

## Contemporary *Satī* Worship: A Case Study of *Satī* Temples in Shekhawati

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### Introduction

Normally, the word *satī* conjures up the image of a Hindu wife entering her husband's funeral pyre to be burned alive with him. The image expresses the notion that the woman is willingly undergoing death out of a sense of duty and love for her husband, and in the belief that her self-sacrifice will bring great reward in a future incarnation to her family, clan and devotees. However, representations of *satī* and the meaning of the word "*satī*" can be different depending on the context in which it is used. In the original Sanskrit, the word *satī* means a virtuous or chaste woman and also refers to the goddess *Satī* who is an incarnation of the great goddess *Pārvatī*, famous as a virtuous woman in Hindu mythology. Second, *Suttee*, as Westerner observers have often spelt the word, describes the ritual of widow immolation rather than the person who is burned<sup>1</sup>. Finally, *satī* denotes mother goddess (*satīmātā*) whose divinity is confirmed by her self-sacrifice on the funeral pyre. Thus semantically speaking, more than one notion of *satī* emerges, though in the colonial period the emphasis came to be on the act of burning (self-immolation) on the funeral pyre of a dead husband.

I will mainly focus on *satī* temples in Shekhawati where *satī* is worshipped as a *kuldevī*<sup>2</sup> by specific communities. At the commencement of my study on *satī*, I came to know about Rāṇī *Satī* temple in Jhunjhunu. It is the biggest and the most famous of the *satī* temples of Rajasthan, and devotees visit this temple from all over India. The temple is supported by Jālān family of Bāṃsal *gotra*<sup>3</sup> of the Agrwāl community and the "goddess" Rāṇī *Satī* is regarded as their *kuldevī*. However, recently, Rāṇī *Satī* is recognized not only as a *kuldevī* of Jālān family but also of the whole Agrwāl community. Although the entire Agrwāl community is welcome to visit Rāṇī *Satī* temple, recently without any formal announcement, the devotees are advised (by word of mouth) to worship their own particular *kuldevī* specific to their *gotra* or lineage. This is a recent phenomenon "First, worship your own *kuldevī*" has been suggested to the devotees<sup>4</sup>. For example, people who belong

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1 [Courtright 1994:28]

2 Goddesses of the *kul* (tribe, community, sect, a family, lineage)

3 An exogamous sub-division of a caste group [Hindi- English:277]

4 From interview B. Agrwal, it was conducted on the 4<sup>th</sup>, Oct, 2013.

to Bindal *gotra* of the Agrwāl's community worship Dholī Dādī who is their *kuldevī*. On an important occasion for their family such as a wedding or a birth first they should worship their own *kuldevī*, after worshipping her they can worship other gods. The priority order which means "your *kuldevī* first" is established. Such advocacy is proposed by word of mouth, and it is not by any announcement in public. Whenever the devotees encounter a troublesome social problem like the breaking up of a marriage or a desire for an offspring when their wishes readily don't come true, they pray to Rāṇī Satī and they get advice from seniors, *gurus*<sup>5</sup> or leaders that the reason is that they didn't first pray to their own *kuldevī*.

Such a sentiment "First, worship your own *kuldevī*" is quite recent. The devotees, according to my interview, didn't even know their own *kuldevī* till almost twenty years ago. Thus, some of the devotees came to know the existence of their *kuldevī* for the first time by such guidance from the elders. This presents an opportunity to trace the roots of their own family<sup>6</sup>. Besides knowing about their original roots, they started to seek other members of their communities. They organized trusts to support their communities' development, like opening schools, hospitals, constructing their *kuldevī* temples, propagating worship by expressing their *satī* stories in writing. They realized the value of their identity and became conscious of unity among their community.

In addition, the phenomenon has also resulted in smaller queues at the Rāṇī Satī temple during the *melā* (a religious fair) at Jhunjhunu which is held once a year. This change has occurred in the last five years. According to my interview, earlier than Rāṇī Satī worship was spreading the devotees used to wait for over four hours to do *darśana*<sup>7</sup> at the *melā*. But the idea recommending *darśana* the devotees to worship their own *kuldevī* before worshipping Rāṇī Satī, it has helped the management of Rāṇī Satī temple to manage the congregation more efficiently<sup>8</sup>.

I feel that the advocacy of "First, worship your own *kuldevī*" forms a new framework on *satī* worship. The temple has become the headquarters of Agrwāl community in *satī* worship. This has led to flourishing of smaller temples. It means although Rāṇī Satī is a *kuldevī* of Jālān family, Bāṃsal *gotra*, her image is changing to *kuldevī* of the whole Agrwāl community in *satī* worship. All people who want to come can worship Rāṇī Satī and Rāṇī Satī will give them a boon. On one side, the temple promotes her worship, on the other side it recommends the worship of their *kuldevī* first. In this way the temple makes a distinction between different *gotras* or lineage and highlights the Bāṃsal *gotra*.

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5 Spiritual guide mentor, a teacher

6 From interview B. Agrwal, it was on the 6<sup>th</sup> Sep 2013.

7 The *darśana*, a word which means "seeing" or "observing", comes from "dṛś" in Sanskrit. It generally means "visiting a shrine" [Hindi- English:482]

8 From interview B. Agrwal, it was on the 6<sup>th</sup> Sep 2013.

It seems by promoting the Rāṇī Satī worship to the entire Agrwāl community, the Bāṃsal *gotra*, Jālān family loses its prominence and status, something they would like to protect. The movement is quite noticeable in contemporary India. It is very interesting that most of *satī* temples in Shekhawati are supported by other *gotras* or lineage of Agrwāl community, not Jālān lineage.

Although there have been some active communities in their own *kuldevī* worship, the advocacy “First, worship your own *kuldevī*” gave opportunity to devotees to trace their own roots historically. Besides knowing about their original roots, they started to seek other members of their communities. Thereafter they organized trusts to support their communities’ development, like opening schools, hospitals, constructing their *kuldevī* temple, propagating worship by expressing their *satī* stories in writing. The status of the temples varies, some have strong active trusts are well maintained and popular, others are in a state of disrepair and desolate. Far from bringing the worship of *satī* to an end, this led to a reinvigoration of the worship of *satī* as specific *kuldevī*.

In this paper, I focused on collecting general information on *satī* temples which are supported by some families in Shekhawati. I think that there is no study of *satī* worship except for Rāṇī Satī temple in Jhunjhunu. It can be possible that some of the temples or lineages will develop in due course. I expect my study to throw light on how *satī* worship has changed along with the social and environmental changes. My opinion is formed on a study of the status and condition of existing temples and *satī* stories prevalent among the local population and its beliefs. Each temple has its own *kuldevī* and its own original story of the *kuldevī*. They tell us about the origins of these temples. Based on an analysis of the information I have collected, my endeavor is to study the status of *satī* worship in contemporary India.

### **Shekhawati (Geography, History)**

I focused on the area of Shekhawati located in the state of Rajasthan. The area covers the district of Jhunjhunu, Sikar and a part of Churu. According to D.K. Taknet, a specialist of Mārṇārī in Shekhawati, Shekhawati derives its name from Rao Shekhaji and his descendants. He established an independent state at Nan Amarsar. His sons expanded their own area which includes Nan Amarsar, Jhunjhunu, Udaipurwati, Sikar, Fatehpur, Danta Ramgarh and Khandela<sup>9</sup>. Shekhawati is in Jaipur division and is situated to the north west of Jaipur. It lies between 27°20’, 28°34’ and north latitudes and 74°41’ and 76°6’ east longitudes. Total area is about 13,784sq.km.

The Mārṇārīs dominate the cities and towns of Shekhawati region. The rural areas of the Shekhawati region are dominated by farming communities. The predominant farmer communities in the rural areas of Shekhawati are the *jats* who were, in the 1930s and even earlier, the most

9 [Taknet 1986:1]

assertive and prosperous among the peasant castes. In 1935 their claims to certain privileges led to a series of clashes between them and the Rājput̥s, who resisted their attempts to revise accepted signs of status. The Rājput̥ community who were the *jagirdars* before independence still played a very important role in society. Before independence, the peasants of the Shekhawati region were exploited and oppressed by the *Jagirdars* during British Raj. During that time, *Jagirdars* would burden farmers, known as *kisans*, with various taxes, a large part of which was to be paid to the British government.

After the eighteenth century, due to scare rainfall the people developed daring and enterprise as they had to shift frequently in search of a new place for their livelihood. In this period to set up their new business, they adapted themselves to the new circumstances and acquired a prominent status. They not only projected their personalities but also propagated their culture. The Vaiśyas in Shekhawati were known as “moneylenders” as they financed farmers as well as the rulers and they were also given an important position as consultant whenever important policy matters were discussed in the *thikhanas* (A feudal estate), towns and villages. Therefore, they were respected because of their talent and intelligence<sup>10</sup>. The main duties of the Vaiśyas in ancient times were agriculture, cow protection and trade. It was normal for them to keep arms for self-protection. Sometimes, they employed soldiers. It is said that this is the origin of some chief communities of Vaiśyas beings among the Kṣatriyas<sup>11</sup>. The Rājput̥ and Vaiśyas in Shekhawati have always been associated closely, however, it does not mean that they have been taking same traditional duties.

Regarding to Brāhmans in Shekhawati, they used to teach the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas to observe religious customs and to worship gods and goddess<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, it can be said that the relationship among the Brāhmans, Kṣatriya, and Vaiśyas in Shekhawati were comparatively close.

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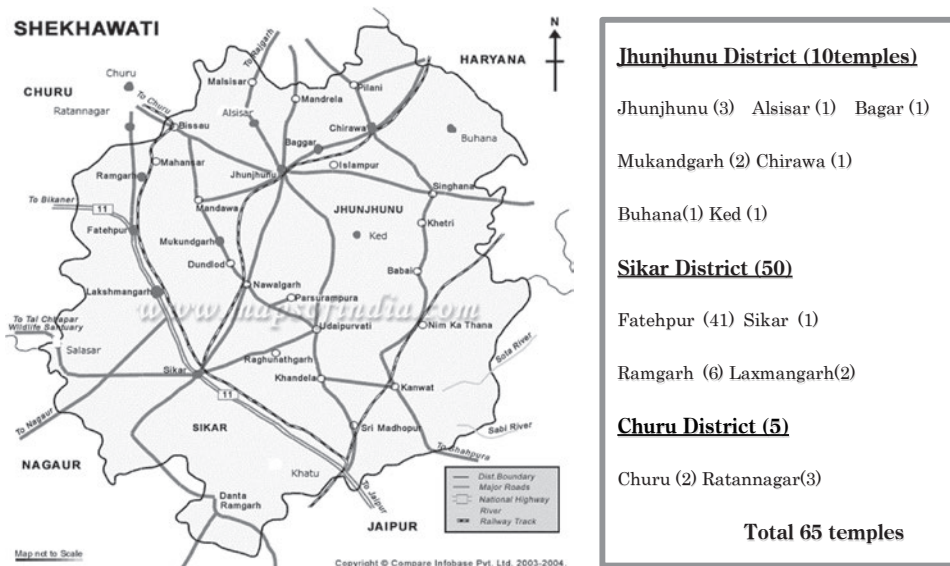
10 [Taknet 1986:29]

11 [Taknet 1986:31]

12 [Taknet 1986:24]

### Map of Shekhawati<sup>13</sup>

The Points the place of *saṭī* temples which I investigated.



### Investigation --- Finding *Saṭī* Temples ---

I conducted field work for this study between 24<sup>th</sup> Sep to 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, 2014, 5<sup>th</sup> Nov- 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and Jan 2015.

To begin with, I had to collect information of all *saṭī* temples in Shekhawati by interviewing people who are associated with the temples. It was very difficult to find “all” *saṭī* temples because there is no data available or any registered official documents. I could only visit the temples which are famous or are known by word of mouth. According to my interviews, there are some private temples which came up without permission and some others which are lying neglected. There are other temples which remain closed all day and have no specific timings for *pūjā* (adoration of a deity). Moreover, if I could find these temples and visit them the local people had no information of their history and little interest in them. Even the local *paṇḍits* (a learned Brāhmins) could not provide any information about these temples, but they were able to guide me to people associated with the trusts which supposedly managed these temples.

Here, when I talk about “all *saṭī* temples”, I would like to make a clarification. As I have already explained “all” refers to the temples where I could secure evidence of their existence. As Taknet says, the area of Shekhawati covers the district of Jhunjhunu, Sikar and a part of Churu. Therefore, I focused on the district of Jhunjhunu and Sikar, and checked Churu city and Ratannagar city in district of Churu. I relied on local information of *saṭī* temples from local residents and some related

13 <http://www.touristplacesinindia.com/shekhawati/images/tourist-map-rajasthan.gif>

literature. In this process a few small unknown temples may have been overlooked.

It is said that all *sati* temples are situated in Fatehpur district of Sikar. I was able to obtain a list of the temples on the basis of which I investigated them. The list of the temples in Fatehpur is mentioned in the *Fathehpur Guide Arthaat Fathehpur –Shekaawaati kaa Itihaasik Digdarsan*, 1975 written by Devakiinandana Kedwala. According to the *paṇḍit*<sup>14</sup> who showed me the booklet, (the booklet is out –of –print and only a few people still have it) it contains a list of all the sati temples in the region and for my study I depended on this list to make site visits from where I collected all my information.

## List of the *Sati* Temples in Shekhawati

### Jhunjhunu District

#### Jhunjhunu

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
1	Rāṇi Sati Mandir	Nārāyaṇī Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	1955-56
2	Śrī Cāvo Dādi Mandir	Cāvami Devi	Agrwāl	Garg	Khetāna	
3	Shree Khemi Shakti Mandir		Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Tulsiyan	

#### Alsisar

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
4	Sitārāma Tulasi Vātikā	Nārāyaṇī Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	2007

#### Bagar

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
5	Śrī Cāvo Viro Trust, Bagar	Cāvami Devi	Agrwāl	Garg	Rūṅgatā	Mar-92

#### Mukandgarh

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
6	Rāṇi Sati Mandir	Nārāyaṇī Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	No info
7	Śringāri Śaktipita	Śrimati Rukmini Devi	Brāhman	Visistha	Sroliyā	27, May, 2001

#### Chirawa

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
8		Aduka Sati				

#### Buhana

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
9		Santosh, Udāl or Udho, Maadal or	Agrwāl	Jindal	Khemakā	

#### Ked

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
10	Keḍ Śakti Dhām	Khemi, Toli, Thukari, Santokhi	Agrwāl	Garg	Keḍiyā	1994

14 He is *paṇḍit* of Śrī Cājala Śakti Dādījī, Gahaniyā Mandir, he supported me a lot during my field work in Fatehpur.

**Sikar Discript****Fatehpur**

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
11	Śrī Rāṇī Sati Mandir, Fatehpur	Nārāyaṇī Devī	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	About 50 years ago
12	Śrī Bindal Kuldevi Mandir	Dholī Dadi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Sarāf	Reconstructed 1983
13		Mokal Sati			Didwanaya	
14	Śrī Kanoḍiyā Kamalā Sati Mandir, Fatehpur	Kamalā Sati	Agrwāl	Mamgal, Govan	Kanoḍiyā	No Information
15	Śrī Pārā-Sārā Śakti Mandir	Pārā, Sarā	Agrwāl	Singhal	Keshan, Gupta, Bhavasangha	2007
16	Haritawālā Mīśra Devī Mandir, Fatehpur	No Information	Brāhman			No Information
17	Śrī Lohiyā Modī Śakti Dhām, Fatehpur	Pāli Sati	Agrwāl	Garg	Lohiyā/ Modī	No Information
18	Śrī Camaḍiyā Kuldevi Śakti Mandir	Śrī Kesar Dādi, Śrī Pāthāna Dādi, Śrī	Agrwāl	Garg	Camaḍiyā	1985
19	Dheliyā Śakti Mandir	Gholī Sati	Agrwāl	Mittal	Dheliyā	V.S 2004 (1947)
20	Kasera Sati Mandir	Cādāl Sati	Agrwāl	Garg/ Govan	Kasera	V.S 2024 (1967).
21	Bhārgava Śakti Mandir	Bhagavāṇī Devī	Brāhman	Dhusar Brāhman	Bhārgava	1978, Renew 10,Dec,2007
22	(not sati temple)	Prohito Sati	Brāhman		Haranārāyaṇā	V.S 2006 (1949)
23	Śrī Dhānukā Athithi Gṛha	Sāwā Sati	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Dhānukā	Renew 20-30 years ago
24	Śrī Pipā Śakti Mandir	Pipā Sati	Darjī			No Information
25		Gausarira Sati	There is temple for the ancestor not sati temple.			
26	Jhuria Sati Mandir	Jhuria Sati	Agrwāl	Jīṃdal	Jhuria	No Information
27		Saraya Sati	No exist			
28		Jaluka Sati	No information			
29	Nai Ki Sati Mandir	Gogal Sati	Nāi	Jhijhariya	Gogal	Around 1993
30	Chipā Sati Mandir	Chipā Sati	Darjī			About 89-90 years ago
31	Śrī Śakti Mātā Charitable Trust	Śakti Mātā	Osvāl	Dugar	Dugar	1936
32	Śrī Jāṃgīḍa Śakti Mandir	Khati Sati	Viśvakarmā	Jāṃgīḍa Brāhman	Khati	1986
33	Nirvāṇa Śiva Śakti Mātā Mandir, Fatehpur	Gayarasi Devī	Moṭi (leather caste)			2011
34	Maan Rajulade ka Sacca Darbar	Rajur Sati	Agrwāl	Garg	Saraogi	
35		Maliya Sati	The temple has expired			
36	Śrī Biyāni Mandir	Śringari Sati	Maheśvari			Around 1993-1998
37	Śrī Cājala Śakti Dādījī, Gahaniyā Mandir	Chājala Devī	Agrwāl	Garg	Caudhari	Around 1950-60
38	Śrī Biran Baraji Dādi Dhām, Śrī Goyankā Mandir	Biran/ Baraji	Agrwāl	Govan	Goyankā	2000
39	Śrīmatī Candravali Devī Sati Mandir	Śrīmatī Candravali Devī	Rājput	Raṭhore	Būbanā	1971
40	Śrī Khemakā Kuldevi Mandir	Santoṣa, Udāl or Udho, Maadal or Madho	Agrwāl	Jīṃdal	Kkemakā	Around 1970
41	Śrī Biyālā Śakti Mandir	No Name (Biyālā Sati)	Brāhman Gaur		Biyālā	Around 70 years ago, renew 2012
42	Śrī Sakti Mandir, Dāmḍhapa	Ṭīḍā, Gelā	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Bajāj Bhāratiya	20,Feb, 2010
43		Dand Jati Brahman Sata	Not sati			
44	Pārāsāra Gotriya Śrī Harihara Śakti Pīṭha	Devū Devī	Agrwāl ※	Bāṃsal	Kheḍavāla	1885/86
45	Copadara's Math	No Information				
46	Poddhar ki Śakti Mandir, Fatehpur	Mādala Bhavāni	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Poddhar	Around 40-50 years ago
47	Gorān Sati Mandir	Gorān Sati	Kumhār(potter)		Prajapati	3,Oct, 1973

48	Toli, Moli, Thukari (Śakti Dhām) Mandir	Toli, Moli, Thukari	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Kejaḍivāla	No Information
49	Śrī Ḍeḍala Śakti Mandir	Ḍeḍala Sati	Agrwāl	Singhal/ Bāṃsal	Singhana	No Information
50	Caturbhujā Mātāji Mandir	Caturbhujā Mātāji	Brāhman, Agrwāl	Sārasvat Brāhman,	Sārasvat Brāhman,	1989
51	Śrī Lāḍamade Ajāḍi Śakti Mandir, Fatehpur	Kamābati Sati	Nai		Ajāḍi	250 year ago

#### Sikar

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
52	Śrī Rāṇi Sati Temple, Sikar	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	Around 120 years ago

#### Ramgarh

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
53	Śrī Caudhari Amari Devi Mandir, Rāmagaḍha	Amari Devi	Agrwāl	Garg	Caudhari	2001
54	Śrī Rūiyā Rāṇi Śakti Mandir, Rāmagaḍha	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Rūiyā	1964
55	Śrī Biran Baraji Dādi Dhām, Śrī Govanakā Mandir, Rāmagaḍha	Biran Baraji	Agrwāl	Goyal	Govan (Goyanakā)	No Information
56	Śrī Durgā Śakti Mandir (Thākurbāḍi)	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Gaurisariyā	1971
57	Rāṇi Sati Mandir, Rāmagaḍha	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl		Jhunjhunuwala	
58		Nāī Sati	Nāī			

#### Laxmangarh

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
59	Rāṇi Sati Mandir, Lakṣmanagaḍha	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	1985
60		Mādala Bhavāni	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Poddhār	

#### Churu District

##### Churu

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
61	Śrī Dholi Sati Dādiji Mandir, Churū	Dholi Dādi	Agrwāl	Bindal	Sarāf	
62	Khemakā Mandir, Churū	Santoṣa, Udāl or Udho, Maadal or Madho	Agrwāl	Jindal	Kkemakā	Around 40 years ago

##### Ratannagar

NO	Name of Temple	Name of Sati	Caste (Jāti )	Gotra	Main Family	Erection of the Temple
63	Śrī Rāṇi Sati Ji Mandir, Ratannagar	Nārāyaṇi Devi	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Jālān	Around 15-20 years ago
64	Surekā Sati Mandir, Ratannagar	Rāṇi Sati & Vārāṇasi Sati	Agrwāl	Bāṃsal	Surekā	1942
65	Shree Dholi Dadi Mandir, Ratannagar	Dholi Dādi	Agrwāl	Bindal	Saraf	

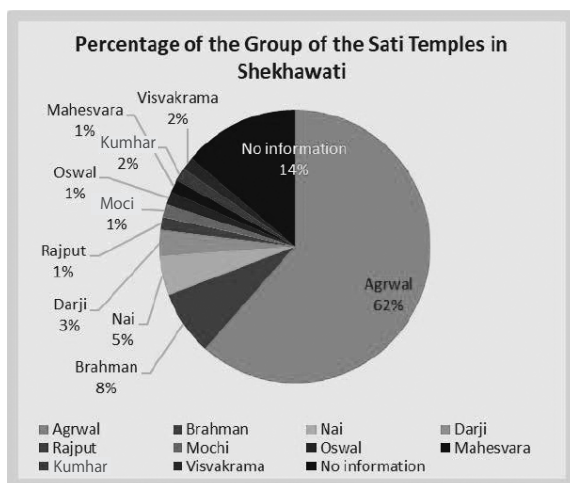
※ According to interview, they insist that they are Brāhman, *gotra* is Pahashar. However, I think they are Agrwāl by reading booklet which they published. And their supporter is Agrwāl, Bāṃsal *gotra*.



## Understanding *Satī* in Shekhawati

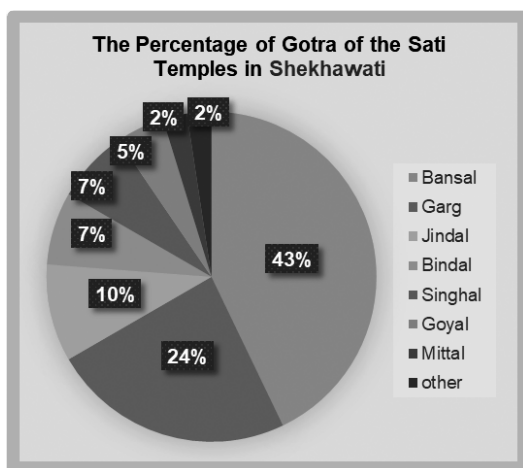
### 1) Agrwāl Community and *Satī* Temples

As you can see in Chart 1, it is a fact that almost 62 % of the temples are managed by the Agrwāl community in Shekhawati, moreover, these *satī* temples are supported by *gotras* (clan) or its lineages of Agrwāl community (Chart2).



【Chart 1】

Group of the Satī temples	No
Agrwal (Agrwāl)	40
Brahman (Brāhman)	5
Nai (Nāī)	3
Darji (Darjī)	2
Rajput (Rājput)	1
Mochi (Mocī)	1
Oswal (Osvāl)	1
Mahesvara (Maheśvarī)	1
Kumhar (Kumhār)	1
Visvakarama(Viśvakarmā)	1
No information	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>



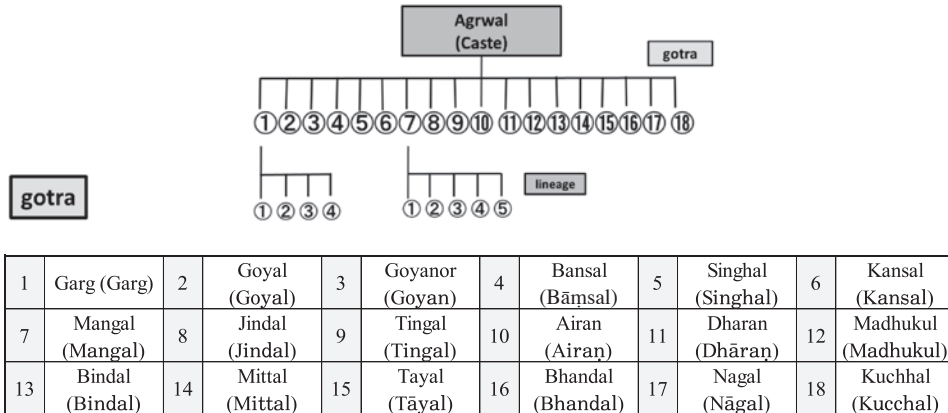
【Chart 2】

Gotra	Lineage
Bansal	18
Garg	9
Jindal	4
Bindal	3
Singhal	3
Goyal	2
Mittal	1
Manghal	1

According to mythology, it is believed that the origin of Agrwāl is attributed to a mythical king, Rājā Agrasen, who founded the city of Agroha with the fortress at its center. The district of Fathehbad in Hariyana State is about 190 km from Delhi and about 20 km from Hisar<sup>15</sup>. Agroha

15 This ancient town was discovered in the year 1888-89. Since then the excavation implemented by Agroha Vikas Trust and the Agroha Dham construction was re-planned with special emphasis on the Temple Complex and the Śakti Sarovar. Functionally Agroha Dham has been planned as a center of learning, philosophy and spirituality. It will also have a Vridh Ashram (Old Age Home), Health Center and Research Center.  
[<http://www.haryana-online.com/agroha.htm>]

was destroyed by the invasion of Sultan Shahāb-‘ud-Dīn Muḥammad Ghorī, after which the Agrwāls scattered to the west (Mārwar) and to the east of their ancient kingdom. The myth tells us that Rājā Agrasen was blessed with eighteen sons. He divided his kingdom among his eighteen children and a *gotra* was formed resulting in eighteen *gotras* of this community. The name of the Agrasena’s *gotras* are as follows, (contemporary written form)



It is thought that Govan is a half *gotra* and not the whole *gotra*, so it is regarded that the Agrwāls have 17.5 *gotras*. Interestingly the 17.5 *gotras* is preceded by a story. Agrasen proceeded to conduct 18 *mahāyajña* (great ritual). During *yajña* (sacrificial ceremony), he noticed that a horse which had been brought to be sacrificed was to get away from sacrificial altar, and because of the king’s compassion for the animal, he stopped doing the *yajña* midway. Thus only seventeen and a half *yajñas* had been performed. After that the gods appeared before him and blessed him with seventeen and a half *gotras*. From this story, we can understand how Agrasen became famous as a compassionate king who refused slaughter of animals in *yajña*. However, there is no supportive evidence as proof. The contrarian view is that the eighteen *gotras* originated from eighteen leading families of Agroha, which were selected by Agrasen and they were given the name after the names of eighteen *r̥sis* (sage)<sup>16</sup>.

It is also thought that the *yajña* also had something to do with the formation of the *gotras*<sup>17</sup>. In the legend of Agrasen, there is a *kuldevī* narrative. It is said in the narrative that Mahālakṣmī, *kuldevī* of Agrwāls, appeared because she was satisfied with Agrasen’s oblations to her, and she decided to become Agrasen’s *kuldevī*, not only in times of crisis but at all times. She fulfills the function of a protector of that family and in turn she commands devotion.

16 [Gupta 1975:3]

17 [Babb 2004:202]

According to a legend which was written in the nineteenth century<sup>18</sup>, King Agrasen was born in the house of King Vallabh of Pratapnagar in the period of the *Dvāparayuga*. Vallabh was a descendant of Dhanpal, who was the first Vaiśya on earth. When he attended the *svayamvara*<sup>19</sup> of Madhavi, the daughter of the king Nagaraj Kumud (snake-deities), he was selected as her husband<sup>20</sup>. At that time, because Indra (the King of the God) also was enamored of her, he was furious with Agrasen even though they were friends. Agrasen went back to his kingdom with Madhvi and thereafter, set out on a pilgrimage. At the holy city of Varanasi he performed a sacrifice for Mahādev (Śiva) and gave lots of gifts to please Mahādev. Mahādev, who was pleased by Agrasen, gave a boon that by worshipping the goddess Mahālakṣmī, he (Mahādev) would ensure that all his wishes would be granted. After Varanasi, he went on to Hardwar where he worshipped Mahālakṣmī. She was pleased and promised that he would be victorious over India which Agrasen desired. On his return to Delhi, he performed severe austerities in her honor. Again she was pleased and as a clan goddess (*kuldevī*) she bestowed protection on his descendants<sup>21</sup>.

Here, it has to be emphasized that although mythically Agrwāl's *kuldevī* is Mahālakṣmī, most of the Agrwāl people in *saṭī* worship are not aware of this. They only recognize their *kuldevī* of the *gotra* or their lineage<sup>22</sup>. It seems to me that the existence of Mahālakṣmī as *kuldevī* among the community is not relevant. It follows that there is no integral relationship between the Agrwāl people who worship *saṭī* and their home town Agroha. (the place of origin of the Mahālakṣmī legend). The *kuldevīs* of *saṭī* temples in Shekhawati are not Mahālakṣmī but women belonging to the *gotras*/ lineage who committed *saṭī*.

Lindsey Harlan, who studies about *kuldevī* among Rājputs, considers it as a Rājputs tradition.

18 Regarding the legend of the king Agrasen, Baharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85) who belong to Agrwāl community, wrote the widely mentioned history of the Agrwāl community. He wrote "*Agarwalon ki Utpatti*" in 1871 which is based on an account in the *Mahalaksmi Vrat Katha* manuscript. Agroha Vikas Trust regards Baharatendu's narrative as Agrwāl origin narrative and refer it to the caste's official organizations<sup>18</sup>. According to *Agrasena Agroha Agrwāl* which is published by the Agroha Vikas Trust, in 1938-39 CE, the India Government began to conduct an excavation in Agroha. Although there was no useful information recovered from the main area because of a past war, some coins were discovered from another area. From this age, people began to gather information about the city for publishing a book which is related the history of Agrwāl. The book was first published in 1938 CE and new editions followed with revisions and now the seventh revised edition which is based on Sbaraajyamani Agrawal's writing in 1977 was published in 2012. In 1976, the then Chief Minister of Haryana Banarsi Das Gupta started the development of Agroha under the banner of "Agroha Vikas Trust". A huge Temple of Mahārājā Agrasen, Matā Lakṣmī and Matā Sarasvatī was constructed. During the last twenty years Agroha Vikas Trust has done a lot of development of this town, and a modern lodging and boarding facility is now available. A number of temples have been constructed in the Complex, including the Sila Mātā temple and Hanuman temple [Babb 2004:202]

19 It was a practice of choosing a husband, from among many of suitors, by a girl of marriageable age.

20 Because Agrasen married Madhvi who was the daughter of the king of the snake, Agrwāls worship snake-hole on *Nag Panchami*. [Gahlot & Dhar 1989:89]

21 [Babb 2004:201]

22 According to my interview, only a person replayed that Agrwāl's *kuldevī* is Mahālakṣmī. It was conducted on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2013.

She argues that the *kuldevī* has a crucial role in the religious lives of Rājput community, is regarded as a divine guardian of their fortune and honor. For the Rājputs, the idea of *kuldevī* emphasizes the sacredness of domestic pativrata duties also<sup>23</sup>. Anne Hardgrove thinks Harlan's theory helps to contextualize that the Mārwarī community combines into one figure of "*Kuldevī*" the Rājput idea of *kuldevī* as the great protectors of the community and the sacred image of "*Satīmātā*" in the domestic sphere. She is the goddess who provides a public representation of protection to the community as symbolized by the virtues of an inner domesticity. I believe this sentiment is reflected in the *satī* temples of Shekhawati.

According to my research, I see a noticeable linkage between the social status of different communities and lineages and their representative temples. The Agrwāl community of 17.5 *gotras* has only 8 *gotras* with 22 lineages represented in their *kuldevī* temples in Shekhawati. The Chart 2 reflects each of these 8 *gotras* holdings of *satī* temples in Shekhawati. Bāṃsal *gotra* holding is 43 %. As mentioned before, Rāṇī Satī who is the *kuldevī* of the Jālān lineage, Bāṃsal *gotra*, is the most famous. It implies that *satī* worship is strong, among them, their trusts have ample funds to manage the temples and provide facilities to the devotees along with publicity pamphlets and booklets comprising *satī* stories. Likewise the Garg *gotras* also have a substantial presence (in the spread of their temples). According to my findings, in the other *gotras* *satī* worship sentiment does not seem to be so strong. For example, some *satī* temples are closed except during the *pūjā* time, some temples have disappeared for lack of care. The physical state of the temples demonstrates the strength and status of the families supporting them. The reasons for the spread of *satī* worship and the existence of the temples belonging to the Agrwāl community in Shekhawati are : first migration, second : search for their own identity, development of their community, business linkages, cumulative prosperity.

I gathered information covering 65 temples in this time. Out of these, 41 temples are located in Fatehpur. According to "Agrasaurabha"<sup>24</sup>, written about the introduction of Agrwāl community in Fatehpur in AD 1451, Fatehpur Khan, established Fatehpur. He was tolerant towards Hinduism and some Agrwāl communities (besides other local people from Hisar and surrounding areas) followed him there<sup>25</sup>. During this migration they brought their own tradition of *satī* worship to Fatehpur. Other castes like Brāhman, Nāī, Kumhār etc, followed<sup>26</sup>. However, around 19-21<sup>th</sup> century, there was a change in the region. People started to migrate from Fatehpur to seek wealth, they began to live in metropolitan cities like Mumbai. Following prosperity and success their nostalgia drove

23 [Harlan 1992:52]

24 Ramagopala Varma (ed.) *Agrasaurabha*, Shree Agrwal Samaj, Fathepur, Shekhawati, 1987. [Ramagopala 1987]

25 [Ramagopala 1987:1-9]

26 [Ramagopala 1987:7]

them to organize trusts for regional revitalization<sup>27</sup> (Shekhawati) and this renaissance of commerce also included a sprouting of *satī* temples in Shekhawati.

As you can see in “List of the *Satī* Temples in Shekhawati”, erection of *satī* temples starts from 1950s to recent years. At the same time, they begin to seek their identity through the history of *satī* worship. Following the phenomena of the advocacy “First worship your own *kuldevī*” the Goyankā lineage (No.38,55) and the Khemakā lineage (No.40) are actively engaged in soliciting any information about *satī* worship amongst their clan<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hands the well-established Poddhars are strongly propagating the thought underlying the Advocacy viz a viz their *kuldevī*, Mādala Devī. They have published a booklet narrating stories of Mādala Devī as a benefactress for the devotees and her malevolent intent for those who lack faith in her (No.46)<sup>29</sup>.

Satī temples, reflecting prosperity, with a wealthy management and a constant flow of visitors and an array of festivals remain relevant as social edifices for the communities. Besides their religious significance they use it as cultural centers as well, a meeting ground providing space for interaction. And the larger the festivities is the stronger the prospects for growth, reflecting a strong linkage between economic resurgence and a growing desire for prestige of the community. In comparison there are smaller temples, lacking the religious fervor, the fanfare of wealth and publicity associated with the Rāñī Satī temples. They have hitherto been neglected by the owners the devotees as well as the researchers.

But my study shows that these other temples are now coming alive. There is a sense of rejuvenation which may be attributed to multiplicity of reasons e.g social changes, assertion of individual identities by each family lineage and the spread of *satī* worship phenomenon. All these, in a way, are related to the growing economic phenomenon. I would like to present my study of *satī* temples in Shekhawati within a historical setting for which I am still searching for relevant documentation. So far I have depended mostly on oral accounts of some *satī* worshippers which may or may not be wholly dependable.

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27 [Ramagopala 1987:19]

28 *Shree Biiran Barajii Dadijii Bhajana Maalaa*, Shree Shakti Goenkaa Trust, 2007. And Jaya Shree Khemakaa Shakti Sangha, *Shree Shakti Vandanaa*, Jaya Shree Khemaka Shakti Sangha, 2008.

29 *Shree Maadala Bhavaanii Carita Maanasa, Managala Paatha*. Shree Poddhaara Maadala Bhavaanii Samiti Guwahaati. 1980.

## 2) Possibility of Sanskritization

According to the Chart 3, the beginning of the *satī* story dates back to the tenth century. We can see that there are 15 *satī* temples which have *satī* story set in thirteenth century. Most of the temples are Rāñī Satī temples which have Nārāyaṇī Devī *satī* story.

	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	n.d
Agarwal		1		15		4	3	3	4	1	1	10
Brahman						1		1	1			1
Nai	1					1						
Darji											2	
Mochi												1
Oswal							1					
Maheisvara										1		
Kuhmar												1
Vishvakaram								1				
Total	1	1		15		6	4	5	5	2	3	13

**[Chart 3] the Origins of the *satī* stories in Shekhawati, 10<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century**

All these are branches which are supported by Jālān lineage, Bāṃsal *gotra*, a community which dominates Shekhawati region. That explains the proliferation of Rāñī Satī temples in Shekhawati. Other temples have *satī* stories set in fifteenth century to eighteenth century patronized by *gotras* or lineage other than the Jālān lineage, Bāṃsal *gotra*, (in the Agrwāl community). Besides these there are a few temples belonging to other castes eg. Nāī, Brāhman, Darjī etc.

The *satī* tradition embodies two distinct features ; the myth surrounding the construction of the *satī* temples and the actual site of widow immolation. The dominant community of the Agrwāls carried relics of *satī* altars from their native places to their new place in Shekhawati to construct new *satī* shrines retaining the prevailing myth. The temples on the original sites where widow immolation actually occurred have no mythological stories attributed to them. On my inspection, I found that these temples belong to the Nāī, Darjī and Kumhār (lower) caste whereas the *satī* story temples belong to the rich communities of the Agrwāls, the Brāhmans, and the Osvāls. These are the so-called lower castes. These temples enshrine a woman who burns herself with her husband's corpse. As a remarkable instance, the temple of Darjī is constructed after a woman burned herself with her husband in the twentieth century. In the case of lower castes, widow immolations are described as *satī* to acquire higher cultural status by lower caste<sup>30</sup>. M.S Srinivas, a sociologist known for her work on caste and caste systems, social stratification defines *Sanskritization* as.

Sanskritization may be briefly defined as the process by which “low” caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a “twice- born” caste. The Sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierarchy.

30 [Sangari & Vaid 1991:ws-9]

Srinivas adds that there are three models of Sanskritization, Brāhman, Kṣatriya, and Vaiśa. Especially, trade castes (Mārwarī, Vaiśa caste) enjoy a great deal of prestige in Rajasthan. The twentieth century has indeed witnessed a great increase in the quantum of mobility in the caste system. Sanskritization played an important role in this mobility by enabling low castes to pass into higher castes<sup>31</sup>. Harlan follows this theory and explains how Mārwarīs absorb practice of *satī*. When Rājput women insist that the practice of *satī* is their own tradition, they regard the power of *sat* as vital and unique only to them. Only Rājput women can make the fire of *satī* appear by their inner power. *Jauhar* is historically famous among the Rājputs in the mediaval period. Gradually the practice of *satī* spread amongst the other castes as well. Lower caste women took to self immolation hoping to elevate their caste position. But, their deification depended upon their ability to make fire manifest itself.

According to my findings, *satī* story among Agrwāl community regard the power of *sat* as important. However, the temple supported by Darjī does not have the concept of *sat* as well as the temple by Kumhār (supposedly another lower caste). It can be said that these lower people learned from watching the practice of *satī* by Mārwarī, and followed it. Therefore, there is no concept of *sat* in such temples. However, it is necessary to think whether that there is any social oppression for the lower caste in the region or not, and whether there is any social impact for them by taking the practice of *satī*. These points are my further subject.

### 3) *Satī* Story of Mārwarīs

Normal image of *satī* story is when a husband dies, the wife goes into his funeral pyre with husband's corpse. Here, the relationship is of husband and wife. However, there is a diversity of *satī* stories in the region. The relationship is between brother and sister(s), or fiancé and fiancée in *satī* stories.

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31 [Srinivas 1989:18]

## Satī Story in Shekhawati

No.	Period of Story	Relationship	How husband (brother) Died	Key Word
1	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
2	About 15th	Husband and Wife	Killed by Dacoits	Dream, Horse, Brother
3				
4	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
5	About 15th	Husband and Wife	Killed by Dacoits	Dream, Horse, Brother
6	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
7	V.S1525 (1468)	No info		Migration
8				
9				
10	V.S1137(1080)	Husband and 4 wives	No info	Migration, Polygyny
11	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
12	V.S1330 (1273)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Dream
13				
14	No info	No info	No info	
15	About 17th	Brother and Sisters	Death from Disease	
16	No info	No info	No info	
17	No info	No info	No info	
18	V.S1603 (1546)	Husband and Wife (&sisters)	Sudden Death on the Day of their Wedding	3 Sisters died after Satī, Migration
19	No info	No info	No info	
20	About 15th	No info		
21	V.S1838 (1781)	Husband and Wife(Son)	Killed by Dacoits	Murti, Satī with son
22	(not sati temple)			
23	About 16th	Unmarried	No info	Unmarried woman's Satī
24	About 20th	No info		Darji Caste
25	(not sati temple)			For Ancestor
26	No info	No info	No info	
27	No Exist			
28	No info			
29	V.S 1515(1458)	No info	No info	Nāi Caste
30	About 80-90 years ago	Husband and Wife	Sudden Death on the Day of their Wedding	Darjya Caste, Dhobhi Caste, Love Marriage
31	About 16th	King and Woman	Not sati	No Satī, śakti, Osvāl community
32	V.S1721 (1664)	No info	No info	Migration
33	No info	Unmarried	No info	Mocī Caste, Unmarried Satī
34		No info	No info	
35	No Exist			
36	About 19th	No info	No info	Maheshwarī community
37	V.S1820 (1763)	Husband and Wife	No info	Dream, Prediction by Paṇḍit
38	V.S1337 (1280), V.S1665(1608)	Husbands and Wives	Sudden Death	Migration, Prediction by Paṇḍit, 2 stories
39	No info	No info	No info	Rājput
40	No info	No info	No info	Migration, Progress in gathering information
41	About 17th	No info	No info	Migration, Brāhman
42	V.S1776 (1719)	Brother and Sisters	Killed by Snake	Migration, Satī of Sisters, Dream
43	(not sati temple)			
44	V.S1614(1558)	No info	No info	Migration
45	No info	No info	No info	
46	V.S1832 (1775)	Husband and Wife	Killed by Dacoits	Showing worshippers's experience under the Goddess



47	No info	Husband and Wife	No info	Actual Picture of Committing Satī, Kumhār Caste
48	No info	Three women	No info	Three women's Satī
49	No info	No info	No info	Temple on the Road
50	V.S1549 (1492)	Not Sati (?)	Not Satī (?)	Migration story, Combination of 5 Goddesses of Durga, worship Brāhman and Agrwāl
51	About 10th	Husband and Wife	Killed by Snake	Nārī
52	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
53	V.S1896 (1839)	Husband and Wife	No info	Conversation with Holy Person, Declare of becoming Satī, Her Miracle
54	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation, Mūrtī
55	V.S1337 (1280), V.S1665(1608)	Husbands and Wives	Sudden Death	Migration, Prediction by Pandit, 2 stories
56	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
57	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
58				Nārī Caste
59	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
60	V.S 1832 (1775)	Husband and Wife	Killed by Dacoits	Showing worshippers's experience under the Goddess
61	V.S1330 (1273)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Dream
62	No info	No info	No info	Migration, Progress in gathering information
63	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation
64	About 20th	No info	No info	4 Sharines
65	V.S1352 (1295)	Husband and Wife	Death in Battle (Muslim)	Incarnation

For example, the *satī* story of Pārā Sārā Śakti Mandir (No.15) describes as relationship between brother and sisters. One day, the younger brother died because of disease. The sisters decided to go into the fire with their young brother's corpse. The reason is that they thought without the brother, it would be difficult for them to live because the brother traditionally performs the *cunrī* ceremony at sisters' wedding and also the festival of *Rakṣābandhan* which is a celebration of the bond between brothers and sisters. Without the brother the festival would be rendered meaningless. Śrī Śakti Mandir, Dāṁdhaṇa (No.42) shows *satī* by sisters, Ṭīḍā and Gelā, when younger brother was bitten by a snake and died. Why sister(s) burned herself with her brother is that they foresaw their miserable life in the future. A brother is believed to be a "protector". Without him they are left bereft.

There is another case, of the relationship between fiancé and fiancée in *satī* stories. Śrī Dhānukā Atithi Grha (No.23) show an unmarried infant girl Sāvā Sātī, 12 years old, dedicated to become a *satī* for her fiancé. Other *satī* story by Bhārgava Śakti Mandir (No.21) shows a wife, Bhāgavānī devī, goes into her husband's funeral pyre along with her son, although it is prohibited for a woman who has an infant from becoming *satī*. As mentioned above, it can be said that the relationship between husband and wife is normally associated with the practice of *satī* – but there are other

kinds of *satī* stories as well.

Moreover, in these *satī* stories in the region, there is no story where the husband fights against an enemy on the battle field and is killed. The popular image is that of a husband fighting against dacoits or dying of sickness. Among the Baniyā *satī* stories the protagonist husband is never killed on the battle field. However, some temples (Rāñī Satī temple) have an element of fighting which pertains to the Kṣatriya caste (warrior caste). The Baniyā, it seems, have appropriated this scene from the Rājput traditional *satī* stories.

I have shown that the condition of *satī* temples in Shekhawati are closely connected with the liveliness of the communities associated with them. If the management of the trust are strong, along with a compelling *satī* story, the *satī* temple is well maintained. This is also a reflection of how much the communities are investing in their hometown and their clan. In Shekhawati, even smaller temples hold melas and have *dharmaśālās*. The holding of melas has an resultant economic bearing. The constructing of the *dharmaśālās* translates into an increasing number of devotees and consequently *satī* worship in the community grows in significance.

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