too didn't live with her husband's family immediately, as the practice of *gauna*, consummating the marriage a year or two after the marriage, was still demanded (in fact, it was thought enormously shameful if a bride returned from her husband's house after the marriage pregnant).

Unfortunately, child survival was still problematic. Sheila's first three children died, including two girls who died from dehydration when toddlers and a son who was stillborn. Eventually, Sheila had a son and two daughters who survived.

Sheila has relatives in the nearby town, and often spends time with them. There she has taken on the challenge of learning to negotiate the intricacies of urban life and modern medical care. Maya never traveled even as far as the nearby town on her own: she was always escorted by some male kin, or later by her daughters-in-law.⁵ Amma, a more forceful woman, also seldom went to town, and certainly never alone. Neither did any major shopping for the family: clothing, bedding, vegetables, spices – these were all procured by the men. But after her first three children died, Sheila demanded the freedom to go to town on her own. Fifteen years later, she knows her way around the market, shops for her family, and provides help to her kin and neighbors regarding health care. She knows how to get malaria tests, when to bribe the technicians to make sure the slides are read correctly, what to take for a hospital stay (bedding and a jug for water), which doctors are best for different illnesses, and so on. Various members of her husband's extended family – as well as other villagers - rely on her and her knowledge, and she moves around the city, and between city and village, freely. Let's briefly look at what Sheila's work as health care intermediary involves, for it also marks the intrusion of a global economy into everyday rural life.

A range of alternatives exist for medical care (see Table 10.1). In the village, you can seek treatment through traditional means such as possession rituals, or you can seek to ward off evil spirits by using lampblack on a baby's eyes, or you can call the local man who worked as a peon in a nearby hospital who now considers himself a trained medical worker ('doctor') and who will gladly give you an injection or set up an intravenous drip bag of glucose if you have had a fever for some days. Nowadays, the family is least likely to use a traditional cure, and there is a heavy reliance on biomedicine and injections. But there are also lively debates about the effects of herbal or ayurvedic cures, though these are more likely to be bought from a dispenser in town than made by the women at home.

If the patient is thought seriously ill, or is an only son, he/she might be taken to town. Mainpuri has a government general hospital where malaria and TB tests are done and serious cases taken, as well as a woman's hospital for obstetrical patients. There are also numerous private hospitals and clinics, some little more than storefronts and others with x-rays and sonogram equipment, as well as beds for the truly sick. Any non-emergency treatment or surgery requires a trip to Agra, four hours away by private taxi. Many of these urban doctors have MBBS degrees in medicine, but many do not, for medical practice is not strictly regulated and many self-educated 'doctors' are found in cities and villages alike. Some clinics specialize in homeopathic cures, following ayurvedic practices used in Indian medicine for thousands of years. And because the treatment of illness is often complicated, and the causes unclear, the town offers yet other choices for traditional cures via possession or similar means.

Currently, medical issues seem to dominate Sheila's life. Her teenage daughter had TB two years ago, perhaps getting it from an aunt in the village. Then both her son and her nephew seemed malnourished, suffering perhaps from what I call the "only son sugar syndrome" (Wadley 2001). As families limit their numbers of children, having one or two sons and one

daughter (ideally), an only son is likely to become very spoiled, especially in view of the rather few limits put on small children in many Karimpur households. Further, disposable income allows for sugar to be bought. Finally, Karimpur mothers believe that their children will not drink milk unless it is highly sweetened. The result is that only sons receive, at their demand, an inordinate number of their daily calories from sugar, and as a result suffer from malnutrition. This evidence of malnutrition amongst boys runs counter to the older patterns where daughters regularly received less food, and less good food, than their brothers and hence were often severely malnourished. Girls actually benefit in this new schema, as they do not get as much of the highly sugared foods. While the doctor regularly tells Sheila to limit her son's sugar and also gives her tonics for him, she seems incapable of sticking to the less sugar regime.

Then Maya and Sheila's young sister-in-law Trisha both got malaria a year ago. Maya was hospitalized for a week in Agra after the malaria was mis-diagnosed by the hospital (no bribe was paid the technician) and mistreated by the village quack, who gave Maya an injection and a glucose drip, first cleaning his needle with well water. A few months later, her second sister-in-law, Priya, who lived in Delhi, had a mental breakdown, perhaps due to the strains of urban life, of living alone in one room and worrying about the marriages of her many daughters. Sheila went by taxi to Delhi and brought Priya back to Karimpur. This time the treatment focused on ritual cures, not biomedical ones; and the two women and her brother-in-law visited a series of traditional curers who dealt in possession and ritual cures. Sheila also took her cousin's wife to a lady doctor to check on her pregnancy after the village midwife claimed that the fetus was too small for its age. The sonogram taken there supported the midwife and the family agreed to find more nurturing food for the pregnant woman.

What I want to emphasize here is that Sheila is regularly moving back and forth between town and village, on her own or with relatives. In large part, she is the one making decisions about which kinds of medical care are given from which doctor, as well as what medicines to buy, from which stores. This mobility and knowledge were completely denied rural women a few years older. And even today, most don't have it.

Although women of farming families in the villages still face enormous work loads, they are less than in Amma's generation. Sheila and her sister-in-law Trisha have their grain ground at the electric mill: first they must winnow and clean the kernels, but once it is cleaned, the men load the bags on the back of a cycle and return with flour that need only be sieved. So the early morning grindstone work is gone. But corn must still be husked by hand and the kernels removed, cow pats made, lentils cleaned and husked, breads cooked. The women usually cook over the household *chula* or mud stove, using cow pats and sticks as fuel. But when there are extra guests, or when the house faces a shortage of female labor, they may cook over a kerosene stove or even a gas stove.

Lacking now are the servant women from lower castes who had maintained connections with these families for generations. *Jajmani* ties have almost disappeared, and only on ritual occasions will a *jajmani* tie be reaffirmed. The Watercarrier woman is no longer needed as most of the better-off families have a pump in their courtyards. They don't use the village Washerwoman, except around ritual occasions, as they can wash their synthetic saris themselves. Both men and women will use an iron owned by the family to press their clothes if needed. Several houses, including Sheila's, now have both bathing rooms and a toilet connected to a septic tank, so the Sweeper is also not needed.

The better-off women of Sheila's generation, and especially those with urban ties, are much more actively involved in religious ritual than their overworked mothers-in-law. And certainly the messages of the religious right have been influential here as well. Sheila and her sisters-in-law are very conservative in their personal habits: they won't drink tea from a china

cup, or in a restaurant. They would never take food cooked by a non-Brahman. More importantly, Priya particularly has time for more rituals, as her one room in Delhi doesn't demand much of her time and she has no farm produce to process. Every week she visits the Hindu temple near her home with other Brahman women from her street. She daily does *puja* to images in a small shrine in a corner of her room. And on the days of women's rituals, she joins with other women in much more lavish ritual performances than are found in the village. Every month or so, she or one of her neighbors will hold some special ritual for family welfare and will invite women to share in the sweets and other offerings made to the deity worshipped.

Back in Karimpur, Priya and Sheila also perform annual rituals. Here the women are replacing the oral stories of their mothers and mothers-in-law with pamphlet versions, as well as replacing the elaborate wall drawings that they used to make for rituals such as Pitcher Fourth, (see Chapter 7) with bought posters.

Women, propelled by the new consumerism that has accompanied their somewhat greater prosperity as well as by the messages of the media, have been able to change what they wear and how they wear it: in fact, there is a crucial interplay between cloth and style here. I want to reiterate that these appear to be small signs of change, yet are significant markers of the globalization of both the weaving industry and the media, as well as the changing roles of women. One affect of the liberalization of the Indian economy has been to lower the price of synthetics. So now cotton and polyester saris cost about the same, and with polyesters lasting four times as long, the women often choose synthetic saris. Synthetics don't need an iron, they dry more quickly, and they wear up to four times longer, all seen as advantages. The colors last longer, there are more designs, they are "fashion", even though they stick to the body, are useless for wiping sweat, are hot, and even cause rashes. Other drawbacks are the absence of used cotton cloth needed for a variety of household purposes, ranging from making a strainer for milk to bandages and menstrual needs.⁶

There is also a redefining of ritual cloth: silk was always considered the most pure and purifiable cloth, to be worn on ritual occasions. Cotton was less pure, but clean cotton could be worn to worship, for weddings, etc. Nowadays, these rural women, who could never have afforded silk saris, wear polyesters in place of silk, and for such "pure" events as cooking (note that I said above that Amma had worn a clean cotton *dhoti* to cook in the 1930s). Now only old women, widows and the odd anthropologist wear cotton. If they can possibly afford it, every one else wears polyester, which is also now a clear marker of class status.

The issue here is the body as the locus of social control: females bodies are impressed with prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, and femininity. As women in Karimpur change how they dress, they are marking new forms of female selfhood and acceptable femininity. The three daughters-in-law - Sheila and Trisha and Priya - have each responded to new modes of fashion and cloth in a different way. In the 1970s, when first married, Sheila and Priya wore brightly printed cotton saris, no longer the plain handloom "*dhoti*" of their elders. They might have owned one polyester sari for dressy occasions. Then synthetic cloth came into the market and now they seldom wear cotton, even in the hottest season. Moreover, they each wear their saris differently. Sheila, despite her urban connections, continues to wear her sari village style, with the end pulled across her head from the left side and then across her front. Unlike Maya and Amma, however, she wears printed, usually synthetic saris. Her younger sister-in-law, Priya, who lives in Delhi, wears her sari "Delhi style"⁷, that is pulled across her front with the end over her left shoulder, though she still covers her head when in the village, though it is pushed much further back than Sheila's. And Trisha, some 15 years younger, and living only in the village, also wears her sari "Delhi style", even while working, but with the end pulled much further down across her face than Priya.

These shifts in cloth and style are symbolic of other changes. All the women remain veiled before their father-in-law and husband's older brothers-in-law. Related to veiling is the appearance of the bride. Through the early 1980s, brides in all the Karimpur weddings that I attended appeared as a bundle of cloth, hidden behind yellow sari and white shawl. But by the late 1980s, the Panjabi red sari had begun to appear. Moreover, young girls from the groom's family were now joining the previously all-male wedding parties. At the wedding of Maya's youngest daughter who was 24 years, the groom's female kin, from a nearby small town, went to the bride as she sat during the ceremony and pulled her sari off her head, leaving her immensely embarrassed, with downcast eyes - and the groom stealing looks as much as he dare at his about-to-be wife, whom he had never before seen.

So what kind of cloth one wears, and how one wears it, are critically symbolic of social status, modes of behavior, social change. There are still, however, some places and occasions when any shift in rules appears all but absent. These are religious rituals and women's visiting. For example, when the Brahman women of the village are setting off to worship at the shrine of Khan Bahadur, the village guardian deity, they will be heavily veiled. Brides and mothers-in-law alike are fully covered, saris drawn over their faces and shawls around them. They are, indeed, in public space, moving through the lanes of the village. But the heavy veiling is also associated, I believe, with maintaining status: with living up to the norm, with "doing the right thing". Last year, a Brahman woman who now lives in the nearby town arrived in the village with several other women. They had come by jeep, but the rains had been so heavy that they had to leave the jeep at the edge of the village and walk the 200 yards to her husband's village house. This woman wore her sari Delhi style, with her head completely uncovered, immediately provoking comments from the women with whom I was sitting - "look at her, her head uncovered. Doesn't she realize she is in the village?" Urban middle class women in the small towns that I know maintain a semblance of purdah before their fathers-in-law and other male elders, even though they have BA degrees.

One thing that hasn't changed is that Sheila and most of the women she knows are still living in joint families. Unlike the expectations of the models of modernization, based on the experiences of the west, Karimpur's families are increasingly joint, as seen in Table 3.2, page ???. Moreover, many of these joint families are very large. The need for men to work together in farming (two adult men are a minimum for successful farming), the increased life span, going from 25 years in the 1920s to almost 60 now, the prosperity that puts less economic pressure on the family to split up, all contribute to farming families staying joint. In contrast, many families of men irregularly employed as day laborers quickly separate off into nuclear units. What is clear, though, is that more women are living in joint families now than ever before. But life for them is different.

As the mother-in-law in the 1960s, Amma had a pretty firm hand on her sons' sexual lives. Women and children generally slept in the courtyard or inner rooms, men on the verandah or roof. When a man desired sexual relations with his wife, he could negotiate a more private sleeping space. But all the space of the household belonged to everyone. Now, however, rooms are allotted to couples and their children. So Sheila and Priya each have their own space within the house, where their clothes and goods are stored and where they can claim a right to sleep without asking anyone's permission. This takes control of sexuality out of the hands of the elders and gives it to the couple. Moreover, the availability of fans (though no other kinds of coolers, and only when the electricity is on, which isn't often) sometimes makes sleeping more comfortable and may lead to a shift in the pattern of August births noted earlier. It also marks a clear shift in familial relationships: the couple is now the dominant relationship, not parent-child (especially mother-son). Fewer decisions are made by the elders and imposed on the younger

generation. This is especially marked because the age of marriage has risen drastically, so that new brides are no longer barely in their teens. By the mid-1990s, most Brahman girls in Karimpur were marrying after age 20, with some as old as 24 or 26. The ritual of *gauna* is no longer held, and the girl immediately moves to her husband's household. Amongst their lower caste neighbors, the average age of marriage is now about 17, up from 12.5 in 1925 (Amma's generation) and to almost thirteen and a half (Sheila's generation) in the late 60s (see Table 11.3).

A later age of marriage does not necessarily mean fewer pregnancies. One result of couple's gaining of control of their sexuality is more closely spaced children. Here too, economic class makes a difference, so that the situation in Sheila's family is different than that of her lower class neighbors. Pregnancy histories of all the married women in Karimpur in 1984 and again in 1999 show that those who are poor have an average of ½ child more than those who are better off.

Some women are using birth control, but almost without exception, they are educated. For example, one of Sheila's Brahman neighbors has sons who all passed at least 8th grade 20-30 years ago. Uneducated brides were found for the oldest two because the family felt that uneducated girls would cause less friction in the joint family. They each have 6 living children. The third son was married to a woman with an 8th grade education: they have three children and she had a tubectomy some years ago.

But there are other methods of controlling family size and population. The sex ratio for juveniles in Karimpur remains an astoundingly low 790 females per thousand males. Girl children are somehow still not surviving. It seems that the poor, in particular, are using sex selective medical care to maximize the number of sons that survive, while they continue to let their daughters die (see Wadley 1993a). Biomedicine, with all that that marks – new drugs, new techniques, (and new diseases) – has had a major effect on the survival of Karimpur's children. But amongst the poor, that survival is differentiated by sex. Hence the family has more sons who can begin working and bringing in income at an early age, and fewer daughters to educate and marry off. Whereas even 30 years ago, the poor did not always have to pay a dowry, and might even get a bride price, nowadays dowry is almost always demanded. So for the poor, the value placed on girls continues to decline.

The survival rates for boys and girls amongst Karimpur's better-off social groups seem about equal. What we cannot account for is sex selective abortion. A clinic in Mainpuri advertises a two minute blood test that will tell you the sex of the fetus. More common now are sonograms, and clinics advertising sonograms line the roads of western Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. Although sonograms are now used as a diagnostic for a variety of problems, they are also often used to determine whether or not to abort a fetus. If used in this way, if a female fetus is identified, it is aborted. Men bring their wives to these clinics, and men seem to make these decisions. At this point, the woman has no control of her body.

Generation Four

But let's move on to the next generation, in particular the young women now in their teens – Sheila and Priya's daughters. These young women live in families that have begun to prosper. Karimpur is now a village behind brick walls. A majority of the households have constructed at least one brick room, and several new brick houses, using an architectural style more common in urban areas, have been recently constructed. Village residents own ten tractors, some 30 motorcycles, one bus, and a couple of trucks.

Two factors seem most important to the better-off of this generation of rural girls: they are healthy and they are educated. As already noted, they will marry later. But their families will be faced with immense dowries.

I want to approach the issues of health by talking about hair. The combination of poor foods and poor personal hygiene, combined with lice and yellow bar soaps, meant that women of the earlier generations had brittle, dry, unhealthy hair. The yellow hair marking malnutrition was common (and still is amongst the rural poor). The current teens who are now in high school and above have long, silky, well-cared for hair. Their mothers used mustard oil on their hair (or better hair oils if they had them) to combat the dryness. These girls, to their mother's dismay, seldom oil their hair. (Oil is also thought to help in the fight against lice and thirty years ago was essential to proper appearance.) Current teens beg their parents for decent shampoos, bathe daily, and have a level of personal hygiene much higher than a generation ago. The local village shops sell 1 rupee packets of shampoo – enough for one wash. Without doubt, the influence of schooling is enormous in these changes, as is the fact that their mothers themselves had some education. But so is the more general availability of water via pumps, and enough income to afford the shampoo packets.

Another shift in values represented by hair is not braiding it. Loose hair is generally interpreted as immoral in most of India, and is often a sign of a widow or prostitute. But fashion ads in the 1960s began to portray women with flowing unbound hair, and while girls did not choose to wear their hair loose for formal occasions, they often combed it out for pictures. A typical stance for pictures from the late 1960s on is a girl, hair unbound, clutching a bouquet of flowers. Similar images were commonly featured on the cover of *Femina*, a popular English-language women's magazine in India.

Of the various media influences, the most important is television, along with the billboards that line India's roads. The small town cinema halls remain the domain of men, except for those at the yearly district fair, so it is TV (which also shows a plethora of Bollywood films) that is the main media influence. About 80 (1/5th) of Karimpur's households have televisions, which run erratically on the often non-existent electricity. The Sunday morning epics were initially most popular, and that was the only time that people actively sought out TVs at their neighbors. But Bollywood films recast on TV are also widely watched.

In addition to long, healthy hair, girls' clothing styles also reflect significant value changes for and by women (see also Tarlo 1996). Most important are the additions of new styles of clothing, along with shifts in the appropriate ages when the choices are worn (see Chapter 11).

It is the changes in education that most mark this generation of rural youth, though the differential between those better-off and the poor is only increasing. Whereas the girls of landowners are now getting high school and college educations, the daughters of the day laborers and poor are still illiterate. These poor girls have not benefited from the changes around them.

Sheila and Priya's daughters, Shanti and Kirin, are now in their teens, are getting music lessons (something that a few years ago would have marked them as immoral in village society), and, like almost all the Brahman teenage girls, are in school. Comparing them to the Watercarriers shows the difference. All but one of the Brahman girls married since 1990 had at least an 8th grade education. Three had BAs. But in 1998, amongst the Water Carriers, 87 percent of the females were still illiterate and less than 1/3 of the school-aged girls were in school. Not quite half of the girls ages 6-10 in 1998 were in school (8 of 17). In contrast, the Brahmans had 24 girls in grades 9 and above, almost as many as boys (31). No Brahman children were uneducated. As Table 3.4 indicates, literacy is only slowly coming to the Karimpur, and villages like it – in UP as a whole, 50 percent of girls aged 6-10 are not in school (Dreze 1999).

The downside of education is dowry. Sheila and her husband believe that they must educate their daughters in order to find good husbands for them: they also know that those future husbands' families will demand more dowry the more education the girl has. A girl should be

slightly less educated than her husband. Nowadays, if a girl has a 12th grade education, the family can expect to have to pay Rs. 100,000 (\$2000) in dowry. This is not the whole cost of the wedding, but the demand in dowry and goods. Remember that a day laborer may make Rs. 40 or 50 (or one dollar) per day. If the girl has a BA, the price will most likely double to Rs 200,000. And if an MA, “many hundreds of thousands.” This is also a time when jobs and employment for young men are extremely difficult to get, so that the BA or MA educated groom may not have regular employment. For those from the lower castes without connections, the likelihood of the groom having a regular job is even lower.

As we saw above, education is positively correlated with birth control, health, infant mortality, and later marriage ages. For Sheila’s daughters and nieces from the better-off farming families, these trends are positive: they are living, are healthy, will marry in their 20s, will have fewer children who will die less often. On the down side, they may be forced into unwanted abortions and their families could face enormous dowry demands. But for their lower caste age mates from families where making a living is extremely problematic, their life opportunities are far fewer: they will likely be uneducated, they will marry by their mid-teens; they will bear more children than their better-off age mates, and their children will be more likely to die. These poor daughters of today will, like their better-off peers, be affected by globalizing trends in media, consumerism, clothing, values, and religion, but the actual conditions of their lives will remain problematic at best.

Let us briefly look at religious change. There is no doubt that the Hindutva messages of the last decade have affected the lives of women in Karimpur, both Hindu and Muslim. In addition, the constant barrage of television shows of Hindu epics and stories of gods and goddesses has altered in some ways the practices of the young. On a minor note, but one dear to the anthropologist, the oral traditions of the elders are being shoved aside by the film tunes of the times. Young girls still sing at any excuse, but are more likely to sing a film song than one of the orally passed on songs of their mothers and aunts (here again, there is a difference between better off and poor, marked by access to TV and radio).

But there is also a loss of some village ritual practices. Earlier I mentioned the girls’ ritual of *simara-simariya* that was performed at the time of Navratri, the nine nights of the goddess, every October. Fifteen years ago, this ritual was performed throughout the village. In 1998, I found remnants of it in only two houses: one Farmer and one Watercarrier. The other teenage girls were going daily to the village goddess shrine. The influence of an urban, Bengali-influenced Navratri has overtaken the related folk practice, in a manner related to the shift from making one’s own ritual drawings to buying a printed one. Some of the ritual changes are propelled by new ideas of what is “right”, as in the refusal of some teenage girls to help make the cow dung figures associated with the ritual of *gobardhan* (literally, “cow dung wealth”), picking up from school and ultimately the west the idea that this once sacred cow dung is now cow shit (Wadley 2000). But while they refuse to touch the once sacred dung, they do not have their mothers’ conservatism regarding food and drink: they will eat in restaurants or tea shops if given the chance, adore the soft drinks that they sometimes buy, and will even try the strange foods brought from America (as long as they aren’t meat). Whether these habits will continue into their marriages will depend in large part on their future mothers-in-law. I would expect a slight regression given the conservatism of the older generation. What they do have, however, especially those who marry into the small towns of the region, is more leisure, and hence more time for religion. The burdens of a farm wife, with the constant processing of food stuffs, are missing for the urban wife whose husband buys foods already partially processed. The leisure and the money available to the more middle class urban wife allow her to devote much more time to religious activity – whether it be daily worship or special rituals to protect the family.

Shanti's Muslim neighbors have also been affected by these religious trends, with the primary effect being that they are much more self-conscious about being "Muslim." "Being Muslim" is a much more critical part of many Karimpur Muslims' identities now than it was in the 60s, when there were no distinguishing features for men or women. Muslim women, like the Hindu women, wore *dhotis* and a shawl when out of their houses. Muslim and Hindu men often wore *lungis* for work and around the village. Now, many adult Muslim women are wearing a *silvar kamiz* instead of a sari/*dhoti*. At least one wears a *burqa*, the enveloping black veil of north Indian Muslim women, when outside of her house. Muslim houses are now decorated with mirrors and tiles in Arabic, marking these houses from the outside as "not Hindu." Nevertheless, and here there is no change, every Thursday some of the Hindu women of Karimpur regularly climb a nearby hill to the shrine of the Muslim guardian saint of the village where, with the help of a Muslim resident of the village, they "spread a sheet" (a Muslim, not Hindu ritual practice) and pray for the saint's help in getting their sons a job, their daughters married, their grandchildren born.

Concluding Reflections

Viewed from outside, the changes in the lives of these four generations of women from rural north India appear immense, and yet small. There are really significant differences, but at least in the villages of western Uttar Pradesh, they don't penetrate deeply into rural society. A critical point is that the differential between richer and poorer rural women is increasing over time. There are major changes for the better-off women, but for the poor, such changes are much slower. Further, while women have more education (generally), access to better health care, greater mobility and some life style choices (e.g. clothing), their general situation is still very problematic. In crucial areas like marriage, birth control, abortion, and treatment of illness, others make decisions for them. While women have gained power in a few notable locales in India, I would argue that these pockets of power are primarily the result of NGO activity that does not begin to penetrate to the more representative rural communities. And while there are significant differences between states in terms of education and welfare, if we use Uttar Pradesh to represent the half dozen or so poorest Indian states – with a population of more than half a billion, seventy percent resident in rural areas – then the issues raised here really do hold for a vast population. Moreover, these women are not involved in politics – they spend too much time, as Sheila does, keeping their families alive and well. Nevertheless, such things as the changes in women's clothing, as markers of deeply rooted symbolic changes regarding education, age of marriage, maintenance of *purdah*, mobility, as well as the penetration of the media, consumerism and global markets, are truly significant for these rural women.

Table 10.1 Options for Medical Care, Karimpur 1998

Place	General Character	Qualifications of Practitioner
Village	Protection (re evil eye, etc) e.g., lampblack, herbs, cowdung smoldering fires chilies tossed in fire, etc.	Traditional knowledge, usually women's
	Injections and glucose drips	Self-claimed, may have worked in a hospital, may have been a compounder for a regular doctor
	Basic emergency care	Men trained by state to treat simple ills (though confusion exists: dusting powder (talc) does not treat <i>dast</i> (diarrhea))
	Possession, either by shaman or in ritual of <i>dank</i>	Led by lower caste men, who may be shaman or oracle or exorcist, usually have special training
Varied	Seek aid of deity	Any supplicant
Nearby Town	Govt. Hospital, Emergency care, no surgery or long term care	MBBS doctors, nurses, laboratories
	TB Hospital and clinic	MBBS doctors, nurses, laboratories
	Women's hospital, help in births but no Caesarians	MBBS doctors, nurses, laboratories
	Private clinics, some specializing in things like women or children, some with hospital sections attached	MBBS doctors
	Private clinics	Self-claimed doctors
	Private clinics	Ayurvedic and herbal
	Shamans and ritual curers	Specialized religious training/expertise
Agra or farther	Govt. hospital to care for those	MBBS doctors, nurses

	seriously ill/needing surgery	
	Psychiatrists	Biomedical training

¹ This chapter is a revision of a paper presented at the Conference on Quality of Life in South Asia, Hiroshima, Japan (2000). The ethnographic present is 1998.

² These are highly debated and contested terms. Here I consider them interchangeable.

³ See Wadley 2005 for fuller details on the relationships between the seasons, births, and deaths.

⁴ I have capitalized the names of castes.

⁵ For a discussion of a woman of Maya's generation who challenged the rules more forcefully, see Wadley 1993b.

⁶ I am grateful to Priti Ramamurthy for some of these insights regarding synthetics.

⁷ The Delhi style of sari, I am told, became popular in Delhi after Independence with the rise of an immigrant population from Pakistan: this group not only became the trend setters in Delhi by the 1960s, but had brought this style of sari with them.