A Prestigious Path to Grace:
Class, Modernity, and Female Religiosity in Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism

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September, 2013

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Acknowledgements

This project has received financial support from both the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (the Canada Graduate Scholarship) and from the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (the Doctoral Student Research Fellowship). The Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University has also provided two generous grants in the last years of my program: the Dean’s Fellowship and the Dissertation Completion Fellowship. I am grateful for this support.

I took my first class with Davesh Soneji, my supervisor and mentor, over a decade ago. Needless to say, it changed the trajectory of my life. Davesh is a brilliant scholar, an engaging teacher, and, more importantly, he is a kind, generous, and incredibly supportive supervisor. I remain indebted to him for the countless hours he has spent poring over my work and discussing my research with me. His passion about all things related to South Asian studies is contagious and I thank him for continuing to inspire me and teach me new things every day.

Over the course of my graduate career, I have interacted with a number of scholars and fellow graduate students who have taken the time to provide feedback on my conference presentations, share their work with me, and answer my persistent questions. These include Francoise Mallison, Jack Hawley, Amrita Shodhan, Shandip Saha, Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, Douglas Haynes, Rupi Naresh, Amy Allocco, Lisa Trivedi, Meilu Ho, Purnima Shah, and Emilia Bachrach. Abigail McGowan, especially, has been incredibly kind with her time, research, and feedback.
My research in India was facilitated through the generous help of the following individuals: Dr. Savaliya of the BJ Institute of Learning and Research in Ahmedabad, R. Nanavati and Sharmila Bhat of the Oriental Institute of MS University in Baroda, Jayesh Shah from the Center of Culture and Development Research in Baroda, and the numerous librarians I met at the Gujarat Vidyapith in Ahmedabad over the years. My work with the Puṣṭimārg community would not have been possible without the support of Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī, Vagishkumar Gosvāmī, Tilak Bava Gosvāmī, Chandragopal Gosvāmī, Raja beṭīji, Indira beṭīji, Nikunjlata beṭīji, Brajīta bahūji, and Krishnakumar Nayak. I would also like to thank all the Puṣṭimārg lay women I met over the years for graciously opening up their religious, social, and personal lives to me.

Teachers and colleagues I have met over the last decade in Montreal include Lara Braitstein, Victor Hori, Leslie Orr, Arvind Sharma, and Katherine Young. They have always been kind and supportive of my work. I would also like to thank Judith Sribnai for her help with translating my abstract into French.

Finally, my largest debt is owed to my family, especially my mother and father, for their sustained support, endless patience, and bottomless love. I could not have completed this dissertation without them. Chetan, you have always cheered me on and cheered me up – especially in the times when I needed it most. Thank you for taking this journey with me; may it always be filled with grace.
Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between class formation, women’s religious practices, and domesticity among the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav mercantile communities (baniyās) of Gujarat. It argues that in modern India, Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities inform baniyā class formation and respectability on the one hand, and constitute the domestic patronage of Puṣṭimārg on the other. Women’s social and religious practices thus come to be centrally implicated in the question of what it means to be a Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav in the modern world.

Using archival and textual sources, I begin by unpacking the social and economic histories of baniyā communities in both pre-colonial and colonial contexts, and trace their emergence as Puṣṭimārg’s most prestigious patrons. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in emulation of Rajasthani nobility, baniyās publically displayed wealth and prestige through donative activities centered around both Puṣṭimārg temple ritual (sevā, “service”), and gifts offered to the Brahmin religious leaders of the tradition, the Gosvāmīs. As “class” begins to emerge as a discrete marker of status in colonial India, upper-caste Puṣṭimārg women are positioned as vital actors in the production of family prestige and respectability within the domestic sphere. In this dissertation, I therefore focus on Puṣṭimārg baniyā negotiations with modernity and identify baniyā men’s concerns around sectarian identity as they come to be dramatized in nineteenth and early twentieth-century social reform movements centered upon women in the Bombay Presidency (including the well-known “Mahārāj Libel Case” of 1862).
This study also turns to traditional sources, such as Puṣṭimārg hagiographic literature (vārtās) and devotional songs composed by women in the dhol and garbā genres, in order to understand the religious practices of women in these communities and their relationship to the production of prestige. My analysis of the vārtās provides a sense of women’s social roles and positions in the Puṣṭimārg imagination, while women’s performance genres provide an important counterpoint to the much-celebrated “official” liturgical music of Puṣṭimārg temples (havelīs). In the final chapter of the dissertation I draw on my ethnographic work to demonstrate how, in the contemporary context, the imbrication of material and religious cultures is seen through the performance of increasingly commodified styles of domestic ritual and through the consumption and display of religious commodities in the home. Recently, women from upper-class Puṣṭimārg families have also begun taking lessons in what they regard as the “classical” style of temple or havelī music. All these processes, I argue, cast women as the producers, performers, and pedagogues of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities. The material expressions of their devotion in domestic contexts as well as women’s religious practices – which includes performing sevā daily, organizing religious gatherings in the home, and participating in temple music lessons – have reconstituted the home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.
Résumé

Cette thèse analyse la relation entre constitution d'une classe, pratiques religieuses des femmes et espace privé, au sein de la communauté marchande Viṣṇouiste Puṣṭimārg du Gujarat. Il s'agit de montrer, d'une part, que, dans l'Inde moderne, les activités religieuses accomplies par les femmes Puṣṭimārg participent à la formation de la caste banijā et à sa reconnaissance, et que, d'autre part, ces pratiques représentent un appui fondamental à la secte Puṣṭimārg dans l'espace domestique. Les pratiques sociales et religieuses des femmes constituent ainsi un élément central pour comprendre ce que signifie être Viṣṇouiste Puṣṭimārgī dans le monde actuel.

À partir d'archives et de sources écrites, je commence par mettre à jour l'histoire sociale et économique des communautés banijā durant la période pré-coloniale et coloniale, de manière à montrer comment ces communautés sont devenues les mécènes les plus prestigieux du Puṣṭimārg. Tout au long des XVIIᵉ et XVIIIᵉ siècles, imitant la noblesse du Rajasthan, les banijā manifestent publiquement leur prospérité et leur distinction en faisant des offrandes rituelles dans les temples Puṣṭimārg (sevā, « service »), ou par le biais de dons remis aux maîtres brahamanes de la tradition, les Gosvāmīs. Alors que la « classe » s'impose comme marqueur d'appartenance sociale dans l'Inde coloniale, les femmes de la haute société Puṣṭimārg tiennent une place essentielle dans l'élaboration du prestige et de la reconnaissance de la famille au sein de l'espace privé. Dans ce travail, je m'intéresse à la manière dont les banijā Puṣṭimārg négocient leur passage dans la modernité. J'examine les questions que posent l'identité sectaire notamment aux hommes banijā dans le contexte des mouvements de réformes sociales.
pour les femmes qui ont lieu dans la Province de Bombay au XIXᵉ et début XXᵉ siècle (par exemple dans le très connu « Cas Mahārāj Libel » en 1862).

Pour comprendre les pratiques religieuses des femmes ainsi que leur rôle dans la reconnaissance de la communauté, je m'appuie également sur des sources traditionnelles, telle que la littérature hagiographique Puṣṭimārg (vārtās) et les chants de dévotion dhol ou garbā composés par les femmes. L'analyse des vārtās montre le rôle social de ces femmes et leur place dans l'imaginaire Puṣṭimārg. Elle révèle également que les genres réservés aux femmes constituent un pendant important aux chants liturgiques officiels et plus célèbres des temples Puṣṭimārg. Dans le dernier chapitre de cette thèse, une approche ethno-graphique permet de montrer comment, dans le contexte contemporain, le mélange de culture matériel et spirituel est perceptible dans des rituels privés de plus en plus tournés vers la consommation ainsi que l'acquisition et l'exposition d'objets religieux dans la maison. Récemment, des femmes de la haute société Puṣṭimārg ont commencé à prendre des leçons sur ce qu'elles considèrent comme le style « classique » des temples, la musique havelī. L'ensemble de ces phénomènes confère aux femmes les rôles de productrice, actrice et témoin de l'identité Puṣṭimārg chez les élites. Les formes matérielles de la dévotion dans l'espace domestique, de même que les pratiques religieuses des femmes (la pratique quotidienne du sevā, l'organisation de réunion à la maison, les leçons de musique au temple) font aujourd'hui de la maison le lieu central du Puṣṭimārg.
Note on Transliteration

Transliterations of Sanskrit and Hindi conform to the conventions outlined in the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (McGregor 1996). I do not use diacritics for places, for the names of associations or societies (such as Arya Samaj), newspapers, journals, and for the names of persons who lived after the nineteenth century. I adopt diacritics for honorary titles (such as Mahārāj, Gosvāmī) and caste names (with the exception of Brahmin). When secondary sources are quoted, the conventions deployed by the author are reproduced in quotations. I use Sanskrit transliteration over Hindi when referring to the titles of Sanskrit texts and for the names of Vallabhācārya, Viṣṭhalanātha, and Gokulanātha. For all other terms, I use standard Hindi transliteration.
Introduction

Puṣṭimārg, or “the Path of Grace,” is a Vaiṣṇav devotional tradition centered upon the worship of Śrīnāthji, a localized form of Kṛṣṇa enshrined in the sect’s main pilgrimage center in the town of Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The tradition was established in the sixteenth century by Vallabhācārya (ca. 1479-1531, also known as Vallabha), a Telugu Brahmin, who discovered the svarūp (“self-manifestation”) of Śrīnāthji during his travels in the Braj region of north India. After erecting a small shrine for the image, Vallabha developed a form of devotional worship that came to be known as sevā (“service”). Vallabha and, later, his second son and successor, Viṭṭhalanātha (ca.1516-1586), are said to have embarked on a series of pilgrimage tours across northern and western India in an effort to consolidate support for the burgeoning tradition. In western India, such as Gujarat and Rajasthan, Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha drew followers from a range of social and caste backgrounds – from the poorest agrarian communities to members of the wealthy mercantile elite and political nobility.

1 Traditional accounts of the “four teaching traditions” (catuh or cār sampradāy) model, which emerge in the early eighteenth century, intend to demonstrate how the four Vaiṣṇav sects of Rāmānand, Keśav Bhaṭṭa Kaśmirī, Caitanya, and Vallabhācārya are the North Indian expressions of the southern traditions established by Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Viṣṇusvāmī, respectively (Hawley 2011, 160-161). In its broader understanding, “Vaiṣṇav” refers to an individual who worships Viṣṇu or any one of his avatāras (“incarnation,” “descent-form”), the most popular of which are Kṛṣṇa and Rāma. Finally, although I use the term “sect” as a translation for sampradāy throughout this thesis, I want to distance myself from its traditional meaning, which sometimes carries a negative connotation of dissent from a majority group. I am using the term “sect” to describe a specifically South Asian religious phenomenon based on the following definition of sampradāy: “a vehicle for transmitting and perpetuating a sacred tradition via a continuous succession of preceptors” (Bennett 1990, 187).

2 In the Puṣṭimārg context, the term svarūp (Skt. svarūpa, “own form”) – and not mūrti (“embodiment”) or vīgraha (“form, figure”), is used to refer to images of Kṛṣṇa-Śrīnāthji. As a svarūp, the image is considered to be the imminent manifestation of god, requiring all the loving attention as a living child-Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, the term pūjā, which is understood as a practice bound by formality and selfish intentions, is not used to denote Puṣṭimārg worship. Instead, sevā (“service”) is used to describe the sincere and spontaneous actions by which devotees take care of Śrīnāthji and offer their devotion.
Under the leadership of Viṭṭhalanātha, *sevā* evolved into a deeply aesthetized and opulent form of worship consisting of the temple-based offerings of poetry (*kīrtan*), music, food (*bhog*), and ornamentation (*śrīgār*). In Puṣṭimārg temples, commonly referred to as *havelīs* (“mansion”), the sophisticated and rich nature of *sevā* has required generous support from the sect’s elite patrons. Today, for example, the Śrīnāthji *havelī* in Nathdwara is considered one of the wealthiest temple sites in India (Saha 2004, 2). One significant theme threaded throughout this dissertation is the patronage of Puṣṭimārg by the mercantile communities of Gujarat, the *baniyās*. *Baniyā* patronage of Puṣṭimārg provides an occasion for wealthy merchant and business families to produce merit and social prestige while simultaneously demonstrating their devotion. By hosting festivals at the *havelī*, sponsoring feasts, funding *havelī* renovations, and offering gifts to the *havelī* and their custodians (the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī or Mahārāj) *baniyās* transmute wealth into moral worth and social respectability.

Most studies of Puṣṭimārg have thus far focused on *havelī*-worship, including the temple traditions of painting, music, and food-offerings (Barz 1976; Bennett 1990, 1993; Beck 1993; Gaston 1997; Taylor 1997; Ho 2006; Ambalal 1987; Lyons 2004; Toomey 1986, 1990, 1992). By exclusively focusing on the *havelī* and their Brahmin male leaders, these lines of academic inquiry have left significant gaps in the study of Puṣṭimārg. The practice of domestic *sevā* and women’s religious roles in the sect represent significant areas of scholarly neglect. These issues, combined with my interest in the production and display of *baniyā* family status and prestige through patterns of religious patronage have given rise to the following queries which animate my work: (1) how does Puṣṭimārg domestic *sevā* become implicated in the production of *baniyā* status
and respectability? (2) how are the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg lay women implicated in this process? In seeking to answer these questions, this project constitutes the first academic study to explore Puṣṭimārg domestic sevā and modes of women’s religious participation in the tradition.

During his travels across India, Vallabha is said to have discovered eight additional svarūps of Kṛṣṇa. Collectively, all nine images including that of Śrīnāthji are known as the nav-nidhi, the revered “nine-treasures” of the sect. These svarūps were inherited by Viṭṭhalanātha, and before passing away he ensured the continual worship of the nav-nidhi by distributing them among his seven male heirs. The subsequent “Seven Houses” of Puṣṭimārg became established through the formal installation of the nine svarūps in Puṣṭimārg havelīs located in different parts of the country, with the first house retaining possession of the sect’s principal image, Śrīnāthji. ³ With Viṭṭhalanātha’s male descendants, known as Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs, the tradition expanded in a dynastic lineage, and today the Gosvāmī of each major Puṣṭimārg havelī can trace their lineage back to Vallabha. Furthermore, since Vallabha himself is considered as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, Gosvāmīs are also traditionally revered by Puṣṭimārgīs as living representatives of Vallabha-Kṛṣṇa. ⁴

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³ In 1672, the Śrīnāthji image moved to the town of Sinhad in Rajasthan from Braj when political instability in the Braj region prompted many members of the Puṣṭimārg leadership to migrate to parts of western India. With the formal installation of the Śrīnāthji svarūp in Sinhad, the town was renamed Nathdwara, “gateway to Śrīnāthji.” The present locations of the nine svarūps and the houses to which they belong are as follows: first house: Nathdwara (Śrīnāthji, Śrīnavanīpriyajī and Śrīmathureṣājī); second house: Nathdwara (Śrīviṭṭhalnāthji); third house: Kankroli (Śrī Dvārakānāthji); fourth house: Gokul, Braj (Śrī Gokulnāthji); fifth house: Kamavan (Śrī Gokulcandramājī); sixth house: Varanasi (Śrī Mukundrājī)/Surat (Śrī Bālkṛṣṇajī); seventh house: Kamavan (Śrī Manmohanajī) (Bennett 1993, 52).

⁴ In the seventeenth century hagiography, the Śrī Nāthji ke Pṛakātya ki Vārta, Vallaṭa’s birth is described as occurring simultaneously as the emergence of the Śrīnāthji svarūp, specifically with the mouth of the svarūp. For this reason, Vallaṭa is traditionally accepted as the mukhāvatāra (“incarnation of the mouth”) of Kṛṣṇa (Barz 1992, 24-30).
Despite the “officially” male public face of contemporary Puṣṭimārg, women are very much at the centre of the life of the sect. The place of women in the Puṣṭimārg tradition is complex, and in many ways, contentious. Although we can sense their presence in the historical record (for example, in hagiographic texts and devotional literature attributed to female figures), scholarly representations cast Puṣṭimārg as an almost exclusively male tradition and lineage. It is this paradox of the “absent-yet-present” Puṣṭimārgī woman that has given rise to many of the questions that form the basis of this dissertation. Moreover, although most Puṣṭimārg followers perform domestic worship in their homes – a practice which I argue is central to maintaining their sectarian identity – it is surprising that there has not been a single comprehensive study on this topic, until now.

I suggest that one of the reasons why Puṣṭimārg may be under-represented in academic literature is because the sect and its elite adherents were at the center of an historical controversy. This controversy, dramatized in the colonial courts of the Bombay Presidency, represented the culmination of reform efforts led by the leading Gujarati reformers of the mid-nineteenth century. The highly gendered reform discourses, which informed the public disparagement of Puṣṭimārg and its baniyā followers, are the subject of chapter three of this dissertation. As I discuss in the chapter, the opulent lifestyles of the wealthy Bombay baniyā merchants, combined with their apathy towards English education, made them the focus of reformist debates in the Bombay Presidency. Baniyā patronage of Puṣṭimārg, especially their allegiance to and reverence of Gosvāmīs, drew the critique of well-known Gujarati reformers such as Karsondas Mulji (1832-1871). The Gosvāmīs, themselves, were publically criticized in vernacular and English newspapers.
and through the circulation of handbills for several years in the late 1850s. The Gosvāmīs were condemned for their own lavish lifestyles and the favouritism they displayed towards their wealthy patrons. However, the most significant allegation put forth by reformers concerned the Gosvāmīs’ alleged sexual promiscuity and their sexual exploitation of female devotees. This public defamation culminated in the publication of an article by Karsondas Mulji in his Gujarati reformist paper in the year 1860. In the article, Mulji declared Puṣṭimārg to be a heterodox sect – in relation to Vedic religion – since it was only founded in the sixteenth century. He also accused the Gosvāmīs of grossly manipulating the sect’s ideologies by dishonouring the wives and daughters of their followers by having sexual relations with them. In his article, Mulji named one Gosvāmī by name, Jadunathji Mahārāj from Surat, who subsequently filed a libel suit against Mulji.

The libel case, popularly referred to as the “Mahārāj Libel Case,” began in the early months of 1862. The case served as a forum for the British court and reformers such as Mulji to interrogate the “authenticity” of the Puṣṭimārg sect and the authority of Gosvāmīs as religious figures. The case was seen as a victory for reformers on grounds of morality and reason. The swift circulation in both English and Gujarati newspapers of the court’s proceedings from the libel case helped to reify reformist efforts to malign the Puṣṭimārg sect, its leaders, and its wealthy merchant followers. Thus, with the exception of a few scholarly writings, almost every English-language source alluding to the Puṣṭimārg sect, to this day, filters their discussion of Puṣṭimārg through the prism of the events surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case.
In this introductory chapter I lay out the foundations of this dissertation by presenting three important themes that inform my work: 1) domesticity and domestic sevā in Puṣṭimārg; 2) women’s devotional practices and “domestic rituals”; and, 3) the relationship between religious patronage and the production of class status. I will then present a literature review, my research methodology, and the chapter breakdown.

I. Domestic Sevā and Domesticity in Puṣṭimārg

The beginnings of domestic sevā in Puṣṭimārg are somewhat ambiguous. This project does not seek to clarify this ambiguity nor does it necessarily attempt to historicize women’s roles as performers of domestic sevā in Puṣṭimārg. The primary concern of this thesis is to demonstrate how the practice of domestic sevā and women’s religious activities help produce family status and prestige in the elite baniyā communities of Gujarat. A focus on domestic sevā, as opposed to temple sevā, allows us to chart women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg as a whole, and though I map the presence of women in the tradition’s historical contexts, I do this with a view to better understand today’s Puṣṭimārg.

Domestic and familial imagery permeate every aspect of Puṣṭimārg ritual culture. Both Puṣṭimārg liturgy and theology approach the worship of god as child (vātsalya bhāv) and a Puṣṭimārg temple in most parts of northern and western India is not called mandir – the common Hindi term used for “temple” – but are known as an havelī, literally “house” or “mansion” (specifically, “Nandālaya,” the home of Nanda and Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa’s foster-parents). Structurally and conceptually sevā is domestically orientated; it consists of participating in or reproducing the quotidian activities or lilās
(“divine sports”) of Śrīnāthjī as he lived in Braj, such as when he is awakened (maṅgal), is dressed and adorned (śṛṅgār), plays with his friends (gvāl), is fed his mid-day meal (rāj-bhog), and is placed to sleep at night (śayan). As householders who marry, have children, and live in their home-havelīs, the havelī is traditionally accepted as the home of both Krṣṇa and the Gosvāmī.6

Gosvāmīs negotiate their dual status as house-holders and Brahmin religious leaders in particular ways. On the one hand, although the hereditary leaders of the sect are Brahmin men (as in other bhakti sectarian movements) Puṣṭimārg’s own bhakti ethos eschewed and subverted Brahminic orthodoxy and asceticism in favor of an emotionally engaging and personal devotional practice. These themes are illustrated in Puṣṭimārg hagiographical literatures, such as the seventeenth-century Caurāsī Vaiṣṇava Vārtās and the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇava Vārtās, the didactic tales of the disciples initiated by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha respectively. Such hagiographical literature, as well as Sanskrit and vernacular works composed by Vallabha and other Puṣṭimārg theologians, like Harirāy (traditional dates, 1591-1716), stress devotional practices that center upon

5 In havelī contexts, the sevā of Śrīnāthjī is structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as jhāṅkis (“glimpses”). Each of these viewing-periods last approximately fifteen minutes and are accompanied by the singing of devotional songs (kīrtans) and music, and backdrop paintings are hung – all of which serve to enhance and invoke the specific lilā or mood of each jhāṅki. Although the timings may vary from one havelī to the next, the liturgical cycle is as follows: 5am-7am: māṅgal (Krṣṇa is awakened); 7am-8am: śṛṅgār (the svarūp is adorned); 8am-9am: gvāl (Krṣṇa is displayed as walking in the pasture with cows, and playing with his friends); 10am-11am: rājbhog (the most ornate of them, when Krṣṇa is presented with his mid-day meal); 4-4:30pm: utthāpan (after an afternoon nap, Krṣṇa has wandered off in the pastures with his friends and is called to return); 5-5:30pm: sandhāyā (Krṣṇa is offered a light meal); 6-6:30pm: śayan (Krṣṇa has gone to bed for the night). The sevā structure also varies according to seasons and festivals.

6 The status of the havelī as both the abode of Krṣṇa and the home (or domestic property) of the Gosvāmī became a contentious issue in the late 1950s and 1960s when the Bombay Public Trust Act was passed in 1950. Under this act, and the previous Charitable and Religious Trust Act (1920), all religious institutions and charitable trusts were deemed “public” and, thus, came under the administration of the state/Indian government. For decades, Gosvāmīs and their family members, engaged in legal battles to revoke the status of the havelī as public or state property. For excerpts from such court cases as well as a Puṣṭimārg perspective on these issues, see Śhyam Manohar Gosvāmī’s Ādhunik Nyāy-Pranālī aur Puṣṭimārgiya Sādhanā-Pranālī kā Āpsī Tākrāv (2006).
the family and are located within the household, in addition to – or in contrast to – temple sevā. The rhetoric of domesticity, with its emphasis on performing sevā in the home, preparing elaborate food-offerings, and worshiping Śrīnāthjī as a child, was undoubtedly an important vehicle for Puṣṭimārg community formation.

On the other hand, Gosvāmīs ground themselves in Brahmanic authority by composing Sanskrit treatises and prescribing orthodox prescriptions of ritual purity and pollution for performing sevā (apras sevā > asparśa, “un-touched”). Vallabha composed all of his works in Sanskrit, including the Tattvārthadīpanibandha, his major theological work, the Šoḍaṣagranthāḥ, sixteen treatises delineating his philosophical (Śuddhādvaita) and devotional (Puṣṭimārg) systems, and by writing commentaries on important treatises such as the Brahmastra (his Anubhāṣya) and on several cantos of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (his Subodhini). Viṭṭhalanātha, also contributed to the Puṣṭimārg Sanskritic literary tradition by writing commentaries on Vallabha’s writings and through composing his own major works. As religious leaders who marry, however, Gosvāmīs, beginning with Vallabha, belong to the householder tradition (grhastha-āśrama). There

For example, in verses two and three of the Bhaktivardhini, one of Vallabha’s sixteen Sanskrit treatises (Šoḍaṣagranthāḥ), Vallabha explains how the “seed of love” (bhakti-bija) matures: “the way to make this seed take firm root is to remain a householder and follow one’s rule of life. The one who is not distracted should devote himself to Krishna by means of ritual image-worship, and by “hearing” and so forth [nine steps of bhakti]” (Redington 125, 2000; Skt., “bhajadbāpaiḥ prakārstu grhe sthītā svadharmataḥ avyāyṛto bhajetkṛṣṇam pūjayā śravanādibhiḥ||). The Bade Śikṣāpatra is a seventeenth-century manual of precepts that teaches the fundamentals of Puṣṭimārg sevā. It consists of Harirāy’s Sanskrit writings and his brother, Gopeśvar’s (b.1593), Brajbhāṣā commentaries. Several verses and their commentaries (such as verse four) allude to the practice of domestic sevā (Arney 517, 2007).

An adherence to strict purity rules while performing sevā is known as apras sevā or “un-touched” sevā. It requires a person to bathe before performing sevā and to not come in contact with any polluting substance prior to commencing their practice. This includes not being touched by any person who is not in a state of ritual purity. Apras sevā also involves wearing clothing that has been washed by the practitioner and which has remained untouched throughout the drying process. Sometimes, practitioners dip their clothing in water right before dressing to ensure the maintenance of ritual purity. The food prepared for sevā must also not be seen or touched by anyone who is not in a state of ritual purity before it is offered to Kṛṣṇa. Sāttvik or “pure” food-items are offered, such as milk, certain fruits, grains, nuts, sweets made of milk, et cetera. Non-vegetarian food or rājsik (“passion-inducing”) foods, such as onion and garlic, are never offered.
has also been no prevalent tradition of asceticism in the history of Puṣṭimārg as it exists in other Vaiṣṇav traditions, which do have lineages of ascetic-ācāryās (“teachers”), such as in Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇavism, Vārkari Vaiṣṇavism, Śrīvaiṣṇavism, and the Svāminārāyaṇa sampradāya.⁹

Gujarati baniyās – who, from the time of Puṣṭimārg’s arrival in Gujarat held a high social and ritual status – are drawn to Puṣṭimārg precisely because it offers a ritual culture which follows upper-caste orthodox purity/pollution prescriptions and yet is informed by a “this-worldly” theology and domestic rhetoric. Instead of ascetic withdrawal and renunciation, devotional practices are structured on, and are embedded in, family/kinship ties. Indeed, the Puṣṭimārg initiation mantra requires the relinquishing of one’s man, tan, and dhan or mind, body, and wealth/worldly “possessions” to Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰

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⁹ According to Vallabha, it is Puṣṭimārg’s emphasis on Kṛṣṇa’s grace for liberation that distinguishes it from maryādāmārg, “the path of limitations.” Maryādāmārg is characterized by an adherence to Vedic prescriptions, as well as a reliance on knowledge (jñāna) and asceticism (sanyāsa) as a means to attaining union with Brahman (mokṣa). Those on the maryādāmārg do not perform sevā, but rather perform pūjā, which according to Vallabha is a “selfish” form of worship, done with expectations of rewards (Bennett 1993, 75). Vallabha maintains that those devotees who worship selfishly and believe that the attainment of liberation is dependent upon their own efforts are susceptible to being more egoistic and thus remain in a state of avidyā (ignorance). It is perhaps for this reason that in his treatise, Samnyāsanirnayah, Vallabha explains how pride (abhimāna) is a characteristic of a sannyāsī or an ascetic. Most often, ascetics believe that through performing renunciation and various austerities they will achieve liberation. This characteristic or pride is in opposition to the humility and helplessness that characterize Puṣṭimārg devotees (Redington 2000, 167). One should not, however, be left with the impression that Vallabha was completely against adopting samnyāsa or tyāga (“renunciation”). In another Sanskrit treatise, the Samnyāsanirnayah, Vallabha does maintain that one may renounce the world in the “advanced stages of devotion, and it is ‘for the sake of experiencing separation’ (vihānubhavārtham)” (v.7-9a, Redington 168).

¹⁰ Initiation into Puṣṭimārg occurs in the form of two rites, both of which occur in the presence of a Gosvāmī, a direct descendent of Vallabha who is thus also considered an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa himself. The first rite, nām nivedan, occurs at a fairly young age (six-seven years of age), in which an individual receives and recites the eight-syllable mantra, Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama (“Śrī Kṛṣṇa is my refuge”). The second rite, which constitutes an individual’s formal initiation into the tradition, consists of receiving and reciting the longer ātmanivedan/Brahmsambandh mantra. At this point the initiate also receives their own personal svarūp of Kṛṣṇa, which the Gosvāmī has consecrated by bathing it in pūjā (the five “nectars” of curds, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar) and offers the svarūp prasād (consecrated food offering) from a previously consecrated svarūp. Through reciting the mantra one dedicates themselves and all that belongs to them to Kṛṣṇa: “Om. Kṛṣṇa is my refuge [Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama]. Tortured for thousands of years now by the pain born of separation from Krishna so that joy has disappeared, I offer to the Blessed Lord Krishna my body, senses, life-breath, and inner faculties, with all their attributes, and wife, home, children
Puṣṭimārgīs are, thus, free to pursue wealth and prosperity so long as they dedicate all their worldly belongings to Kṛṣṇa first.

Although Puṣṭimārg ritual praxis is immersed in domestic imagery, it is surprising that the practice of domestic sevā itself has never been a subject of academic inquiry. In this thesis, I discuss the performance of domestic sevā and other religious activities women engage in within the home, such as satsaṅg (“religious discourse”), bhāgavat kathā (discourses on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa), bhajan-kīrtan sessions (singing of devotional songs), and havelī music lessons. I bring this discussion into conversation with nineteenth-century gender and domestic reform movements, as well as twentieth-century nationalist and consumer ideologies, which have politicized the home by reconstituting it as a site of cultural and social production. The home is a place where caste, gender, and class politics are embedded in – and reproduced through – quotidian actions and kinship relations. In this project, I see the urban upper-class Puṣṭimārg baniyā home as a modern site of religious patronage. The home, thus, simultaneously serves three functions: 1) as the space of religious practice; 2) the arena in which women ensure comfort and respectability through the supervision of household tasks and the maintenance of social ties; 3) as the site of family status reproduction.

II. Domestic Rituals, Women, and the Practice of Bhakti

Since this thesis is partially concerned with exploring women’s domestic sevā practices, it is necessary to unpack the meaning of the phrase “domestic rituals.” I understand women’s “domestic rituals” as those religious actions which take place in (but and acquired wealth here and hereafter, along with my very self. I am your servant, Krishna, I am yours” (Redington 2000, 67).
are not limited to) the spatial boundaries of a home, such as the performance of worship
of household deities or the celebration of calendric and religious festivals, such as Divālī
and Navarātrī. Domestic rituals can also be religious practices that are tied to “domestic”
or familial concerns and which are informed by traditional views on gender roles and
marriage. Such rituals, which normally also take place in the home, include rites of
passage like pregnancy rituals (sīmanta), as well as vratas or nōnpus (“votive
observances”) performed by women to ensure their husbands’ longevity and
marital/domestic well-being. For the most part, scholarship on Hindu women and their
religious practices has been filtered through this latter understanding of domestic rituals.
That is to say, the subject of Hindu women’s religious lives in academic literature has
remained limited to discussions of married women’s auspiciousness and the rituals and/or
votive observances which these women perform in order to maintain their auspicious
status as married women or sumaṅgalīs.11 Furthermore, Hindu women’s actions –
whether they are religious practices or not – are normally read through the double-bind
modalities of “compliance” and “submission,” on the one hand, or “resistance” and
“subversion” on the other hand.12 This becomes especially true when discussing women’s
roles in bhakti or devotional traditions.

Bhakti, itself, has been construed as a revolutionary “movement” which sought
to subvert Brahmanic orthodoxy by giving a voice and providing an alternate religious

11 See, for example, Hancock (1995, 1999); Harlan (2007); Leslie (1992); McGee (1991, 1996); Nagarajan
12 See Hancock (1995, 1999); McDaniel (2007); Pearson (1996); Raheja and Gold (1994); Ramanujan
(1982).
path to members of the lower castes and women. Some scholars have noted that bhakti’s egalitarian ethos has remained limited to the sphere of ideology without effecting any real change in the social lives of low-caste and female practitioners. However, the popular view of bhakti as a mode for transcending caste, class, and gender restrictions may explain why a plethora of sources emphasize the “subversive” aspects of bhakti, especially when it centers on the religious lives of women. For example, most studies of women in the bhakti context tend to conflate the “female bhakta” – a female practitioner of bhakti – with the female “poet-saint,” and subsequently these studies focus on extraordinary historical figures such as Mīrābāī, Āṇṭāl, Karaikkālammaiyār, Akkā Mahādevī, Janābāī, Muktābāī, and Bahinābāī who “defy social norms and taboos,” “overturn models of femininity,” or “overturn caste hierarchy” (Ramanujan 1982, 318-319). Interestingly, Bahinābāī (1628-1700), of the Vārkarī Vaiṣṇav tradition in Maharashtra, is usually singled out as an “exception” among this group of female bhaktas for she married and practiced bhakti. As Anne Feldhaus has argued: “…Bahinā Bāī presents herself as someone who has achieved what these others did not: she managed to reconcile her duties to her husband with her devotion to God and his saints” (1982, 593). Mary McGee also echoes this sentiment more than a decade later when she writes that

13 For more on early twentieth-century nationalist constructions of bhakti as a pan-Indian, egalitarian “movement” or āndolan see Hawley (2007). Similarly, for the ways in which bhakti came to represent “Hindu religion” in, and through, the works of Hariscandra of Benaras (1850-85), see Dalmia (1997).

14 Regarding bhakti’s inability to effect any transformation in the social realities of lower castes David Lorenzen demonstrates how “The only significant rejection of caste among Hindu sects is found in Virasaisim, in nirguni sects such as the Kabir and Ravidas Panths, and to a lesser extent in the Arya Samaj” (2004, 10 qtd. in Burchett 2009). In Patton Burchett’s study on the hagiographies of four “untouchable” bhakti-saints (Tiruppān Āḻvār, Nandañār, Chokhāmelā, and Raidās), he argues how “…a closer reading shows that, in subtle ways, these stories also reinforce the social hierarchy and confirm Brāhmins as possessing a social identity of higher purity and value than any other” (116-117).

15 Authors who have focused on some of these female poet-saints include Craddock (2007); Feldhaus (1982); Harlan (1995); Martin-Kershaw (1995); McGee (1995); Ramaswamy (1997); Ramanujan (1982); Sellegren (1996); Venkatesan (2010); Zelliot (2000).
“…most women bhaktas were rather extraordinary, as they defied the model of the traditional Hindu woman and housewife. Bahīnābāī is the exception to this female bhakta paradigm… Bahīnābāī not only married, but remained with her husband even after undergoing spiritual initiation, giving birth to two children” (McGee 1995, 116). In such literature, the roles of a woman as religious practitioner and wife (or mother, daughter-in-law) are cast as contradictory, as identities which exist on opposite ends of a spectrum that somehow must be “reconciled.”

In this project I propose a shift in focus to the everyday female practitioner, such as the lay Puṣṭīmārgī Vaiṣṇav woman, who is part of a bhakti tradition, performs daily sevā, and is married and has children. Moreover, if one wants to focus on female bhaktas who composed poetry – and are yet not revered as “poets-saints” – the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs who remained married and had children provide examples of historical women whose devotional compositions are popularly sung today. However, throughout my thesis, I do not present such women as “exceptions.” Nor do I necessarily read their devotional practices as mechanisms for either “subverting” or “complying with” Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchal values.

Mary Hancock is one of the few scholars who has written succinctly about the domestic religious practices of “every-day” Hindu women (1995, 1999). Her brilliant study has centered on women who belong to the urban Brahmin smārta community of Chennai. Although I draw heavily from Hancock’s work, I distance myself from her bifocal reading of devotional activities as sites which constitute “compliance with” or “resistance to” “notions of sexual and domestic order” (1995, 61). Following Saba Mahmood (2005), I think it is important to realize how analyzing women’s actions “… in
terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce
the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations
of domination” (174). Furthermore, resistance taken as a pseudonym for “agency” also
limits the different modalities agency takes and “the grammar of concepts in which its
particular affect, meaning, and form resides” (188). Read through the western feminist
hermeneutic of “resistance” and “subversion,” bhakti is usually positioned as a vehicle
for women to temporarily circumvent or opt-out of their quotidian activities and identities
as wives, mothers, and daughter-in-laws. One of the primary problems I see with this
paradigm is that women’s roles as wife/mother/daughter-in-law are cast as monolithic
social-identities which are then taken as emblematic of the oppressive forces of
“Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchy.” Bhakti practices are presented as agentive
moments of rupture or resistance, which some-how exist in a vacuum and remain
unmarked and disassociated from the influences of caste, gender, and class politics. Or,
taken as (non-agentive) moments of reconciliation and compliance, devotional practices
are cast as mechanisms for suturing one’s role as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law on
the one hand, and one’s role as a bhakti practitioner, on the other hand. In this project, I
see women’s experiences of devotion and their devotional practices, which punctuate
their quotidian activities (such as waking, bathing, eating, socializing), as part of the
every-day corporeal, emotional, and moral processes which are constitutive of identity
formation and female subjectivity.

Having said that, I acknowledge that devotional practices can sometimes
present opportunities for women to negotiate with orthodox value-systems. For example,
religious practices informed by Brahmanic notions of purity/pollution and women’s
auspiciousness/inauspiciousness, normally exclude those women who are in a state of ritual pollution (such as during menstruation, post-partum) and have an inauspiciousness status (such as widows) from performing and participating in rituals. In the Puṣṭimārg context, however, orthodox perspectives on ritual purity/pollution and auspiciousness/inauspiciousness seem to function along a gradient rather than as polarities. That is to say, women who follow strict rules of apras sevā do not perform sevā during times of menses, while other women do. Widows – considered “inauspicious” by the standards of Brahmanic orthodoxy – also perform sevā daily and participate in Puṣṭimārg religious festivals.

Puṣṭimārg sevā practices performed by women are not circumscribed by normative ideologies of auspiciousness, which includes maintaining one’s status as a sumaṅgalī or married woman. Should this be read as an example of Puṣṭimārg sevā being “subversive” of, or “resistant,” to Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy and patriarchy? Not necessarily. Instead, I prefer to read Puṣṭimārg lay women’s religious practices as opportunities for understanding and approaching Hindu women’s religious lives that moves beyond the well-rehearsed model of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness. Puṣṭimārg religious practices, like other quotidian actions which women perform, are informed by and are embedded in the reproduction of gender, caste, and class politics. Devotional practices cannot (only) be understood through the opposing modalities of “compliance”/“resistance.” They are constitutive of the everyday heterogeneity of women’s social realities, and represent the fluidity – and not the contradictions – that exist between women’s identities and roles as family-women and devotees.
III. Religious Patronage and the Production of Status

Understanding how patterns of religious patronage facilitate the production of status and respectability among the wealthy baniyā communities of Gujarat is another central theme I explore in this project. My study of this theme anchors itself on the work of scholars who highlight the relationship between class formation, consumerism, and religious practices, including Joanne Waghorne (2004), Mary Hancock (1999), Partha Chatterjee (1993), Sumanta Banerjee (1989a; 1989b) Douglas Haynes (1991), Christine Dobbin (1972), and Vineeta Sinha (2011).

In chapter one I discuss how the entrepreneurial and proselytizing efforts of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attracted the support of royal patrons as well as the following of elite Gujarati baniyā merchant “princes” or ṣeṭhs. The wealthy baniyā communities of Gujarat facilitated the circulation of capital through trans-regional networks of loan and exchange services, which even members of the ruling classes relied upon. As socio-political and economic ties were established between the political nobility and influential merchants and bankers, their mutual patronage of Puṣṭimārg also served as a common cultural link between these two elite groups. Just as the munificence of kings was displayed through their religious patronage activities, merchant ṣeṭhs also demonstrated and produced their status through patterns of religious giving.

In his study, Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India (1991), Haynes makes note of the ways Gujarati merchant families and firms sought to establish and maintain their ābrū, which is understood as both a merchant’s “credit” and social reputability or moral character (56). In an effort to generate and display their ābrū or social status, baniyā ṣeṭhs
hosted prestigious weddings and engaged in forms of philanthropy. They also made financial contributions to Puṣṭimārg havelīs and their Gosvāmīs, and helped organize feasts to honor Gosvāmīs on special occasions, such as religious holidays or for a Gosvāmī’s marriage and sacred-thread ceremonies (65). Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984), I see the patronage of an influential sect like Puṣṭimārg as a key mechanism for the reproduction of symbolic capital among members of the baniyā community for whom social prestige and community trust are of utmost importance – especially for their financial prosperity. As Bourdieu explains, “the exhibition of the material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is likely to be in itself a source of material profit in a good-faith economy in which good repute is the best, if not the only, economic guarantee” (1977, 180).

In chapters two and three I explore how the Gujarati baniyā community is influenced by the processes of colonial modernity, such as English education, the colonial economy, and social and religious reform. “Class” as a social category signifying one’s status is an important development of modernity. The middle-classes, especially, as the products and producers of modernity come to define what it means to be “modern” in colonial contexts (Joshi 2012, 29). Among the many transformations of this period, the legal and economic developments of the colonial regime required one to train to become a functioning civil servant of the Rāj. English education was introduced as a vehicle for participating in the new economic context; however, it was also promoted as a civilizing force and a bastion of technological and scientific progress. On the one hand, members of the traditionally learned upper-castes were drawn to these new public institutions and the civil job market of the Bombay Presidency quickly became saturated
with positions in accounting, teaching, journalism, and clerkship. On the other hand, as the champions of modernity, Brahmin middle-class intellectuals also promoted a movement towards social and religious reform.

Nineteenth century and early twentieth century reform efforts informed changes in gender, religious, and political ideologies, many of which resonate to this day. With the separation and gendering of public and domestic spheres through these discourses, women became reconstituted as the bearers of family respectability and status. The urban home, another marker of modernity, also became the site of cultural and social production. As I demonstrate in chapter three, in addition to economic factors such as income and occupation, or even one’s caste and family background, family class and status was determined by the degree to which women from respectable households could negotiate modernity – here, represented through education, changes in consumer practices, home-management – and “tradition,” such as observing strī-dharma (“women’s duties”), engaging in religious practices, and ensuring the harmony of the joint-family. As Partha Chatterjee (1993) and Sanjay Joshi (2001, 2012) remind us, although the middle-classes fashioned themselves as the bearers of modernity, “Their belief in modernization coexisted with the reinforcing of older hierarchies, their nationalism was complicit with what has been termed ‘communalism,’ and their belief in progress coexisted with their advocacy of tradition” (Joshi 2012, 31). Thus, to understand the ways in which the middle-classes engaged in their own identity and political self-construction, we need to move beyond traditional Weberian approaches to class, which stress the rise of industrial capitalism and economic factors such as income and
Unlike the educated middle-classes, the upper-classes – represented by individuals like the wealthy Gujarati baniyā śeṭhs – were initially able to adapt to the new colonial economy. Until the rise of professional jobs in law or medicine, men from these families did not need to enter western institutes of higher learning in order to better their social standing. Instead, many baniyā śeṭhs, including Puṣṭimārg baniyās, participated in the expansion of the cotton-mill industry by establishing their own mills throughout Gujarat in the latter-half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. By hosting lavish weddings, adopting new aesthetic tastes and consumption practices, building English-styled bungalows and, indeed, continuing with opulent forms of religious giving, the baniyā śeṭhs played a role in defining what it meant to be “upper-class” at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century, however, especially in India’s post-liberalization economic context (1980s-1990s), class culture and identity came to be increasingly determined by consumer practices and through the acquisition of commodities. In the upper-class Puṣṭimārg baniyā family, women’s growing roles as consumers has also

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16 The intersections between urbanization, religion, and the rising middle class in Europe permeated many of Weber’s social theories. In his Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (2006; first published as a two-part article in 1904-05), Weber argues that the austere lifestyle promoted by the “this worldly asceticism” and “spiritual” work ethic of Calvinist Protestantism created the necessary conditions for the accumulation of capital which led to, or at least favored, the rise of modern capitalism in Europe. In his Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism (1967), Weber applied his thesis of the “spirit of capitalism” to the religious traditions of India. On the whole Weber concludes that despite the existence of affluent merchant classes (in the Parsi, Jain, and Vaiṣṇav communites), religious views have impeded the rise of “rational” capitalism in India. He implicates the caste system in making “impossible the development of large-scale enterprises” (1967, 111-133). With regard to Puṣṭimārg in particular, although Weber acknowledges how the sect includes one of the largest number of business people, he describes it as a “holy path [that] is in no way ethically rational,” and is therefore inconsistent with Protestant ethics and its “spirit of capitalism” (1967, 316). His study is limited and laden with Orientalist baggage: for example, he describes the tradition as one “that seeks the holy, in opposition to the intellectual tradition, not in asceticism or contemplation but in refined sublimated Krishna orgies” (315).
allowed for new and creative material expressions of status, aesthetic tastes, and religious sensibilities. Building on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and Mary Hancock (1999), I understand that Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic rituals, like other cultural practices, have been “transformed by contestatory nationalisms, transnational processes, commodification, and class formation” (Hancock 25). Women’s sevā demonstrates the extension of consumer cultures to ritual praxis. As sites of cultural consumption and display, religious practices thus reinforce women’s identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs and also reify their class privilege. As I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis, increasing commodified styles of domestic sevā, the display of expensive religious commodities in the home, as well as the growing desire among elite women to learn how to sing Puṣṭimārg havelī liturgy music in a “classical” style, are all practices that help reproduce differences and social hierarchies between members of the Puṣṭimārg community.

Bringing together the three major themes of this dissertation – domesticity, women’s religious practices, and status production – I demonstrate how all these processes have recast the urban home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

**Literature Review**

As noted above, I suggest that one of the primary reasons why academic work on Puṣṭimārg has remained somewhat limited is due to the reform debates surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case. The paucity of literature on Puṣṭimārg is reflected even in today’s scholarship. For example, in two edited volumes on “Kṛṣṇa” published in the last decade in which contributions were made by leading scholars of Vaiṣṇav studies, with the exception of one translation of Harirāy’s Bade Śikṣāpatra (a sevā guide), there is no
essay on Puṣṭimārg theology, philosophy, and ritual culture.¹⁷ Thus far, studies of Puṣṭimārg in the English language have focused on temple worship, dealing exclusively with its traditions of music, painting, and ritual food-offerings.¹⁸ Peter Bennett’s study on Puṣṭimārg havelī culture in the pilgrimage city of Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh (1993) provides a comprehensive introduction to temple sevā practices and to the Vallabha-kul or Gosvāmī lineage. In this work, as well as in his excellent essay, In Nanda Baba’s House (1990), Bennett portrays sevā as an alaukika (“other-worldly”) emotional experience (1990, 198). He does this by interpreting all aspects of temple sevā – such as the songs sung during liturgy, the backdrop paintings hung behind the svarūp, and the food-offerings presented to the deity – through Sanskrit aesthetic theories on bhāva (“emotion”) and rasa (“relish,” “taste”). However, studies such as Bennett’s, which focus on temple sevā and the Gosvāmī lineage, cast Puṣṭimārg as an exclusively temple-centered tradition. This has come at the expense of excluding an important dimension of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity formation and maintenance, namely, the practice of domestic sevā. The purpose of my project is to present a counter-point to claims made by scholars like Bennett, who argue that “temple worship tends to be the principal means by which these householder initiates demonstrate and participate in their faith” (1993, 12).

In addition to temple sevā, Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy has also been an area of scholarly focus and there have been several attempts made to translate the

¹⁷ The two volumes I am referring to are Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity (ed. Guy Beck, 2005) and Krishna: A Sourcebook (ed. Edwin F. Bryant, 2007).
¹⁸ Scholars whom have worked on Puṣṭimārg traditions of music include: Beck (1993); Gaston (1997); Ho (2006); Sanford (2008); Taylor (1997); for painting see: Ambalal (1987); Lyons (2004); and for work on Puṣṭimārgī ritual food-offerings refer to: Bennett (1983, 1990, 1993); Toomey (1986, 1990, 1992).
works of Vallabha into English. In his well-known book, The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya (1976), Richard Barz also presents an introduction to Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. However, he provides an overview of Puṣṭimārg hagiographic literature, and offers a few translations of the Brajbhāṣā vārtās which describe the lives of the poet-saints initiated by Vallabha. In a later essay (1994), he discusses how the vārtās function as an important vehicle for disseminating key Puṣṭimārg theological concepts.

With regards to Puṣṭimārg hagiographical literature, Hariharināth Ṭaṇḍan’s Hindi work, Vārtā sāhitya: Ek Brhat Adhyayan (1960), remains the most comprehensive study on the vārtā literature. Other scholars who have touched upon the subject of Puṣṭimārg vārtās include essays by Charlotte Vaudeville (1976; 1980), Vasudha Dalmia (2001a; 2001b), and Saha (2006). In Forging Community (2001a), Dalmia presents some of the processes involved in Puṣṭimārg community formation as they are presented in the vārtā narratives, particularly in the Caurāsī Vaiṣṇav Vārtā (CVV). One of the important concerns of the CVV is to demonstrate the charismatic and mediating role of Vallabha as a guru. Other themes in the vārtās which Dalima highlights include Puṣṭimārg’s devaluation of Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy and asceticism in favour of devotional practices which center on the family and take place in the home. As Dalmia argues, this form of domestic devotion and sevā “— at once intimate and transcendent, unmediated by brahmanical ritual… was obviously the radical innovation of its time” (2001a, 134).

19 Works on Puṣṭmārgī theology and philosophy (Śuddhādvaita) include: Marfatia (1967); Narain (2004); Parekh (1969); Shah (1969); Telivala (1980); Timmi (1992). In his Vallbhācārya on The Love Games of Kṛṣṇa (1990) James D. Redington translated an excerpt of Vallabha’s Sanskrit commentaries on one of the most important Vaiṣṇava theological treatises, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. He has recently also translated Vallabha’s sixteen philosophical treatises known as the Ṣoḍaśagraṅthāḥ (The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises of Vallabhacharya), 2000.
In her other essay on the vārtās, “Women, Duty, and Sanctified Space in the Vaiṣṇava Hagiography of the Seventeenth Century” (2001b), Dalmia again demonstrates how the CVV narratives reveal Puṣṭimārg’s unique bhakti ethos, although this time in relation to the status of women. By examining tales which revolve around female initiates, including one about a woman (a “Rājpūtānī”) who refuses to perform sati, Dalmia explains how the bhakti movements of the “sixteenth and seventeenth centuries established powerful alternate traditions regarding the status of women, socially and within the family” (217). Both of Dalmia’s essays on the vārtās represent important milestones in Puṣṭimārg scholarship. She is one of the few scholars who brings to light hitherto unexplored aspects of Puṣṭimārg devotionalism, such as the practice of domestic sevā and women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg. In fact, “Women, Duty, and Sanctified Space” represents one of the few works in the English language that has attempted to explore the ways in which women have participated in the sect. However, as the title itself indicates, Dalmia’s study is limited to a textual study of Puṣṭimārgī women’s devotional practices as narrated in the tradition’s hagiographic literature and does not touch upon the subject of contemporary women’s domestic practices.

From an emic perspective, the narratives from the vārtās describe events that took place in the lives of actual people. Although one should be cautious in using these hagiographies as sources of “accurate” historical data, the vārtās nevertheless help produce a quasi-historical picture of seventeenth century north India and illuminate ideological positions valued by Puṣṭimārgīs. In terms of Puṣṭimārg’S history, Kanṭhmani Śāstrī’s large Hindi compilation, entitled Kāṃkrolī kā Itihās (1939), provides historical information concerning the lives and activities of Puṣṭimārg hereditary leaders from the
important Dvārakādhīṣjī havelī in Kankroli, Rajasthan, including accounts about their relationship with the Mewar royal family. Two excellent English socio-historical studies of the sect include Edwin Allen Richardson’s unpublished doctoral thesis entitled “The Mughal and Rajput Patronage of the Bhakti Sect of the Maharajas, the Vallabha Sampradaya, 1640-1760 AD” (1979) and Shandip Saha’s unpublished thesis, “Creating a Community of Grace: A History of the Pustimarga in Northern and Western India” (2004). I draw on both these studies in my first chapter to illustrate Puṣṭimārg’s rise as a courtly religion in western India and to map the important cultural and economic ties that were being forged between Rajasthani royals, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and Gujarati baniyā śeths during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Saha, however, contextualizes this discussion against the backdrop of the troubled Delhi Sultanate era, which he argues promoted the formation of the Puṣṭimārg sect. In the closing chapters of his dissertation, Saha discusses the relationship between Puṣṭimārg and its mercantile followers in the colonial context of the nineteenth century Bombay Presidency, and concludes with an overview of the Mahārāj Libel Case.

In their attempts to construct a social history of Puṣṭimārg, one of the significant drawbacks of the works of both Richardson and Saha is the portrayal of Puṣṭimārg as a sect whose practices are wholly temple-centered. Furthermore, Saha does highlight the role of reformers, like Karsondas Mulji, in the libel case and he also discusses the potential institutional changes in Puṣṭimārg in the aftermath of the case. However, nowhere does Saha discuss the role or status of Puṣṭimārgī women, even though the case was ostensibly about their sexual exploitation. Nor does Saha contextualize the debates surrounding the libel case within the larger middle-class
discourses on gender and domesticity circulating in the late nineteenth century.

Other authors who have focused on the Mahārāj Libel Case include Mehta (1971), Thakkar (1997), Haberman (1993), Shodhan (1995, 1997), Lüt (1995), and Scott (2009). These sources, with the exception of Thakkar and Shodhan, focus mostly on the reformist rhetoric being used throughout the trial to undermine a bhakti sect like Puṣṭimārg in comparison to the “ancient” Vedic traditions. Although Scott does touch upon issues of gender construction and sexuality, which are clearly informing the trial, his discussion is brief and also points to the works of Shodhan and Thakkar. Both Shodhan and Thakkar’s studies serve as excellent sources for unpacking the “women’s question” in the libel case. Drawing on the work of Lata Mani, who examines colonial debates on sati abolition (1998), Thakkar argues how Puṣṭimārgī women are “neither subjects nor objects but the ground chosen by the leaders of a sect and social reformers to decide what is moral and what is religious practice” (46). Similarly, Shodhan (1997) demonstrates how male reformers involved in the trial were more concerned with regulating and monitoring women’s movements and reconstituting their place to the home. However, none of these lines of inquiry explore the issue of domestic sevā and how women’s domestic religious practices may have been affected by the gender, domestic, and religious reform debates of the time.

Finally, Francoise Mallison’s English and French essays on Puṣṭimārg devotional songs (in the dhol genre) represent the only examples of western scholarship that explore Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic religious practices in the twentieth century (1986; 1989). Although Mallison does not discuss the practice of domestic sevā per se, she does demonstrate how devotional songs in the vernacular languages of Hindi and
Gujarati are popularly sung by Puṣṭimārgī women while performing sevā at home or during women’s satṣaṅg gatherings. She juxtaposes the singing of such songs by women with the tradition of temple music, which has remained the preserve of Puṣṭimārg male hereditary musicians for centuries. I build on Mallison’s work on Puṣṭimārg dhol songs in my fourth chapter in an effort to highlight the historical literary activities of bahājīs and beṭjīs – the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs, respectively – many of whom composed these songs. My examination of contemporary women’s performance cultures, however, is grounded in my debate on class production among elite Puṣṭimārg families in Gujarat. For example, many Puṣṭimārg women from these families have begun to take lessons in temple or havelī liturgical music (kīrtan), calling into question the gendered and spatial exclusivity of the temple kīrtan repertoires.

Research Methods

The spatial and social contexts of my study include the Puṣṭimārg urban home as well as the communal spaces and networks created by and between Puṣṭimārg women who perform daily domestic sevā. These include, for example, religious-social gatherings (satṣaṅg) where women come together to discuss Puṣṭimārg theological themes and ritual adornment ideas and recipes, as well as bhajan maṇḍalīs (“singing groups”) and temple-song (kīrtan) classes. The regional and historical foci of my investigation range from eighteenth century Gujarat and Rajasthan to the present. My focus on contemporary, living Puṣṭimārg is centered on the city of Ahmedabad.

Using an interdisciplinary methodology, the data for this study is drawn from several broad areas. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I piece together a pre-colonial
history of Puṣṭimārg patronage by the baniyā communities of Gujarat through examining seventeenth century European travel accounts, as well as an English translation of the eighteenth century Persian text, the Mirat-i-Ahmadi. I draw on primary sources from the colonial period for my discussions in chapters two and three on baniyā upper-class identity formation and the implication of nineteenth century reform movements on the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women. Finally, chapters four and five draw on Hindi, Gujarati, and Brajbhāṣā textual and manuscript sources, as well as ethnography. My work with hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders like Vagishkumar Gosvāmī and Indira beṭī, as well as leaders who function as traditional scholars of the sect, such as Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī, has proved invaluable to this project. Vagishkumar Gosvāmī, for example, is the direct descendant in a line of Puṣṭimārg hereditary leaders who have presided over the Dvārakādhīṣṭī havelī in Kankroli, Rajasthan since the havelī’s establishment in the late seventeenth century. The havelī was patronized by Rajasthan royal families and became a vibrant Puṣṭimārg religious and cultural center; it serves as an important pilgrimage site even today. With the permission of Vagishkumar Gosvāmī, I was able to access the havelī’s private library collections where I found devotional works composed by Puṣṭimārg women (lay followers and wives/daughters of hereditary leaders).

In addition to textual and archival work, a methodological approach that I use in this project is ethnography, in the form of participant observation and through

20 Examples of manuscript materials include Kakko (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088), Kṛṣṇa-Ras (B.J. Institute, ms. 6671), Gupta-Ras (B.J. Institute, ms.8511a), Sevā-Vidhi-Utsav (B.J. Institute, ms. 2177), Puṣṭi-Sevā (B.J. Institute, ms. 1089), Padsamgrah (Oriental Institute, ms.144.7357), Vaiṣṇavī Vasant Holt Dhol (Oriental Institute, ms.14359), Vaiṣṇavī Sevā Śringār (Oriental Institute, ms. 14364).

21 Beṭī, which literally means “daughter,” is normally suffixed to the names of the daughters of hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders. As I discuss in my conclusion, Indira beṭī is at the centre of an ever-expanding global community of Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇavs and is a guru figure for hundreds of male and female disciples.
conducting “conversational interviews” with close to forty-five participants. I conducted this field work in three-four month periods over the course of four years (2007-2010). As noted above, I have worked with several hereditary leaders from within the tradition, such as Shyam Manohar Gosvāmī in Mumbai, Vagish Gosvāmī and Indira beṭī in Baroda, and Raja beṭī in Ahmedabad. Since my project focuses on the question of women’s participation in the tradition, I have conducted extensive fieldwork with Puṣṭimārg female lay practitioners who perform elaborate devotional rituals in their homes. I also accompanied several women while they attended Puṣṭimārg-related social activities, including discussion/reading groups, singing sessions at a devotee’s home, and kīrtan classes. With their permission, I was at times also able to document these activities through audio and video recordings. Most of the women I worked with belong to the wealthy, upper-class families of Ahmedabad. During my interview sessions, although I loosely followed a standardized set of questions, I engaged my interlocutors in conversation, which allowed us to move into spontaneous discussions about their religious activities outside of the home, their social lives, personal lives, and family relationships.

Drawing on the methods of reflexive ethnography, I recognize how my approach, my identity as a woman/researcher/student of Indian origin, and the fact that I am not a follower of the Puṣṭimārg tradition, influenced the women I have worked with and thus shaped this project in specific ways. As Frederick Steier argues, “By recognizing our own role in research, our reciprocators are, seemingly paradoxically, given greater voice,” whereby the research process becomes one in which the researcher and the “reciprocator” engage in the co-constructing of a world (180). It is this “co-
constructed world” of women’s articulatory practices that guides my work. Moreover, as
the section on “Domestic Rituals, Women, and the Practice of Bhakti” above indicated,
this is a study that discusses the socio-religious, ritual, performance, and aesthetic
practices of Puṣṭimārg women, including their everyday negotiations with caste, class,
and kinship affiliations and structures. This project is, therefore, also informed by South
Asian feminist approaches to ethnography.22 In my examination of the social activities
and aesthetic choices related to Puṣṭimārg women’s devotional practices and how they
are implicated in the process of family status production I build on Pierre Bourdieu’s
theories of social and symbolic capital. In addition to the authors noted above in sections
II (“Domestic Rituals”) and III (“Religious Patronage”), I also draw heavily on the
growing body of literature on class in South Asia.23 By organizing Puṣṭimārg related
social events, arranging for private kīrtan lessons, and functioning as the primary
consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, elite Puṣṭimārgī women
create – and in some respects, become – the cultural or symbolic capital needed to
maintain and reproduce family status and respectability (Hancock 1999, 14).

22 My perspectives on women’s articulatory practices and women’s histories resonate with the large body of
theoretical work by feminist scholars of South Asia. These include: Chaudhuri (2005); Hancock (2000); Loomba
and Lukose (2012); Majumdar (2009); Mohanty (2003); Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, eds. (1991); Powell and
Lambert-Hurley, eds. (2006); Rajan (1993); Rege (2006); Sangari and Vaid, eds. (1989); Sarkar (2001); Sinha
(2006); Sreenivas (2008); Visweswaran (1994).
23 Prominent examples of theoretical work on issues of class in South Asia include: Ahmad and Reifeld, eds.
(2001); Appadurai, ed. (1986); Assayag and Fuller, eds. (2005); Basu (2004); Birla (2009); Breckenridge, ed.
(1995); Brosius, (2010); Caplan (1985); Chatterjee (1993); Chakrabarty (2000); Fernandes (2006); Joshi (2010);
Form and Structure

In chapter one, “Baniyās on the Path to Grace” I trace Puṣṭimārg’s rise as a courtly religion in western India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Using European travel accounts from the seventeenth century I demonstrate how, by the time Puṣṭimārg consolidates itself in parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan, Gujarati baniyās already appeared to have been exercising a high social and ritual status. The lavish patronage of a courtly sect like Puṣṭimārg, I suggest, served to further enhance baniyā prestige and social respectability. Drawing on a Persian source, Ali Muhammad Khan’s Mirat-i-Ahmadi (1761), I chart the religious activities of Puṣṭimārg baniyās in Mughal-period Ahmedabad. Finally, the theme of Puṣṭimārg baniyā patronage is extended to the nineteenth century context of the Bombay Presidency through the writings of the Scottish East India Company officer, Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821-1865) and his Rās Mala ([1878]1973). Although in many of these sources we are not provided with explicit references to domestic sevā practices, it is clear that affluent baniyās perpetuated their elite status through patterns of religious giving.

Chapter two investigates the production of elite Puṣṭimārg baniyā identities through the prism of colonial modernity. Class as a modern category for designating social status and respectability is one of the important developments of the colonial period. One of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate how the wealthy baniyā śeṭhs of the Bombay Presidency were constitutive of the upper-classes and not the middle-classes – those who were wholly dependent on the new colonial economy. Using their credit networks and commercial services, baniyās facilitated the expansion of the British Rāj in western India. Śeṭhs also participated in the Anglo-Indian judicial system, and oversaw
and provided the capital for municipal affairs and urban development projects. However, despite their economic and administrative collaboration with the British, upper-class Gujarati baniyās did not show interest in one of the most important aspects of colonial modernity, namely English education. As the chapter illustrates, the upper-classes and the educated-classes constituted two entirely different social groups in the Bombay Presidency.

Chapter three explores how, by the middle of the nineteenth century, members of the English educated middle-classes participated in reformist campaigns against the Gujarati baniyā community. Reforms criticized the affluent lifestyles of śeṭhs as well as their apathy towards western education (and thus, social progress). However, as the infamous Mahārāj Libel Case of 1862 demonstrated, what disturbed social and religious reformers most, was the baniyā community’s affiliation with Puṣṭimārg. The libel case, which ostensibly centered on the sexual exploitation of Puṣṭimārg women, provided an opportunity for reformers like Karsondas Mulji to undermine the legitimacy and authenticity of Puṣṭimārg as a sectarian tradition, as well as question the authority of Gosvāmīs as religious leaders. More importantly, however, this chapter maps the larger gender- and religion-based reform discourses of the nineteenth century that clearly informed the ambitions and ideological agendas of reformers like Mulji and his supporters. The social and religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women became sites upon which middle-class moralities were mapped and debated. The connections between woman, home, and respectability being forged through these debates reconstituted Puṣṭimārg women’s religious practices to the home, thus casting them as the primary producers and performers of elite Puṣṭimārgī identities.
Historical texts and reformist movements (demonstrated by the libel case) indicate Puṣṭimārg women’s active involvement in Puṣṭimārg. However, in order to appreciate the modes of female participation in Puṣṭimārg’s social history, chapter four turns to traditional sources which help illustrate their historical presence and roles in the sect. These sources include the hagiographical literature, specifically the Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā and the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā, as well as devotional songs composed by Puṣṭimārg women. The vārtās provide us with a sense of how the sect itself perceived of lay women’s social positions and religious roles in Puṣṭimārg. While the devotional songs composed by women in the popular Gujarati performance genres of dhol and garbā not only demonstrate a significant way in which women perpetuated the living traditions of Puṣṭimārg but they also serve as an important counterpoint to the temple traditions of havelī kīrtan music.

The final chapter in this thesis, “From Havelī to Home” focuses on the intersections between modes of women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg, domestic religious practices, and class formation in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. By bringing together the themes covered in earlier chapters with a discussion on twentieth century nationalist ideologies, consumption practices, and class politics I demonstrate how the modern Puṣṭimārg home is recast as the cultural site for both class and sectarian identity formation. The data for this chapter is drawn primarily from the field work I have conducted with female lay practitioners in the city of Ahmedabad. My ethnography consists of participant observation, audio and video recordings, and conversational interviews I conducted with close to forty-five participants. The participants of my study consisted of mostly middle-aged women belonging to wealthy business families, as well
as hereditary Puṣṭimārg leaders and their bahūjīs and beṭījīs. A majority of the women I worked with are connected to one another through overlapping social networks or by marriage. Therefore, I begin my discussion of the relationship between Puṣṭimārg domestic sevā and elite sectarian identity formation by first demonstrating how the practice of sevā was introduced to many women as a result of their marriage into Puṣṭimārgī families.

Many of the women I worked with have begun taking lessons in havelī kīrtan singing, popularly referred to as havelī saṅgīt. As I demonstrate in this chapter, upper-class women are continuing to perpetuate elite Puṣṭimārg identities by making claims to a more canonical and “classical” Puṣṭimārg performance genre. Furthermore, in many of the homes of these women, class and status are signified by the characteristic markers of privilege, such as large bungalows, the presence of domestic labour, and signs of an available disposable income. However, material expressions of their sectarian identities – which I interpret as cultural and symbolic capital – are also implicated in the processes of class production. These include Puṣṭimārg women’s increased commodified styles of domestic worship, their consumption and display of expensive Puṣṭimārg religious commodities, and the time and space allotted to the performace of domestic sevā.

**Conclusion**

This project examines how the religious patronage of Puṣṭimārg facilitates the reproduction and display of family status. To date, most studies of Puṣṭimārg, even those that address the relationship between Puṣṭimārg patronage and the production of prestige, have focused exclusively on temple practice. This work constitutes the first English
language study to explore Puṣṭimārg domestic ritual and women’s religious practices in the home. It thus extends current scholarship on Puṣṭimārg scholarship by highlighting important and hitherto neglected aspects of the sect. Furthermore, since Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities are examined outside the well-rehearsed models of auspiciousness and sumaṅgalī status, this study marks an important contribution to the study of gender and Hinduism more broadly.

There are three major themes that weave through this thesis: 1) the relationship between class-inflected modernities and Puṣṭimārg; 2) the perpetuation of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities through material culture (such as ritual substances donated for use in havelī sevā, the ritual accoutrements used in domestic sevā, the religious commodities displayed in the home, and so on); and 3) women’s roles in both these processes. As I discuss throughout this work, colonial modernity, gender and domestic reform, and nationalist ideologies have reconstituted the home and women’s domestic activities as sites of cultural and status production. Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities, which are increasingly being informed by changes in consumption styles and aesthetic tastes, have cast the Puṣṭimārg home as the modern site of religious patronage. As the first study to explore women’s domestic religious practices and class production in Puṣṭimārg, this project raises more questions than it seeks to answer. Each theme explored in this dissertation – religious reform and Puṣṭimārg, the historical roles of women in the sect, Puṣṭimārg domestic rituals, and Puṣṭimārg performance cultures – can undoubtedly be subjects of further academic inquiry.
From the time Puṣṭimārg arrived in Gujarat and Rajasthan in the mid-seventeenth century it enjoyed the support and patronage of political and royal nobilities. As Puṣṭimārg grew into a courtly religion, the sect’s religious leaders – the Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs – also became powerful and wealthy land-owners (jāgidārs). At the same time, the proselytizing and entrepreneurial efforts of Gosvāmīs attracted the wealthy mercantile communities of western India, which included the Gujarati baniyās and bhātīyas.24 Both members of the political nobility and Puṣṭimārg leadership profited from their deepening ties with these Gujarati merchant elites.

24 In my work, I use the categories of baniyā and bhātīyā to denote specific jātis, or sub-castes, within the larger commercial caste or vaiśya varṇa. There are numerous other commercial sub-castes in Gujarat, such as the bhansāls, kāpols, and luhānās. Traditional as well as scholarly sources sometimes use “baniyā” interchangeably with “vaiśya” to characterize all these commercial castes more generally. These terms normally describe occupations, and their meanings change in different contexts. For example, the word baniyā stems from “vānīk,” “vāṇija,” and “vāṇī,” and in Maharashtra the term “vāṇī” was used to describe a person who was a trader-cum-userer, whereas European travelers would use the term “banyan” to refer to any trader in general. Depending on the context or source, one finds the term baniyā denoting merchants and business men from the Hindu Brahmin caste, as well as from Jain, Muslim, and Parsi communities (David Hardiman 1996, 62). I use the term “baniyā” to refer to Hindu commercial castes more broadly, and though they are separate sub-castes, I will only distinguish “baniyā” from other sub-castes such as “bhātīyā” when necessary. Though I am using the category in its most generalized sense, it is important to note that within these commercial communities distinctions are made between village grain dealers (also called baniyā), the local money dealer (sarrat), the traveling trader, and the great merchant or guild of the city (māhājān) (Bayly 1983, 371). Furthermore, many of these sub-castes which sometimes become subsumed under the general category of baniyā do not necessarily identify themselves as such. Bhātīyās, for example, who hail from the regions of Sind, Kutch, and Saurashtra instead claim Rājpūt or ksatriya ancestry (Markovits 2008, 194; Simpson, 2008). Another important point of difference between bhātīyās and baniyās is the caste taboo placed on foreign travel by the latter. Finally, since my project focuses on Puṣṭimārg families in Ahmedabad, I am using the term “baniyā” in a localized sense to refer to the Hindu commercial communities of central Gujarat. I am consciously distinguishing “baniyā” from “mārvāris/mārvādis,” the term used to refer to the commercial castes of Rajasthan. For more on the activities of mārvāris see Timberg (1978) and Birla (2009); for their pan-national activities and on the politics of mārvāri community formation in Calcutta, see Hardgrove (2004).
In this chapter, I trace the development of baniyā patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India. I demonstrate how the high caste and social status exercised by Gujarati baniyās facilitated the community’s adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. Furthermore, for a community in which the display and maintenance of trust-worthiness and honor (ābrū) is of social and economic value, the lavish patronage of an exalted sect such as Puṣṭimārg served to further enhance baniyā prestige and respectability.

**Courtly Contexts: The Royal Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India**

Beginning with Vallabha and his earliest descendents, the Puṣṭimārg tradition received considerable patronage from members of north and western India’s political and royal nobility and wealthy mercantile communities. Puṣṭimārg historian, Shandip Saha, draws on the sect’s hagiographical (vārtā) literature, traditional sources on Vallabha’s pilgrimage tours (Caurāśī Bhāṭhak Caritra), as well as Vallabha’s biography (Śrī Mahāprabhuṭī kī Nīvjāṛta), to demonstrate how Vallabha focused most of his proselytizing efforts in the Malwa region of central India and in the Kathiawad peninsula of Gujarat (Saha 2007, 304). In Gujarat, Vallabha drew followers from the agrarian communities like the kuṃbīs and pātīdārs and he also began to attract members from the prominent and wealthy Hindu mercantile communities such as the luhāṃs, bhāṭiyās, and baniyās.

Vallabha’s second son and successor, Viṭṭhalanātha, furthered Vallabha’s proselytising activities. He is also credited with institutionalizing the sevā of Kṛṣṇa in Puṣṭimārg havelīs, as well as guaranteeing the continued worship of the sect’s nine Kṛṣṇa images (svarūps) by distributing them among his seven sons. Like Vallabha,
Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have embarked on a series of “fund-raising” tours throughout Gujarat between 1543 and 1582, in which he continued to initiate baniyās and members from farming and agricultural communities in cities like Surat, Cambay, Godhra, and Ahmedabad (Saha 2004, 121). However, unlike Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha actively sought the support and patronage of the ruling political elite. Drawing once again from Puṣṭimārg vārtā literature (Bhāvsindhi kī vārtā), Saha indicates how in 1562 Viṭṭhalanātha secured the patronage of the Hindu queen, Rāṇī Durgāvatī, of the Gondwana region in central India (122). Furthermore, and though it is not historically verifiable whether or not or even how Viṭṭhalanātha had direct connections with the Mughal court, one can find a grant in Emperor Akbar’s name exempting Viṭṭhalanātha and his descendents from paying taxes on the land in and around the area of Gokul and Govardhan.25

Viṭṭhalanātha’s descendents continued to live in the Braj region until the political instability precipitated by the Jāt Rebellion in the late seventeenth century prompted many members of the Puṣṭimārg leadership to migrate into parts of Rajasthan, such as Jaipur, Bundi, Bikaner, and Mewar (Saha 2008, 304). The Mewar rulers, in particular mahārāṇa Rāj Siṁh (r. 1653-80), offered the Puṣṭimārg continued support and military protection in Rajasthan.26 The assurance of such security facilitated the move of

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25 This specific grant is issued in the year 1593. For a detailed examination of all the land grants issued to the Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs by the Mughals see Krishnalal M. Jhaveri, Imperial Farmans (1928). In the text, Jhaveri provides English, Hindi, and Gujarati translations of the farmāns.

26 According to Saha, who bases his conclusions on Kanthmani Sastri’s traditional historical treatise, Kāṃkarolī kā Itihās (1939), Rājpūt patronage of Puṣṭimārg only began in the mid-seventeenth century when Jagat Siṁh I (r. 1628-52) of Mewar was initiated by Giridhar Mahārāj, the leader of the third house, during a pilgrimage tour in Gokul. This, in part, explains why his son, Rāj Siṁh, would later compete with various Rājpūt kingdoms for the honor of securing Puṣṭimārg’s base in Mewar, Rajasthan (2008, 309-311).
the image of Śrīnāthjī in 1672 when it was installed in its new havelī in the town of Sinhad, which was then renamed Nathdwara.

By 1676, the Mewar kingdom, the oldest and most prestigious among the Rājpūt states, became the chief patrons of Puṣṭimārg in Rajasthan when its rulers also built a havelī for the third house in the town of Kankroli. Since members of the Mewar royal family, beginning with Jagat Siṃh I (r. 1628-52), were already followers of the third house, the Mewar mahārāṇa declared the Puṣṭimārg sect as the personal religion of the darbār. The Kankroli Gosvāmīs began to serve as the spiritual preceptors of the royal family, and as Saha demonstrates, the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs eventually became a “permanent fixture in the court life of the Mewar mahārājas by presiding over major events such as the coronation and sacred thread ceremonies of the Mewar princes” (2004, 180-181).

In his study on Mughal and Rājpūt patronage of Puṣṭimārg, Edwin Richardson demonstrates how the Mewar kingdom not only supported Puṣṭimārg but also encouraged the sect to become increasingly autonomous by allowing its Gosvāmīs to own and control numerous villages and grazing lands (1979). The rulers of Jaipur, Kota, Bikaner, and Jodhpur also granted tax free land to the Gosvāmīs of Nathdwara and Kankroli and held Puṣṭimārg as the religion of the court. By 1809 and 1838, the Gosvāmīs of Nathdwara and Kankroli, respectively became first-ranking jāgirdārs or land-owners. They managed the administrative and judicial issues related to their estates, accrued taxes from their lands, collected duty-fees on goods produced in the temple bazaars, exacted fees from

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27 By the nineteenth century, the Gosvāmī of Kankroli controlled twenty-one villages in and around the area of Mewar, and the Gosvāmī of Nathdwara controlled close to thirty villages (Richardson 1979, 74-76).
pilgrims as they entered the city walls, and attended and presided over special occasions in the royal *darbārs* (Saha 2004, 185-187). The Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were not only the religious leaders of the community, as a result of their entrepreneurial efforts, by the nineteenth century they had also refashioned themselves as members of the Rājpūt nobility.

The growing prestige of Puṣṭimārg as a courtly religion was also reflected in Rajasthani visual and artistic cultures. The painting traditions of Mewar, Nathdwara, Kisangarh, and Kota illustrate how Śrīnāthji himself – following a trajectory similar to his primary caretakers – was also being re-imagined as a Rājpūt prince. Although both Saha and Richardson indicate that Kisangarh patronage of Puṣṭimārg began with *mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṅh (r. 1748-1757), according to Brajraj Singh, the contemporary descendent of the Kisangarh royal family, Puṣṭimārg was embraced as the court’s religion much earlier with the conversion of *mahārāṇa* Rūp Siṅh (r. 1643-1658).²⁸ *Mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṅh is perhaps best known for his devotional poetry to Kṛṣṇa under the pen-name Nāgirdās, and for his love of the Kisangarh courtesan Baṅṭhaṅṅi. Nāgirdās’ love poetry became an important source of inspiration for the unique Kisangarh style of painting for which the town is known. In these paintings, commissioned by subsequent Kisangarh *mahārāṇas*, Kṛṣṇa (in his local manifestation as Kalyānrāy), is depicted as a young prince enthroned in his palace, giving *darśan* to Kisangarh kings and being surrounded by royal attendants.²⁹ As Edwin Richardson notes, in this new “artistic renaissance,” Śrīnāthji was depicted “not in the rustic company of Brajvasis but among

²⁸ Saha (2004, 181); Richardson (1979, 98); personal communication with Brajraj Singh in Kisangarh, Rajasthan, November 2nd, 2008.
the nobility in the palaces” (90). In Kota, a similar theme was also developing. *Mahārāṇa* Bhīm Siṃh I (r. 1720-23) took initiation into Puṣṭimārg and established Kṛṣṇa in his form of Brajnāthjī as Kota’s tutelary deity. Paintings from Kota depict Brajnāthjī as a royal ruler presiding over his court, and depict Bhīm Siṃh as a dīvān or minister attending to the true king of Kota, Kṛṣṇa. Bhīm Siṃh would eventually build a temple to Brajnāthjī within the palace complex itself, effectively conflating “spaces of Brajnāthjī’s residence with those of royal power” (Taylor, 60-61).

Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India enabled the reproduction and legitimization of Rājpūt kingship. As Nicholas Dirks argues, “one of the fundamental requirements of Indian kingship was that the king be a munificent provider of fertile lands for Brahmans..., [and] for temples which were the centers of pūja worship and festival occasions” (1979, 44). In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the Rājpūt king’s munificence was displayed through land grants made to Puṣṭimārg Brahmin Gosvāmīs, financing the construction of *havelīs*, providing assurance of military protection to these religious institutions, and by patronizing and sometimes even producing (as in the case of *mahārāṇa* Sāvant Siṃh) devotional poetry. In return, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs presided over ceremonial and religious events at the kings’ *darbārs*. The presence of Puṣṭimārg within a particular kingdom also brought reputability and lent credence to that state since large *havelīs* like the ones in Nathdwara and Kankroli required substantial financial subsistence from its patrons to operate and to carry out its daily liturgical activities. That is to say,
Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were attracted to only those kingdoms which were politically stable, could guarantee military protection, and which provided continual patronage.\textsuperscript{30}

A dialectical relationship existed between the Rājpūt kingdom and Puṣṭimārg, each reinforcing and legitimizing the other. For example, Bhīm Siṃh I, the first Kota king to become initiated in Puṣṭimārg, began his kingship in the same year that Aurangzeb died (1707) and when Mughal reign was becoming increasingly destabilized. Bhīm Siṃh wanted to take advantage of this moment of Mughal weakness to “transform Kota from a petty principality of minor consequence to a regional power” by patronizing Puṣṭimārg (Norbert Peabody 1991, 734). In Mewar, Rāj Siṃh encouraged Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs to settle in the region when he too was in the process of economically and culturally reconstructing the state after years of warfare with the Mughals (Saha 2007, 311). The kingdoms of Kota and Mewar vied for the honor of permanently housing Puṣṭimārg at moments of state building and expansion. Finally, another important reason for the Rājpūt nobility to want to attract and secure the presence of Puṣṭimārg in their region at moments of cultural, political, and economical expansion is because they, like Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, participated in profitable relationships with some of the wealthiest followers of Puṣṭimārg, namely the Gujarati Hindu baniyās or mercantile communities.

\textsuperscript{30} In his travel accounts through Rajasthan the British political agent, Colonel James Tod, writes of his attendance at an important Puṣṭimārg festival, which took place in Nathdwara in 1822. All the different svarūps associated with the seven houses had congregated in Nathdwara for the event. Tod explains how the Rājpūt rulers asked his help to make sure the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs returned to the same capitals from which they came, together with their svarūps, for the Rājpūt rulers “dreaded lest bribery might entice the priests to fix them elsewhere, which would have involved their [the kings’] loss of sanctity, dignity, and prosperity” (Tod 436n2).
Mercantile Munificence: *Baniyā* Patronage of Puṣṭimārg in western India

With the establishment of Nathdwara as the sect’s cultic centre, the Śrīnāthjī *havelī* and other subsidiary Puṣṭimārg *havelīs* affiliated with the seven houses received sustained patronage from both the Rajasthani aristocracy and from the affluent merchant communities of western India. Prior to Puṣṭimārg’s move to Nathdwara, *baniyā* communities were already key patrons of Puṣṭimārg in Braj. However, in western India the success of Puṣṭimārg can be significantly attributed to the ties forged between members of the mercantile community, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and Rājpūt *mahārāṇas*.

As noted above, during their proselytizing tours across north and western India, both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha drew converts from a range of caste groups such as *bhūmihār* Brahmins, Rājpūts, as well as from low-caste farming communities like the *gujar* s, *kurīs*, *kuṇbīs* and *pāṭīdārs* (Saha 2007, 306). However, second to Rājpūt *mahārāṇas*, the most influential patrons sought out by Viṭṭhalanātha in western India were members from the affluent commercial castes, the Gujarati Hindu *baniyās*. Unlike the ruling political nobility who exercised authority through their control of land, *baniyā* communities controlled the flow of capital and the credit structure. Ashin Das Gupta, in his study of Surat merchants during the eighteenth century, aptly describes *baniyās’* ubiquitous presence and involvement in the money market as follows: “In short wherever

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31 As David Pocock illustrates in his work, *Mind, Body, and Wealth: A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village* (1973), under the Mughal government some *kuṇbī* families assumed the title *pāṭīdār* (“land-owner”) because they were granted the right to dispense with “middle-men” when paying their land tax. As this new caste title became more popular for denoting the wealthy and prestigious members of the *kuṇbī* community, more and more *kuṇbīs* started to appropriate the name *pāṭīdār*. In 1931, the caste title was officially changed to *pāṭīdār* (5-6). The change in name ostensibly marked an improved caste designation and status. However, as Pocock argues, even after the change in caste name a distinction is still retained between *pāṭīdār* and *kuṇbī* by members of these communities: “A man may be a Patidar in his own eyes and in the eyes of his affines and still be considered a Kanbi by [an] other Patidar” (1972, 52).
there was an economic transaction in the city, you would very likely find a broker to smooth your way and take his cut” (84-85 qtd in M.N. Pearson, 457).

As traders, brokers, bankers, and currency dealers and exchangers (śaroffs), many baniyās maintained an itinerant lifestyle and were therefore able to cultivate expansive networks of social and political connections across large regions, including those beyond India. From the time when the rulers of Rajasthan and Gujarat were forced to accept the suzerainty of Mughal emperors, well known baniyās provided large loans to Rājpūt mahārāṇas, occupied important political positions, held some control over state finances and revenue collection, and even served as ration suppliers and paymasters of the states’ armies (Markovits 2008; Hardiman 22-25). Their ties with Rājpūts also facilitated many baniyās to form connections with Mughal officials and rulers, which perhaps explains why many Hindu merchants were able to continue to expand their networks under the Mughal regime. In Rajasthan, many land-owners or jāgīrdārs also appointed merchants and usurers to collect their land-tax revenue more efficiently by using their own local connections (Hardiman 23-25). As jāgīrdārs themselves, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs may have also relied on influential and trustworthy baniyās to facilitate their tax-revenue collection. Whether or not such a “working” relationship existed between Puṣṭimārg leaders and baniyās, socio-political, economic, and cultural ties were indeed being fostered between the political nobility, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, and influential merchants and bankers. On the one hand, as Saha argues, “Puṣṭimārg’s deepening ties with political elites offered merchants greater opportunities to increase their social

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32 During the expansion of the Maritime Gujarat overseas trade in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, many business communities like the bhāiyās expanded their trading networks to regions outside of India, like Zanzibar, Muscat, China, and Japan – but they were forbidden to journey to Europe and America due to caste restrictions (Shodhan 2001, 9).
prestige through their continued patronage of the mahārājas” (2007, 312). On the other hand, direct connections with Rājpūts and the granting of loans and gifts to these rulers also endowed baniyās with considerable respectability and influence. Thus, both political rulers and Puṣṭimārg religious leaders were dependent on the support and patronage of wealthy merchants, whose trustworthiness, honor, or prestige (ijjat, ābru) were in turn informed by patterns of religious and political gift giving.33

There are also several instances where we see the influence of a wealthy Puṣṭimārg baniyā approach that of political nobility in the context of religious patronage. In his study of Puṣṭimārg patronage by the kings of Kota, Norbert Peabody illustrates how in 1720 Bhīm Sīṃh was defeated and killed by Nizam-ul-Mulk, a feudatory of the Mughal emperor, who was based in Hyderabad. Bhīm Sīṃh was known to have the svarūp of Brijnāthījī accompany him and his troops on an elephant in every battle. When Bhīm Sīṃh was killed, the elephant carrying the palladium was also captured by Nizam-ul-Mulk and brought back to Hyderabad. In an effort to preserve the “potency” of Kota’s tutelary deity, a Hindu merchant in Hyderabad solicited the image from Nizam-ul-Mulk, built a havelī, and spent hundreds of thousands of rupees to continue the lavish sevā of the Puṣṭimārg deity, until it was returned to Kota five years later (1991,737). Due to his wealth and social influence the baniyā was essentially able to stand in for the Kota king and continue the worship of Brijnāthījī. Another example of mercantile munificence is brought to us by Colonel James Tod’s accounts of Rajasthan. In his Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Tod describes his attendance at an important Puṣṭimārg festival

33 Words like mān, ijjat, and ābru were used by members of the baniyā community to refer to social distinctions like “honor,” “prestige,” or “reputation.” However, the most significant of these terms was ābru, which referred to both a merchant’s or merchant firm’s economic credit and reputation (Haynes 1991, 56).
(ānṅakūṭ) taking place in Nathdwara in 1822. He writes how, eighty years earlier, during the same festival:

Rana Ursi presented to the god a tora, or massive golden anklet-chain set with emeralds; Beejy Sing a diamond necklace worth twenty-five thousand rupees; other princes according to their means. They were followed by an old woman of Surat, with infirm step and shaking head, who ... placed at its feet a bill of exchange for seventy thousand rupees. The mighty were humbled ... Such gifts, and to a yet greater amount, are, or were, by no means uncommon from the sons of commerce… (436)

This description by Tod of donation activities by kings and a wealthy baniyā woman not only illustrates how Rājpūt kings and affluent Hindu merchants were among the most important patrons of Puṣṭimārg, but that kings could be “humbled” by the status of these merchants. Also it is noteworthy that a woman is making such a generous donation, suggesting that Puṣṭimārg lay women were also actively involved in forms of religious giving. This is a theme we will return to later in our discussion on Puṣṭimārg lay women’s religious roles in Puṣṭimārg.

As the Mughal empire was becoming decentralized and weak in the eighteenth century, the political nobility of western India increasingly turned to the affluent commercial castes for support. Their mutual ties to Puṣṭimārg facilitated the formation of a “king-merchant” alliance in which income from trade, as well as pilgrimage traffic generated by Gujarati mercantile followers, provided continued financial sustenance to kings (Peabody 1991, 751; Saha 2004, 177). In addition to these political elites, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were also dependent on the baniyā community for financial support. For example, Gosvāmīs derived a considerable amount of money from the duties they
would extract on goods produced in the market place – especially those goods produced by their Gujarati devotees.

Before many of the merchants in Gujarat migrated to Bombay – the commercial-industrial-administrative centre of the British Rāj in western India – cities like Surat and Ahmedabad were home to affluent baniyā communities who played an important role in both the indigenous commercial economy and international trade. Surat linked several important trade routes between its port and the manufacturing centres of Bharuch, Cambay, and Ahmedabad (Haynes 1991, 35-37). In such large towns and cities, many baniyā sub-castes would be organized around occupational guild-like regional bodies known as mahājans.34 These mahājans were responsible for standardizing the rules for conducting business by the baniyās (such as establishing prices as well as wages for artisans), they exercised religious functions such as building temples and rest-houses (dharmśālās), enforced caste rules of marriage and customary practices, and would help resolve any conflicts among members within the community. In short, as Douglas Haynes argues, mahājans were concerned most with managing any threats to the baniyā community’s social honor and economic credit, its ābrā. Mahājans were “critical arenas in which authority was generated and perpetuated … [and] like other high-caste institutions, [they] were enmeshed in the politics of reputation” (1991, 60-61). If members of the community did not comply with the decisions made by their mahājan,

34 Caste and occupational guilds such as these are known to have existed in Gujarat for at least the last eight centuries (Haynes 1991, 60). Dwijendra Tripathi and Makrand Mehta also note how mahājans did not follow the same pattern of organization in all cities. For example, unlike Surat, Ahmedabad did not have one city wide organization. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the city had approximately fifty-three mahājan-like institutions. Ahmedabad instead had a nagarśeth, a position which developed in the seventeenth century and was adopted by other urban centers much later. The nagarśeth coordinated between the heads of mahājans and the state, and under the leadership of the nagarśeth, the Ahmedabad mahājans sometimes worked together to protect their business interests (159-160).
they faced the threat of expulsion from the guild and therefore also faced the possibility of being ex-communicated from their caste as well (63).

In his study of the merchant communities of Surat, Haynes notes how most guilds like the large *Samast Vanik Mahajan* (the mahājan of all the Hindu baniyās in Surat) would link themselves to a well known religious institution. The *Samast Vanik Mahajan*, for example, was actively involved with all the devotional activities and with the Gosvāmīs of Surat’s Bālkṛṣṇalājī havelī, popularly known as “Moṭā mandir.”

Mahājans such as these would normally collect a cess or tax, called lāgo, on the trade of their baniyā members and then donate these funds to the various havelīs. In Gujarat, this form of patronage constituted a major source of income for the havelīs and their Gosvāmīs. This pattern of patronage also continued in colonial Bombay where, by the mid-nineteenth century, five to six Mahārājs had already established themselves. The various Vaiṣṇav baniyā and bhāṭiyā communities that migrated to Bombay from Gujarat during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries signed an agreement with the Bombay Gosvāmīs in 1823 to donate all tax proceeds extracted from every item or commodity of trade and sale (Shodhan 2001, 10). These ranged from quotidian items such as spices, cotton, cloth, opium, and bills of exchange, to luxury goods like gold and silver, pearls and jewels (Mulji 1865, 146).

In addition to such clear financial support of the Puṣṭimārg havelīs and their Gosvāmīs, mahājan guilds also helped to organize feasts to honor Gosvāmīs on special occasions, such as religious holidays or for a Gosvāmī’s marriage and sacred-thread

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35 Though there have been disputes in the early twentieth century among the descendents of Viṭṭhalanātha’s sixth son over matters of succession, the Gosvāmīs of the Bālkṛṣṇajī havelī claim leadership of this Sixth House in Surat.
ceremonies. On these occasions, many baniyā families even competed for the honor to host the mahājan’s festivities. The mahājan made their decision based on the proposed arrangements put forth by the applicant and – perhaps more importantly – they considered the “moral character” or ābrū of the potential sponsor (Haynes 1991, 65). Cultivating a relationship of trust and respect with the local mahājan was therefore essential for baniyā families to maintain and produce their own family’s ābrū. As Haynes explains: “Only with this necessary collective base of reputation acquired through participation in the mahajan’s affairs could the merchant family firm cultivate its own individual prestige and credit in the community through such actions as temple donations and prestigious marriages” (63).

The production and preservation of family prestige and honor or ābrū through patterns of religious patronage is an important aspect for understanding how merchant communities are involved with Puṣṭimārg. It relates to the formation of what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) classifies as “cultural” or “social” capital, a theme I will return to shortly. However, it might be helpful to now pause and discuss some additional reasons as to why baniyā families were attracted to Puṣṭimārg and why they attracted the attention of Puṣṭimārg Gosvamīs, who were actively seeking new patrons.

**Baniyās Becoming Puṣṭi**

By the time Vallabha travelled to western India and began attracting followers, places like Rajasthan and Gujarat were already a stronghold for Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. Francoise Mallison (1983), in her essay on the development of early Kṛṣṇaism in Gujarat investigates the presence of Vaiṣṇav traditions prior to the rise of a
sectarian tradition like Puṣṭimārg. Mallison demonstrates how Vaiṣṇavism in the form of worship to Viṣṇu-Trivikrama was quite popular in Gujarat in the seventh and eighth centuries.\(^{36}\) Kṛṣṇa bhakti flourishes in the fifteenth century when we find Gujarati translations of Sanskrit anthologies dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, such as the Bālagopālastuti, the Gitagovinda, and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa being produced (245). This is also the period during which Narasimha Mehta (ca. 1414-1480 CE), popularly considered the ādikavi or “first poet” of the Gujarati language, lived and composed his devotional lyrics to Kṛṣṇa and Śiva.\(^{37}\) Thus, by the time Vallabha and Viṣṭhalanātha arrived, the Kṛṣṇaite culture of Gujarat was already flourishing. As Mallison argues, “Vallabha and Viṣṭhalanātha did not simply win Gujarat over to their faith; it would be more correct to say that the Kṛṣṇa bhakti of Gujarat absorbed and inspired it” (1994, 60). However, it was only with the arrival of Vallabha and Viṣṭhalanātha and the particular bhakti ethos they presented that this Gujārati “cult of Kṛṣṇa” became crystallized and eventually institutionalized into an orthodox sectarian tradition or sampradāy.\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) Other than areas where Puṣṭimārg and Svāmīnārāyāṇ temples are situated, the most important places of Kṛṣṇa worship in Gujarat are: Dwarka, Dakor, Shamlalji (near Bhiloda), and Tulsiyasham (Janagadh district). The main image in all four pilgrimage centers is the form of Viṣṇu as Trivikrama. Here “Trivikrama” represents one of the possible twenty four ways in which Viṣṇu can be shown holding his four insignia (lotus, mace, disc, and conch), and does not refer to Viṣṇu’s avatār as Trivikrama-Vāmana (Mallison 1994, 54; 1983, 246).

\(^{37}\) Though a large majority of the poems written by Narasimha Mehta are oriented around Kṛṣṇa and Śiva in their saguna (“with-form,” “immanent”) aspects, Narasimha Mehta also composed poetry in the nirguna (“transcendent”) bhakti genre. Charlotte Vaudeville argues that this eclectic style is representative of the “ecumenical bhakti” that prevailed in parts of north and western India by the fifteenth century (qtd. in Neelima Shukla-Bhatt 2003, 13).

\(^{38}\) Another Vaiṣṇav sectarian tradition that appears to have gained popularity in Gujarat during the eighteenth century is the south Indian Śrīvaiṣṇav sampradāy founded by Rāmānuja (1017-1137). Rāmānuja unified Vaiṣṇav theology with non-dual (Advaita) doctrines, and established the philosophical school of Viśiṣṭādīvaita Vedānta or “qualified non-dualism.” Śrīvaiṣṇavism places importance on bhakti and self-surrender (prāpti) to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇ. Soon after Rāmānuja’s death, a schism emerged over the centrality of the Tamil hymns composed by the Ālvārs, the nature of the self (ātman), and the role of Śrī-Lakṣmī. The
I suggest that Gujarati banīās may have embraced Puṣtimārg – a tradition which places a heavy emphasis on ritual purity – because of their already high social and ritual status. We can gain some insight into the religious lifestyles of Gujarati banīās during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in the writings of European travelers who visited the bustling commercial centres of Ahmedabad, Surat, and Cambay in their tours across south Asia. In his study of Gujarati merchants and their Indian Ocean networks, Murari Kumar Jha notes how, by the seventeenth century, “the transoceanic movement of people, goods, and ideas made Gujarati port society truly cosmopolitan” (28). Other than the well-established Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Parsi commercial groups residing in Gujarat, the port cities of Ahmedabad and Surat attracted Arab, Turkish, Persian, Egyptian, and Armenian merchant communities as well. It was therefore inevitable for European travelers to also pass through these major cosmopolitan centres, especially Ahmedabad, which was the capital of Gujarat.39

Tradition split into two communities – the “northern” Vaṭakalais and the “southern” Teṇkalais. Institutionally, each community consolidated around temples, a lineage of teachers/leaders (ācāryas), and centres of learning known as maths, with which ācāryas were normally associated. Although the dates are not known, according to Haripriya Rangarajan, Śrīvaiśnavism found its way to Gujarat with the establishment of the Totādari math and the Rāmānujakot at Dwarka. The twenty-fifth leader of the Teṇkalai Vāṇamāmalai math – Chinna Kaliyan Rāmānujan Śvāmi – was responsible for doing this (1996, 31-32). Individual ācāryas from Tamilnadu and Karnataka also began arriving in Gujarat towards the end of the seventeenth century. With the influence of the Totādari math in Dwarka, numerous Śrīvaiśnav temples were constructed across Gujarat; by the beginning of the nineteenth century nearly thirty had been established, which were dedicated to forms of Viṣṇu, namely Bālājī, Venkatesvara, and Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇ (36-37). It is important to note that Sahājānanda Śvāmi (1781-1830) of the Svāminārāyaṇ sampradāy, another popular Vaiśṇav sect of Gujarāṭ, claims to belong to the same lineage of Śrīvaiśnav ācāryas starting with Rāmānuja (Williams 2004, 63). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Puṣtimārg (110, 323 people), Śrīvaiśnav (72, 092 people), and Svāminārāyaṇ (32, 481 people) constituted the three most popular Vaiśṇav sampradāyas of Ahmedabad (Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency Vol. IV, Ahmedabad district, 1879, 34).

39 After Gujarat was conquered by the Delhi Sultanate in the early fourteenth century, Sultan Ahmad Shah established Ahmedabad as the capital of Gujarāṭ (known then as Gurjardesh) in 1411. Gujarāṭ was then annexed to the Mughal Empire in 1573, and Ahmedabad became a provincial capital. For centuries Ahmedabad remained the commercial capital of the Gujarāṭ region, even after Bombay became the centre of the colonial Presidency in western India. Gandhinagar would eventually replace Ahmedabad as capital of Gujarāṭ in the years after 1960, when Gujarāṭ emerged as a separate state (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 2-21).
SA Clarke, a pastor from a church in London who visited Ahmedabad in the early 1650s, described the streets of Ahmedabad as being filled with shops selling “perfumes, spices, ... silks, cotton, calico, and choice of Indian and Chinese rarities, owned, and sold by the fair spoken, but crafty Bannians” (31). In 1626, Sir Thomas Herbert, an English traveler provided a more detailed description of baniyās, as individuals who are excellent arithmeticians, good at navigation, who do not eat or drink with a Christian, and who are second to the “Priests”: “the Priests and Merchants (appropriating the first & second to themselves) are more superstitious then the casts of Souldiers and Mechanicks, who assume a liberty of Meats and Wine in variety” (42-51). In addition to characterizing Brahmins and baniyās as holding the “first” and “second” place in the caste hierarchy, Herbert repeatedly emphasizes how members of the baniyā community are strict vegetarians and do not consume alcohol. Regarding their religious practices, he writes how baniyās bathe often, and in the mornings they “duck three times” in the water, face the east, and while murmuring some phrases, “adore” the sun. Herbert also provides a drawing of a baniyā standing in front of an image (47) and writes how “Above all, their Idolatry to Pagods (or Images of deformed demons) is observable” (51). Though he does not tell us which deity is depicted, he does explain how “the pagod” is built under a banyan tree, is adorned with silk of all colors, and individuals sing songs and perform “many mysteries” in front of the image (51-52). The description of baniyās as similar to Brahmins in the social and ritual hierarchy of Gujarat is also noted by the French traveler, Francois Pyrard de Laval (1578-1623), who visited parts of western India in the early seventeenth century. In his description of the merchants he encountered

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40 This is a reference to sandhyā rituals.
in Cambay, Pyrard de Laval notes how “The Banians ... observe the same manner of life as the Bramenis, albeit they wear not the cord” (249).

The writings of the British traveller, John Ovington, further support the descriptions of baniyās provided by his contemporaries. Ovington, a chaplain to the Queen, traveled to Surat in 1689. He exclaims how “The Bannians are by much the most numerous, and by far the wealthiest of all the Pagans of India” (278). He also writes that baniyās abstain from eating the flesh of living creatures (283), and remain clean by performing “constant Ablutions and daily Washings” (315). Ovington provides detailed descriptions of the baniyā lifestyle and how they spend their money on “their women,” and on lavish weddings. The display of wealth by baniyā families is a subject that I will return to below, however, an interesting point that Ovington brings up is the manner by which baniyās take oaths or make promises. He explains this as follows: “As we lay our Hands in swearing upon the Holy Bible, so he [the baniyā] puts his hand upon the venerable Cow, with this Imprecation, That he may eat of the Flesh of that Blest Animal, if what he says be not true” (231-232). According to Jha, in addition to taking an oath by touching a cow, Hindu merchants would also make vows by placing their hands upon a deity or by visiting a sacred shrine (37). It is perhaps not that surprising how, in order to resolve ambiguities in trade and to establish trust, merchants would take oaths using religious symbols/insignia. However, what I am interested in is how a merchant’s religious affiliations and activities, such as patronizing a religious shrine and sponsoring and hosting religious festivals, can further enhance the prestige and respectability (ābrū) of a merchant family. That is to say, a community for whom social stability, honor and prestige, and community trust are important – especially for their financial prosperity

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(much like for political elites), strong links with religious sites, persons, and activities would only help facilitate the (re)production of such forms of symbolic capital. To draw on Pierre Bourdieu, “the exhibition of the material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is likely to be in itself a source of material profit in a good-faith economy in which good repute is the best, if not the only, economic guarantee” (1977, 180). A merchant’s ābrū, which could mean both “honor” and “credit,” was accumulated over years of honest commercial dealings and by maintaining a good reputation in the community.41 In addition to conducting their business with integrity and through establishing networks of trust, many baniyās established and maintained their good social standing through patterns of religious patronage and by exercising moral leadership in the community (Haynes 1991, 38).

So far, the seventeenth century writings of European travelers have presented a picture of the baniyā as an individual who belonged to one of the most prominent and wealthy social groups of Gujarat; who maintained a vegetarian diet and abstained from drinking alcohol; one who followed purity rules by constantly washing; and who performed and participated in religious activities. It is important, however, to keep in mind that many of these early European travelers did not differentiate between Jain and Hindu baniyās and, even when discussing Hindu baniyās, they may have been describing

41 The system of the huṇḍī (credit note or bill of exchange) exemplifies how important a merchant’s credit-worthiness was to participate in commercial and financial dealings. As Lakshmi Subramanian explains, huṇḍīs had a twofold function: “to enable one to get advances and or alternatively to remit funds from one place to another” (1987, 477). Gujarati baniyās were masters of the huṇḍī system, which became the dominant financial instrument among the traders, bankers, and merchants of western India by the eighteenth century. The reputation or credit of a merchant banker would determine whether his huṇḍī would be accepted. This system depended on the honor and credit-worthiness of merchant bankers so much so that if “these huṇḍīs had lost their viability, then the merchants who carried them would have been unable to make their purchases, and the whole trading network could have collapsed” (1991, 38).
the activities of Brahmin merchants. Having said that, I think it is safe to presume that by
the seventeenth century, and probably even earlier, Gujarati baniyās not only enjoyed a
high social and economic standing, but also maintained a relatively high ritual or caste
status. Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, like Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and their earliest descendents
may have introduced strict purity rules into Puṣṭimārg because they were Brahmins
themselves. However, the acceptance and continued observance of such purity rules by
the baniyā lay population may have been facilitated by the fact that baniyās were already
following Brahmanic rules of purity and pollution. That is to say, the prospect of
“Sanskritization” or “upward mobility” may not have been the motivation behind, or the
outcome of, baniyās converting into Puṣṭimārg, as it mostly likely was for kuṇbī and
paṭīdār agricultural communities.42 Instead, Puṣṭimārg may have been enthusiastically
adopted by the baniyā community of Gujarat because it introduced a religious ethos that
aligned well with the religious, ritual, aesthetic, and economic needs and practices of the
baniyā community: Puṣṭimārg provided a new, fixed, and stable sectarian identity around
a deity who was already popular in Gujarat; it offered a life-affirming and householder-
based theology and liturgy, one in which practitioners were free to pursue wealth and

42 For example, Shandip Saha argues how as a result of “its emphasis on a householder life grounded in
strict vegetarianism, simplicity, restraint, and frugality, membership in the Puṣṭi Mārga conferred upon
members of the mercantile community the status of brahmins in Gujarati society” (2004, 114). Though I do
not want to completely dismiss this claim, based on the above descriptions of Gujarati baniyā communities
in seventeenth century European travelogues and in the work by Murari Kumar Jha (2009), it appears that
(Hindu?) baniyās may have already been practicing strict vegetarianism and were following purity rules by
the time Puṣṭimārg became popular in Gujarat. This claim could be further corroborated (or perhaps even
discredited) with further historical sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For now, I would like
to nuance Saha’s approach for understanding why Puṣṭimārg gained popularity among the Gujarati baniyā
community. The prospect of upward caste mobility can more aptly describe the kuṇbī and paṭīdār
communities’ adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. As Francoise Mallison argues, “The ascension of
the Kaṇābī-Pateṣa is often due to their ‘vallabhization’, with the prestige of its vegetarianism and stricter
purity rules, which represents a certain form of brahmanization that offered an attractive pattern of life”
(1994, 52).
prosperity so long as they dedicate all their worldly belongings to Kṛṣṇa first; finally, the sect was led by a hereditary community of Brahmin householders, whose ritual purity rules conformed with those of baniyā householders.

Patterns of Puṣṭimārg Patronage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

We are able to see further examples of the baniyā community’s high caste status as well as their explicit ties to Puṣṭimārg in later historical works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An excellent source for understanding the political, social, and religious conditions of Mughal-period Ahmedabad is Ali Muhammad Khan’s Mirat-i-Ahmadi, which was completed in 1761. The Mirat-i-Ahmadi’s khātimā or supplement provides a more detailed description of the various caste groups, communities, and religious shrines located in Ahmedabad. My discussion, therefore, draws from the supplement, which was translated from Persian by Syed Nawab Ali and Charles Seddon (1928). Ali Muhammad Khan was raised in Ahmedabad and was eventually appointed as the imperial divān of the province by the Mughal administration. His access to state papers and documents, on which the Mirat-i-Ahmadi is based, was enabled by his role as divān. In the supplement, Ali Muhammad Khan begins with describing the city, its inhabitants, and its bazaars:

“...it would be no exaggeration to say that so grand and magnificent a city is to be found nowhere else. Bazars are spacious and well arranged; its inhabitants, both men and women, are handsome... Cloth of fine texture, which is exported by land and sea, yields a profitable trade... and suburbs 360 (some say 380) in number enlarge the city.” (1928, 7)

In his description of the Ahmedabadi baniyā community, Ali Khan notes how the community is comprised of “Meshri” baniyās and “Shravak” baniyās. He then goes
on to list the eighty-four sub-divisions of the \textit{baniyā} community in Ahmedabad (116-118).

Ali Khan uses “Shravak” to refer to those \textit{baniyā}s who follow the Jain religion. As for the “Meshri” \textit{baniyā}s, Ali Khan describes them as individuals who “follow the Brahmans and worship Mahadev, Bhavani, and Krishna...there are some who worship Krishna, paying at the same time some respect to Mahadev; these are called Vaishnavas and Bhagats whose religious preceptors are called Gosains, who are these Brahmans who consider themselves adopted sons of Krishna” (118). What this passage clearly suggests is that by this point in the mid-eighteenth century – approximately two hundred years after Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have visited western India, the Puṣṭimārg sect had firmly rooted itself into the religious landscape of Gujarat. It is also interesting that the supplement describes Puṣṭimārgī \textit{baniyā}s as patronizing shrines to Śiva as well. This blurring or relaxed understanding of sectarian boundaries is also illustrated by Douglas Haynes in his study of merchant communities in Surat. In Surat, Haynes notes, the Chakawala family maintained a banking firm during the late eighteenth century. They “apparently saw no contradiction in building a temple to Shiva in the village of Katargam while donating thousands of rupees in \textit{seva} to Vaishnava deities” (1991, 59). Though limited, these historical examples of Puṣṭimārgī \textit{baniyā}s patronizing both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva shrines are significant for two reasons: firstly, these early references attest to a sense of sectarian identity that is markedly different from the strict sectarianism practiced by Puṣṭimārgīs today and, therefore, complicates our reading of sectarian identity formation in the Puṣṭimārg community.\footnote{Today, for example, orthodox Puṣṭimārgīs will not visit temples or sacred shrines dedicated to other deities. Most Puṣṭimārgīs also do not celebrate festivals like Navarātrī in their homes nor would they have images of other deities in their domestic shrines.} Secondly, we do not know exactly what Ali Khan means...
when he says that *baniyās* who worship Kṛṣṇa also pay “at the same time some respect to Mahadev.” It could be similar to what Haynes has described, namely, that the same *baniyā* family would donate money to both Vaiṣṇav and Śaiva shrines. As was briefly discussed above, prominent *baniyā* families were continuously engaged in furthering their reputation or ābrū within the merchant community – and religious giving was a significant part of this process. So even if a *baniyā* family was “strictly” Puṣṭimārg and not followers of Śiva, patronizing a non-Vaiṣṇav temple through gift-giving may have been a means to generate status and prestige for the merchant family.

To continue with Ali Muhammad Khan’s work, unlike the early European travelogues discussed above, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* lists all the prominent mosques, Hindu shrines and pilgrimage sites, as well as Jain temples which were located within and in the outskirts of Ahmedabad city. There are two Vaiṣṇav shrines mentioned by Ali Khan which are certainly of the Puṣṭimārg sampradāya: a shrine which apparently houses the footprints of “Acharya Gosain, the founder of Vaishnavism in Asarwa,” namely, Vallabhacārya (132); and, that of “Gokal Chandrama,” which most likely refers to the svarūp Gokulcandramaṭī. This sacred site is described as follows: “[“Gokul Chandrama.] In Raja Mehta’s lane, from olden times kept in the house of one Raghunath Gosain. After the death of his son Brijnath it was removed to Dosiwara, to the house of one Brij Bhukan. Banias go there and worship it five times a day, providing also for its expenses” (129). Other than the prominent *havelīs*, such as Nathdwara and Kankroli, which were becoming popular pilgrimage sites, the fact that the homes of Gosvāmīs served as sacred sites for Puṣṭimārgīs may have rendered some of them inconspicuous to “outside” observers in places like Ahmedabad. However, the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* confirmed one
phenomenon that we have already addressed, that is, donations made by baniyā followers were responsible for sustaining the elaborate sevā performed in Puṣṭimārg sacred shrines.

If we now turn to works from colonial Gujarat, the Rās Mālā (“Garland of Chronicles”) or Hindu Annals of Western India by Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821-1865) is a good source for providing us with a glimpse into the social and religious world of Puṣṭimārgī baniyās. Alexander Forbes was a Scottish officer of the East India Company who served as Assistant Collector in Ahmedabad, and was also appointed as Sessions Judge in Surat, Ahmedabad, and Bombay between 1846 and 1864. In 1848, Forbes solicited the help of Dalpatram Dhayabhai, a Brahmin Gujarati poet from Kathiawar who converted into the Svāminārāyan sect and who served as his interlocutor and language teacher. As Aparna Kapadia demonstrates, in the same year, with the help of local elites and the geologist George Fulljames, Forbes was instrumental in the formation of the Gujarat Vernacular Society, a literary society founded for the promotion of the Gujarati language and literature (52). He also encouraged the publication of newspapers, and the development of schools and libraries in Ahmedabad, Surat, and Bombay.

44 Though European powers, such as the Portuguese, had begun exerting their authority in parts of western India starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British imperial presence was marked by the opening of the East India Company’s first factory in Surat in 1612. The Company Rāj began consolidating power throughout parts of Gujarat with the help of ruling elites, and by taking advantage of the unstable political and economic environment precipitated by declining Mughal power and Maratha incursions into western India. From their base in Bombay, the Company started annexing regions of Gujarat in the late eighteenth century and, by 1820, they had appropriated the administrative and government activities of Ahmedabad, Surat, and other districts of Gujarat. Gujarat and Maharashtra officially became consolidated as part of the Bombay Presidency in the early years of the nineteenth century, however, many large areas of the Gujarat region and surrounding areas were left under the control of Rājpūt rulers, local chieftains, and the Maratha Gaikwad of Baroda.

45 The Svāminārāyan sampradāya, today one of the most popular Vaiṣṇav traditions of Gujarat, was established in the early nineteenth century by an ascetic Brahmin named Sahajānand Svāmī (1781-1830).
The *Rās Mālā*, a monumental work divided into four books and spanning over eight hundred pages was published in 1856. In the text, Forbes discusses Gujarat’s early-medieval dynasties, Gujarat during the “Mohumeddan” period and during Maratha rule, and he focuses on the Rājpūts of Gujarat, whom he believed formed the political backbone of Gujarat society (54). It is only in book four, in the conclusion, that Forbes presents chapters on “Hindoo Castes,” “Town-Life,” and “Religious Services-Festivals.” It is in this section that we are, once again, provided with a description of the high caste status held by *baniyās* in Gujarat:

“The Kshutreeya caste is now no longer considered by other Hindoos to be next in rank to the Brahmin; its place has been usurped by the Wāneeās [*baniyās*], a branch of the Vaishya caste, who will not even drink water with Rajpoots, and ‘Brahmin-wāneeā’ is now a synonymous expression for ‘oojulee-wustee’ [*ujli vastī*], or high-caste population. The Rajpoots use animal foods and spirituous liquor, both unclean in the last degree to their puritanic neighbors...” (Forbes, 536-537)

This resonates with earlier descriptions of *baniyās* by European travelers. However, Alexander Forbes explicitly invokes a type of caste classification that we have not seen before, that of the “Brahmin-*baniyā*.” Both Brahmin and *baniyās* follow strict caste rules regarding food restrictions (whom one can dine with and who can prepare meals, for example), observe a vegetarian diet, do not drink alcohol, and purify themselves by bathing often (540, 552). Harald Tambs-Lyche confirms the existence of such a caste taxonomy, which is peculiar to Gujarat. However, he argues that this characterization only “worked” in Gujarat’s central regions; “In Saurashtra, Kutch, and in the eastern mountains, Rajputs and other martial, landowning castes remained politically and culturally dominant” (2010, 108).
In his description of the daily routine of Brahmin-\textit{baniyā} householders, Forbes continues to explain how:

“They rise from their beds about four o’clock in the morning, repeating the name of their tutelary divinity, as, O! Muhā Dev!, O! Thākorjee (Vishnoo), O! Umbrā Mother. The pundit, or Sanskrit scholar, mutters a verse ... The Bhugut, or religious layman, chants the praises of his deity in the vernacular stanzas of some poet... Brahmins and Bhuguts are frequently under the vow to bathe before sunrise, in which case, as soon as they are risen, and have said their prayers, they either bathe in warm water at home, or set off for that purpose to the tank or the river. After bathing they assume a silk garment that has been washed the day before, and worship” (552).

There are several important points that Forbes alludes to in this depiction of the \textit{baniyā} householder’s daily activities. The first, which we have also already discussed, is how the religious adepts of Gujarat are predominantly followers of Śaiva, Śakta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. The second, to be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, is how laypersons or “bhuguts” sing songs to their tutelary deities in vernacular languages (of Gujarati or Brajbhāṣā, I presume). And finally, the last practice which Forbes discusses is one that orthodox Puṣṭimārgis still perform today, namely, \textit{apras} (> Skt. \textit{asparśa}, “untouched”) \textit{sevā}. As Forbes illustrates, prior to performing their daily worship, a person bathes and then dresses in a garment that has been washed the day before. Though Forbes does not use the phrase “\textit{apras sevā}” nor does he explain its significance, it is a practice that ensures a person remains ritually pure from the moment they have bathed till they have completed their worship – \textit{if} they do not come in contact with any polluting substance or person.\footnote{Forbes in fact lists a range of substances and activities that can render one impure on pages 554-555.}

\footnote{Forbes in fact lists a range of substances and activities that can render one impure on pages 554-555.}
Although Forbes does present, in great detail, the various domestic ritual practices of Brahmins (552-555), he unfortunately does not do the same for baniyās. Instead he explains how “Wāneeās, and trading people generally, set off early in the morning to have a sight of the Dev in his temple ...Others worship the first thing in the morning the ‘sacred basil,’... [and] when they return home to dinner, paying, perhaps, on their way, a second visit to the temple. ” (555). Since this project is primarily concerned with Puṣṭimārg domestic sevā practices it is unfortunate that so far none of the historical travelogues and texts have presented a description of devotional rituals occurring in the home. This is perhaps due to the fact that most Europeans did not have ready access to the domestic lives and spheres of Indians, and if they did, they most certainly would not have been permitted to observe the sevā practices being performed within the home, especially by the female members of baniyā families. Furthermore, in addition to the general European and Orientalist preoccupation with understanding and depicting Brahmanic and Sanskritic practices, Forbes’ interlocutor was also a Brahmin, albeit a Svāmīnārāyaṇ follower. This may be another reason why Forbes provided a detailed presentation of Brahmin domestic practices and not those of Vaiṣṇav baniyās, like Puṣṭimārgīs or even Svāmīnārāyaṇīs.

One source from this period, which does provide an indication of domestic sevā being performed, is the *Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society*, a publication of the Royal Asiatic Society. In its sixteenth volume, published in 1828, the

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47 He explains how each Brahmin household has a “Dev-mundeer,” where seven or eight images are placed, including the salagram, an image of an infant Kṛṣṇa (“Bāl Mookoond”), Śiva, Ganeṣa, Dūrga, Śūrya, Hanumān, and others, to which the “sixteen services” are performed. In the morning, he describes how Brahmins worship the sun while reciting the Gīyatrī mantra on a rudrākṣa rosary; before eating they perform “Turpun;” performs homa, the fire-sacrifice, and so on (552-555).
British Orientalist Horace H. Wilson wrote a chapter entitled “A Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus” (1-136). Wilson devotes several pages to discussing the Puṣṭimārg sect (85-98) and, in passing, mentions the following important point about its followers:

“Besides their public demonstrations of respect, pictures and images of Gopāla are kept in the houses of the members of the sect, who, before they sit down to any of their meals, take care to offer a portion to the idol. Those of the disciples who have performed the triple Samarpana [initiation], eat only from the hands of each other; and the wife or child that has not exhibited the same mark of devotion to the Guru, can neither cook for such a disciple, nor eat in his society.” (94)

This brief description by Wilson draws attention to the ways in which Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity was intersecting with, or permeated, domestic spaces and practices – at least by the beginning of the nineteenth century if not much earlier. For example, according to Wilson, Puṣṭimārgī homes contain pictures and images of Kṛṣṇa, and although this is not explicitly mentioned by Wilson, these images were perhaps kept in domestic shrines within the home. The excerpt goes on to indicate how Puṣṭimārgīs first offer food to Kṛṣṇa before consuming it themselves and that the wife (or any female member of the household) cannot prepare any meals unless she has obtained initiation first. Thus the everyday practices of food preparation, consumption, and the organization of domestic space – which already on their own are markers of identity and social positioning (since caste rules also apply) – are further inflected by a family’s sectarian identity as Puṣṭimārgī. Considering that Alexander Forbes served as the vice-president of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, he worked, lived, and wrote about his experiences in India well after these volumes were published, and that his primary interlocutor was a Gujarati Vaiṣṇav, it is surprising that he does not go into detail about the domestic religious practices of Gujarati Puṣṭimārgī families.
Forbes, however, does describe the opulence with which religious activities take place at a “temple of Vishnoo,” where five daily services are said to occur (596). Since most Vaiṣṇav shrines in Gujarat, including Śrīnārāyaṇaṇ ones, were by this period following the liturgical structure of Puṣṭimārg temples, it is sometimes not very clear which sectarian tradition a temple belongs to (Mallison 1983, 246; Saha 2008, 310). However, based on the descriptions Forbes provides of the services taking place, it appears to be a Puṣṭimārg temple. While describing the morning service, Forbes alludes to the costly nature of the sevā offerings: “at this time his breakfast is brought to him, which consists of rice and milk, and such other articles of food as rich men use” (597). H.H. Wilson, in his essay in the *Asiatic Researches*, also comments on the lavishness of Puṣṭimārg temple worship as follows: “Vallabha introduced ... that it was the duty of the teachers and his disciples to worship their deity, not in nudity and hunger, but in costly apparel and choice food, not in solitude and mortification, but in the pleasures of society, and the enjoyment of the world” (90). Though Wilson and even contemporary scholars, such as Francoise Mallison (1994), attribute the establishment of the opulent and highly aestheticized form of Puṣṭimārg temple liturgy to Vallabha, it is important to remember that the sophisticated and costly sevā rituals currently performed in Puṣṭimārg temples were most likely institutionalized by Vallabha’s son Viṭṭhalanātha and only became crystallized in the years after him (Saha 2008, 308).48 However what can be deduced from this discussion is that from the very early days of Puṣṭimārg’s presence in Gujarat, mercantile communities continued to translate “through religious giving some of their

48 Saha explains how there are no accounts depicting the manner in which sevā must have been performed in Vallabha’s time, or even by Vallabha himself. In the seventeenth century hagiography, *Śrīnāthji ki Prākātya Vārtā*, which does describe sevā being performed at Govardhan during Vallabha’s lifetime, the sevā is depicted as “a relatively simple affair” (Harirāy 1988: 11-12 qtd in Saha 2008, 308).
financial capital, to which a stigma might be attached if it were either allowed to accumulate visibly or exchanged for personal possessions, into symbolic capital valued throughout high-caste society, thus generating personal authority” (Haynes 1991, 59).

Thus far we have been presented with examples of how Puṣṭimārg baniyās engage in the patronage of havelīs. They may do this either through donating money and supplies for a particular sevā, such as the extravagant mid-day meal of rāj-bhog, through sponsoring a feast for a religious festival or hosting a Gosvāmī’s celebration, and also by providing monetary sustenance to the Gosvāmīs directly. Wealthy baniyā families do this primarily because they are followers of Puṣṭimārg and regard religious giving as acts of devotion. Indeed, the Puṣṭimārg initiation mantra itself requires the relinquishing of one’s man, tan, and dhan or mind, body, and wealth/worldly “possessions” to Kṛṣṇa.49 At the same time, however, and without compromising or questioning the devotional sentiments or intentions of practitioners, I argue that religious giving also provides wealthy baniyā families an opportunity to (re-)produce family honor and prestige, or ābrū. Like other ābrū-generating or ābrū-exhibiting activities, I suggest that religious patronage can also become a vehicle for displaying and producing one’s social status. In the same European travelogues we have discussed above, the other ways in which baniyā families are shown to display or transmute their wealth into socially acceptable or socially reputable forms, includes rites of passage such as wedding ceremonies, the adornment of female members of their family, and through philanthropy.

Returning to John Ovington’s seventeenth century travel writings in Surat, he relates a story of a very wealthy baniyā from Ahmedabad who, during public festivals

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49 See footnote 10 for a translation of the initiation mantras.
would serve his guests in plates of gold, but he was then killed by a jealous rival.

Ovington remarks how:

“Sumptuousness and State suit not very well with the Life and Condition of a Bannian; they must not both flourish long together. This keeps our Brokers at Surat, who are Bannians, from all costly disbursements, tho’ they are reckon’d by some to be worth 15, by others 30 Lacks of Roupies … without any show of a luxurious Garniture, either on their Dishes, or in their Houses. Their main Cost is expended upon their Women.” (319-320)

This portrayal of a baniyā as a person who is simultaneously wealthy and yet lives austerely, is not uncommon. Whether it is out of fear of another’s jealousy or evil-eye (nazar, drṣṭi) or because, as Douglas Haynes argues, a social stigma might be attached to a family’s wealth if it were “allowed to accumulate visibly or [be] exchanged for personal possessions” (1991, 59), many baniyās displayed their wealth in less conspicuous ways – such as by expending it upon their women, as Ovington writes. He gives a detailed description of how many jewels and ornaments a baniyā woman wears:

“… they are deckt from the Crown of the Head to the very feet…[the jewels] are composed of a variety of Diamonds, Rubies, Saphirs, and other Stones of Esteem” (320).

Another occasion on which wealthy baniyā families are described as spending lavishly is during wedding ceremonies. Both Thomas Herbert (53) and Ovington describe how the bride and groom are richly attired and paraded publicly: “Flags, Flambeaus, Musick, State-Coaches, and Led Horses, are all too little for this Day’s Solemnity” (328). Finally, the seventeenth century French traveller Jean de Thevenot, a contemporary of Ovington, presents us with an example of how a rich baniyā, named “Gopy,” paid for the construction of a well or “Tanquie” in Surat which supposedly provided all the drinking water of the city. He concludes his description of the well by stating how “It is certainly a
Work worthy of a King” (1687, III.25). In addition to forms of religious giving, such examples, though brief, indicate how wealthy Gujarati baniyās chose to exhibit their wealth. It is also interesting, though not surprising, that expending wealth on the female members of baniyā families was noteworthy enough for Ovington to include it in his writings. Such descriptions of baniyā women are also found in the writings of Thomas Herbert (46). Women’s bodies and their corporeal practices (such as having their hair tied or left loose, their sārī length and material, quantity and quality of adornment) have been, and continue to be, signifiers of a woman’s caste and marital status, as well as sites for displaying family prestige and honor.

Conclusion

I have attempted to map the ways in which Puṣṭimārg was patronized by the political and mercantile elites of western India from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The baniyā community of Gujarat, as I have demonstrated, enjoyed a high social and caste status at the time of the arrival of Puṣṭimārg in the region. This may explain why, in moments of expansion and consolidation, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs turned to the baniyā communities for support, and why Puṣṭmārg in turn was so enthusiastically adopted by these commercial groups.

With the writings of Alexander Forbes and H.H. Wilson, I traced baniyā patronage of Puṣṭimārg through to the nineteenth century. In addition to being an act of devotion, I argue that religious giving becomes a site for the production and display of prestige, or ābrū, for wealthy baniyā families. In order to proceed with this chronological trajectory and arrive at our discussion of the contemporary urban domestic sevā practices
of Puṣṭimārgī female practitioners, in the following two chapters I examine how baniyā families engaged with the processes of colonial modernity, including the new colonial economy, the English education system, and socio-religious reform movements. What emerges in this context is class as a social category and signifier of status. Ultimately, I demonstrate how Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities and women’s domestic practices inform and become implicated in the shifting class politics of the Bombay Presidency.
CHAPTER 2

Colonial Contexts:

Baniyās and the Formation of Elite Identity in the Bombay Presidency

This Chapter describes the formation of Puṣṭimārg upper-class identities in the Bombay Presidency. Baniyās, in their traditional commercial roles as bankers, traders, and money-lenders, facilitated the expansion and consolidation of the East India Company and the British Rāj in western India. Many great baniyā merchants, referred to as śeths, also became actively involved in administrative roles in British governance and provided the capital for city improvement and urbanization projects. With the emergence of large scale industries, such as the cotton mills, many merchant śeths – who hailed from different sub-caste and religious backgrounds – became leading industrialists and capitalists. As this chapter demonstrates, in addition to wealthy Pārṣi and Jain families, Hindu śeths also began to represent the upper-classes of the Bombay Presidency.

Puṣṭimārg upper-class status was marked by new forms of consumption and philanthropic practices. Religious patronage also took on more modern forms, including baniyā participation in havelī committees and Vaiṣṇav societies, as well as their engagement with print culture. Puṣṭimārg śeths, however, remained aloof from one of the most important processes of colonial modernity, namely Western learning and English education. In the Bombay Presidency, unlike in the Bengal Presidency, the upper-classes and the educated-classes – those who came to represent the middle-classes – were two entirely different social groups.
The Formation of the Anglo-Baniyā Alliance

British imperial presence was established in India with the opening of the first English East India Company (hereafter, EIC) factory in Surat in 1612. The accumulation of vast amounts of wealth through aggressive trade activities, as well as having a strong military presence in India, facilitated the EIC’s control of Surat in 1759, and then over Bharuch in 1772.\textsuperscript{50} It was only after the British had finally defeated the Marathas in 1817 that the emerging colonial power officially appropriated the administrative and government activities of Ahmedabad as well. By the beginning decades of the nineteenth century, cities and towns across Gujarat and Maharashtra were absorbed as part of the Bombay Presidency and were governed from the growing cosmopolitan center of Bombay.\textsuperscript{51} Large areas of western India, however, remained under the control of the Maratha Gaikwad of Baroda, and various other Rājpūt kings, Muslim nawabs, and local chieftans.

To a large degree British presence was seen as a welcoming change after the turmoil and uncertainty Gujarat experienced as a result of the fall of the Mughals and the ransacking of cities by Maratha armies. Political destabilization precipitated by the weakening Mughal empire and repeated Maratha incursions into Gujarat caused trade routes and lines of communication to become increasingly insecure and disrupted across western and northern India (Yagnik and Seth 2010, 66-67; Dasgupta 139-144). The subsequent isolation suffered by cities in western India, as well as the expansion of private European trade in the area, led to a decline in baniyā confidence and business

\textsuperscript{50} For more on the conquest of Surat by the British, see Torri (1998).
\textsuperscript{51} Bombay became the capital of the Bombay Presidency in 1818.
activity in the first half of the eighteenth century. During Maratha rule of Ahmedabad, for instance, many merchant families left the city and moved their businesses further south to cities like Surat, which was emerging as a new rival to Ahmedabad and Cambay as a center of trade (Gillion 29-32). All these factors may explain why the Gujarati business communities – Hindu, Muslim, and Jain alike – welcomed and were supportive of the East India Company during the early phases of British activity in western India. The British, themselves, promised to restore a city like Ahmedabad back to its “original glory.” For example, in 1817 after the British had finally annexed Ahmedabad from the Marathas, the British Resident at Baroda made the following remarks:

“…Under the administration of British laws which protect property and encourage every exertion of lucrative industry, the extensive merchandise for which Ahmedabad was once distinguished would become renewed … it may not be hazarding too much to say, that the city of Ahmedabad placed in the hands of the British Government promises to prove a source not only of great Revenue, but a possession worthy of a splendid and enlightened nation.” Gillion 34-35

An “Anglo-Bania” alliance, which Lakshmi Subramanian describes as “the alignment of the indigenous credit system to Imperial strategy” (1987, 474) began to emerge between the East India Company and mercantile communities even before the EIC officially took over the administrative and governmental activities of cities in the Bombay Presidency. This relationship appeared lucrative for both parties. Many baniyās found that the EIC offered a sense of security and protection, and also presented opportunities for business expansion. The EIC, on the other hand, saw its alliance with the Indian mercantile groups as a way to guarantee the support of local elites and to ensure the supply of indigenous capital towards their imperial and state-building activities. Lakshmi Sumbramanian argues how this “Anglo-Bania” alliance facilitated the
consolidation of the Bombay Presidency itself: “...[it] became in effect the dominating factor in the history of the West Coast during the crucial half century of transition, and constituted in a real sense the prelude to the triumph of Bombay” (474).

From the 1760s onwards, Company officials felt that they did not have enough financial resources to support their civil and military ventures in Bombay. By the closing decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century the EIC became heavily dependent on the cooperation of the Gujarati baniyā community and the use of the financial system that they operated for accessing and circulating capital. For example, the hundra credit system proved crucial during the first Anglo-Maratha war (1775-1782) since it enabled the British army to purchase supplies (485-86). As Subramanian asserts, “If the European merchants of Bombay city had provided the ideological rationale behind expansion, it was Bania capital that fed the fighting armies, clothed the men locked in battle and kept them in good humour” (510).

On the one hand, scholars like Lakshmi Subramanian acknowledge the imperative role played by the Gujarati baniyā merchants in facilitating the expansion and consolidation of the Bombay Presidency. On the other hand, one finds a different retelling of the historical relationship between the British and baniyās in the work of Michelguglielmo Torri who adamantly argues against Subramanian. For example, he dismisses any claims made by Subramanian on the role the Surat baniyās had in enabling the victory of the British over the Surat castle in 1759 (1987, 1998), and instead attributes

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52 By the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the British colonial government began to perceive their dependency on the baniyā merchant communities as a sign of political weakness. They slowly turned to other sources of capital and credit, such as from their increasing trade with China, public loan flotations, agency houses in Bombay and Calcutta, and from bankers in London (Hardiman 1996, 44; Subramanian 509-510).
British ascendancy in Surat to the Mughal nobility. According to Torri, the baniyā communities are said to have resisted the establishment of British paramountcy in Gujarat, and that “…the merchants as a body (both Hindu and non-Hindu) were totally incapable of governing their own destinies” (1998, 259). To a certain extent Torri represents baniyā communities as mere “pawns” in the colonial order of things, whom were approached and manipulated as collaborators in the colonial and imperial enterprise at the whim of the British. When the European rulers decided to “change the rules” at the end of the eighteenth century, Torri explains how

…both the Mughal nobles and the Bania bankers dropped through the trapdoor of history. The Banias – as well as the Mughal nobles and the Parsi merchant princes – far from being partners, even junior partners, were, quite simply, expendable collaborators who were used as long as they were judged useful, to be afterwards discarded as old rags by their masters. (1987, 710).

Both Subramanian and Torri make valid points – although, I believe, Torri’s dismissal of the collaborative role the baniyās had with the British to be an extreme position. In addition to this economic-based baniyā alliance, I am interested in trying to understand how the social-cultural and religious identities of Hindu Gujarati baniyās – many of whom were Puṣṭimārgī – were influenced by the colonial encounter. Thus far, we know that from a very early period Gujarati baniyās were economically collaborating with the British. However, did this relationship burgeon in other areas? For example, since baniyās held a high social status (as “Brahmin-baniyās”) did they, like the Brahmin and land-owning (zamindār) communities in the Bengal and Madras Presidencies, attend English schools in the early phases of English education? Did they take on civil servant or professional positions in the new colonial economy of the Bombay Presidency? How
did the emerging social and religious reform movements influence the Puṣṭimārg community? Collectively, these questions also prompt us to interrogate how the Puṣṭimārg baniyā family was affected or marked by the processes involved in the production of class in nineteenth and twentieth century western India.

As noted above, the Gujarati baniyā community was influenced by the arrival and consolidation of the EIC in significant ways. As Bombay was growing into the commercial and administrative center of EIC rule in western India, baniyā and bhātiyā communities began migrating into the metropolis from areas in Gujarat during the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century. Increased security on trade routes allowed baniyā communities to circulate more easily across western and northern India. Furthermore, while continuing to provide money-lending and exchange services to both indigenous and European customers, many merchants also began exporting opium to China, an industry that was, until then, the sole monopoly of the EIC. In his study on the merchant communities of western India in the colonial era, Claude Markovits demonstrates how this “Malwa opium” trade played a vital role in the accumulation of capital among Parsi, Ahmedabad, Marwari, and Kathiwar merchants in the first decades of the nineteenth century (2008,198).

With regards to administrative roles in British governance, in Ahmedabad, for example, the great merchants or ṣeṭhs were actively involved in city improvement and urbanization projects. After the annexation of Ahmedabad in 1817, J.A. Dunlop, the British revenue commissioner based in Ahmedabad, requested funds from the Bombay government to repair the city’s walls and to establish a police force. When his appeals went unanswered, he turned to the great baniyā-ṣeṭhs of the city for financial support.
The śēths of Ahmedabad recommended a small increase in duties on export and import goods to raise the necessary funds for public works. A Town Wall Fund Committee was then formed, which consisted of the judge and collector of Ahmedabad, as well as the qazi and nagarśēth (the leading śēth of Ahmedabad). The Town Wall Fund Committee thus marked the beginning of the joint collaboration between British officials and Ahmedabad mercantile elites in governing the city. The Committee, which would later evolve into the Municipality of Ahmedabad, also began to manage city sanitation and water supply (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 103-107). Although there were many disagreements between the merchants and the British in subsequent years, their cooperation with the British was made apparent during the 1857 Rebellion. This alliance was motivated by the merchants’ own concerns regarding the security of trade routes and subsequent loss of capital during this period of political unrest. As Yagnik and Sheth note, during the Revolt, the merchants of Ahmedabad requested the Town Wall Fund Committee to support the allocation of hundreds of additional security guards in the city, and the nagarśēth even offered the British the use of his private mail network to gather intelligence for their military expeditions (113). However, despite cooperating so actively with the British, the traditional positions of power and prestige that the ruling merchants experienced and exercised were slowly being appropriated by the colonial power. For example, a year after the Revolt, the nagarśēth Prembhai Himabhai protested against the

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53 During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries several śēths who were prominent followers of Puṣṭimārg also became members of the Ahmedabad Municipality. For example, śēth Śrī Achratīlal Parikh (b.1881) was a member of the committee from 1910-1915. He also served as a director of several textile mills, including Vijay Mills (Ahmedabad), Gopal Mills (Bharoach), Vadodra Spinning and Weaving Company (Vadodra), et cetera (Shah 1952, 106). Another wealthy śēth who served as a member of the Ahmedabad Municipality was Śrī Mangaldas Girdhardas (b.1882). Like Achratīlal Parikh, Girdhardas was a Puṣṭimārgī and also accumulated his wealth by managing several textile mills in Ahmedabad, Bombay, and Jabalpur (109).
decision to terminate his traditional rights to a percentage of the city’s import levies. Although the British government would eventually concede by agreeing to pay him a small annual pension, according to the nagarseṭh, this move by the British compromised his “dignity as an influential citizen” of the city (114-115). Transformations in, or even the erasure of, traditional forms of authority – such as with the nagarśeṭh, the mahājanś or caste-guilds, and the influential role of the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs – occurred not only through direct colonial intervention but also from pressure from the emerging English educated middle classes of the Bombay presidency. Many social and religious reformers drew from these classes, including the well-known critic of Puṣṭimārg, Karsondas Mulji (1832-1871).

English Education and Middle-Class Modernities

English education in the Bombay Presidency was promoted in the early to mid-nineteenth century by Sir Erskine Perry, the President of the Board of Education, and most notably by Mounstuart Elphinstone, who served as the Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827. The first English school of significance was founded in Bombay in 1827, and the city was also the site of the first English institute of higher learning in the Presidency, the Elphinstone Intitution, which was formed in 1834. On the one hand, British officials perceived of and presented English education as a tool to create a class of people to serve as civil servants in the administration of India. On the other hand, as Erskine Perry articulated, by introducing the English language – and through it – Western

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54 Even before the Bombay Government officially began institutionalizing English education in the Bombay Presidency, Christian missionaries had already started establishing English schools as early as 1817 when the London Missionary Society started a school in Surat (Raval 47).
55 Elphinstone Institute became Elphinstone College in 1857 upon the founding of Bombay University.
learning and science, the new education system was promoted as an instrument of “change and regeneration” by creating a new class of persons who “would diffuse knowledge widely among the people, and thus raise India to her rightful position beside the nations of the West” (cited in Christine Dobbin 1972, 28). This type of learning, it was hoped, would create a deep moral and cultural transformation and compel these new class of “cultivated gentlemen” to transmit this new-found knowledge through print (text books, novels, and newspapers), through the formation of intellectual societies, and through public lectures – all the markers and producers of a newly emerging public sphere.

Echoing themes from Thomas B. Macaulay’s “Minute on Education” (1835), the Governor of Bombay, Sir Bartle Frere, during his speech at Bombay University in 1863 described the new graduates as “interpreters – the connecting links between the rulers and the ruled” (31). But who were the graduates, this new class of “cultivated gentlemen,” of institutions like Bombay University and Elphinstone College during this period? British officials, such as Elphinstone and Perry, had hoped it would be members from the leading commercial classes of Bombay, such as the Gujarati baniyās and bhātiyās, who were already economically and administratively collaborating with the British and were the social elites of the city. Much to their disappointment, however, it appeared that the leading śeṭhs of the city did not have an interest in the new institutions of Western learning. Śeṭh families also did not want their children mixing with poorer children at government schools and did not want to expose their children to Christian teachings in missionary schools. Most merchant śeṭhs instead arranged for private
tutoring lessons so that their children could acquire enough proficiency in English to continue their commercial activities (51).

In her study on the prominent šeṭhs or “merchant princes” of Bombay city in the mid-nineteenth century, Christine Dobbin demonstrates how no baniyās or bhātiyās (or Muslims) graduated from the higher classes of Elphinstone College between 1827 and 1842 (31). Instead, those who were attending and graduating from the college came from the Marathi-speaking population of Bombay, such as from the chitpavan Brahmin, saraswat Brahmin, and the pathare prabhu castes. These communities, Dobbin notes, already had a “tradition of learning and government service” such as with the Peshwas in the eighteenth century, while the prabhūs had served the Portuguese and worked as clerks under the EIC (1972, 31). It was, therefore, not surprising to find male members from these high caste communities eager to enter the new government schools and colleges (1972, 31; 1970, 80). A large number of graduates also came from less prosperous Parsi families, and the remaining body of students drew from lower Hindu castes, and a few belonged to Gujarati Brahmin castes. Males from these poor but traditionally learned communities hoped an English education would serve as a mobilizing force, and would eventually secure a role for them in the new colonial economy as civil servants of the Rāj. Education officials even attempted to raise the tuition costs of schools to attract members from leading šeṭh families but this tactic only led to the marginalization of the poor and to the need of increased funding for student scholarships which many šeṭhs in fact provided.

One of the primary reasons why British officials were expecting members from the prosperous commercial castes to enter the English education system was because
these communities, as we saw in the case of Ahmedabad, were already participating in arenas of municipal administration and urban planning. For example, in 1836, European business men formed the Chamber of Commerce, an institutional platform from which they could exert pressure on the government to further their commercial projects. The Chamber also included leading ṣeṭhs from the merchant community, and together they petitioned the Government of Calcutta to provide more funds for the infrastructure of Bombay city, in the form of roads, bridges, and lines of communication (1972, 22). Ṣeṭhs were also involved in the emergent Anglo-Indian judicial system. In 1834 thirteen Indians were made Justices of the Peace, and by the 1850s many prominent ṣeṭhs of the city had become Justices.⁵⁶

It was surprising for the British that baniyās, who were quite eager to attain positions of leadership in the civic sphere, were uninterested in adopting and leading the cause of Western learning and education. This may have been especially bewildering since many ṣeṭhs were on the Board of Education, served as members of the managing committee of the Elphinstone College, and were active patrons of education. For example, Gujarati ṣeṭhs like Jagannath Shankarshet, Goculdas Tejpal, and Varjivandas Madhavdas – the brother of Gopaldas Madhavdas, the head of the Kapol baniyā mahājan in Bombay and a prominent Puṣṭimārgī – provided funds for establishing Anglo-Vernacular schools (33). In the Gujarati Puṣṭimārg historical text, Puṣṭimārgnāṁ 500 Varṣ:Gauravpūrṇ Itihās by Vitthaldas Shah (1952), there is a chapter which provides short biographical sketches of prominent Puṣṭimārg ṣeṭhs entitled “Vaiṣṇav Āgevān

⁵⁶ For example, ṣeṭh Keela Chand Devchand (b. 1855) and his son ṣeṭh Chhotalal Keela Chand (b. 1878), both Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavas, were appointed as Justices of Peace in the late nineteenth century. Keela Chand participated in several business ventures; he served as a broker, an agent for an insurance company, and also exported cotton. His son, Chhotalal, went on to expand his father’s businesses (Shah 1952, 110-111).
Vyaktionā Jīvāncaritro” (pg. 105-149). In this chapter, it describes how other Puṣṭimārg śēths, like Mangaldas Girdhardas (b.1882) from Ahmedabad, donated large sums to the Public Education Society of Surat and to the Benares Hindu University. He also served as the director of a school for the deaf and mute in Ahmedabad (109). Śēth Keela Chand Devchand (b.1855), another Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav, who was awarded the title of Justice of Peace, is said to have also donated Rs. 40,000 to Benares Hindu University (109-110). Finally, Chhotalal Heera Chand (b.1871), a Puṣṭimārgī and an Ahmedabadi owner of several mills, established a public religious and charitable trust worth Rs. 5,00,000 from which funds were donated to several educational institutes (118). Such acts of public donations by Puṣṭimārg śēths can be interpreted through the same logic as their acts of religious patronage – as status or ābṛā producing practices – albeit this time, for a new European public. Sometimes these same śēths, like Chhotalal Heera Chand or Keela Chand Devchand, donated large amounts of money for temple building and renovations as well as for government institutes like schools and hospitals (110-118). As Jesse S. Palsetia notes, “By the nineteenth century, Indian charity in emulation of British standards became an important means of gaining recognition in the public culture, as Indian donors and philanthropists sought to become worthy of imperial recognition and advancement” (87).

The fact remains, however, that many of these same śēths were not interested in attending the very institutions of learning they funded. The scene in Bombay was not at all similar to colonial Calcutta, where the English educated intelligentsia drew largely from the wealthy land-owning or zamindār and taluqdār families, as well as from families of “independent income” (Dobbin 1972, 35). In Bombay, colonial officials had
to finally resign to the reality that neither the landed aristocracy nor the wealthy commercial classes had a desire for a Western literary and scientific education. That is to say, in the nineteenth century Bombay Presidency, the “upper classes” and the “educated classes” were two entirely different entities (32).

I. “The Upper Classes” and the Production of Elite Baniyā Identities

Before turning to a discussion of the Western educated classes and the rise of reform movements in western India, I want to briefly reflect on how members of the wealthy mercantile communities produced and articulated an upper-class identity in the late nineteenth century context of the Bombay Presidency. To begin with, the coming together of merchants, from different religious and caste backgrounds, for a common economic goal (like the Chamber of Commerce as we discussed above) are instances whereby members of the mercantile communities are seen to function as a class, which is an important marker of their modernity. Another event marking the collaboration among baniyā and bhāṭiyā ṣeṭhs was the acceptance of the joint-stock principle by merchants and the subsequent expansion of the Bombay cotton mill industry (19). In August 1854, for example, the wealthy Parsi merchant, Manakji Nasarvanji Petit, invited his close business associates, such as the Jewish business man, Elias Sassoon, and the Puṣṭimārgī baniyā, Varjivandas Madhavdas, along with two Europeans to start the Oriental Spinning and Weaving Company (20). The cotton mill enterprise would eventually attract the leading baniyā and bhāṭiyā ṣeṭhs of the city to invest in and promote what would eventually become the leading industry of India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed many Puṣṭimārg baniyās and bhāṭiyās became wealthy ṣeṭhs by
establishing mill factories across Gujarat. These included, for example, śēṭh Balabhai Damordas (b. 1857), the founder of Sarangpur Mills in Ahmedabad (Shah 1952, 105-106); śēṭh Achratlal Parikh (b. 1881), the director of several mills including Vijay Mills in Ahmedabad and Gopal Mills in Bharoach (106); śēṭh Mangaldas Girdhardas (b. 1882), who managed seven mills across Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Jabalpur (109); śēṭh Chhotalal Heerachand (b. 1869), who shifted his business from real estate to building mills, including Chhotalal Mills in Kalol and Kadi, Gujarat, and so on (118). This marked the transformation in the role of the baniyā and bhāṭiyā śēṭh from trader/ banker/ merchant into becoming leading industrialists and capitalists. As Makrand Mehta and Dwijendra Tripathi argue, such collaboration between merchants based on common economic interests and occupational affiliations, and not merely caste identity, are characteristic of a class — in this case, the upper-class (1984, 166).

While traveling through Ahmedabad in 1849, a British officer commented on the new markers of elite status among the wealthy merchants of Gujarat:

In those times [during the Maratha Government] a wealthy man was not known by his dress, carriage, or appearance…[now] the wealthy of the city have many of them set up carriages, and several have built country houses, and enjoy themselves in the ease and comfort which characterizes a peaceful and civilized people. (Gillion 56)

In The Indian Mission of the Irish Presbyterian Church (1890), Revered Robert Jeffrey corroborates this description decades later when he comments on the affluent lifestyles of the baniyās and bhāṭiyās in Gujarat: “These [of the trading class], in such cities as Bombay, Surat, and Ahmedabad, live in great outward state. They build huge showy mansions, one-fifth of the space in which they do not occupy; and drive about in splendid carriages, drawn by magnificent horses, which often cost as much as £500 the pair”
(103). Quoting from the Ahmedabadi historian, Maganlal Vakhatchand, Gillion also describes how in 1851 the upper classes of Ahmedabad were building houses in the English style and were beginning to adopt “changes in dress, including the wearing of socks” (ibid).

As C.A. Bayly argues, shifts in material culture and elite tastes, marked by the increased consumption of imported commodities, allowed for English fabrics and English clothing styles to also gain a foothold in the Indian market (1986, 306). By 1849, the importation of fine textured and low cost English cloth had completely displaced the weaving of cotton cloth in the Ahmedabad district (48). Before the āsēth-owned Indian mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad began mass producing their own textiles in the mid-1800s, styles and quality of clothing in India – always already a marker of identity – was further influenced by the importation and consumption of European machine-made fabrics. Bayly notes, moreover, how merchants although bought English textiles, many still retained their traditional garb (1986, 307). Thus, European styles of clothing may not have necessarily been an indicator of elite status in the way that using European fabric was.  

Perhaps the key point here, which Bayly alludes to, is how the new English-educated class or middle class – the most “Westernized” Indians at this point – had to “accommodate” Europe in the public sphere through, for example, their dressing practices: wearing trousers, socks, the English frock-coat, et cetera. As was briefly mentioned above and will be discussed in further detail below, in the early phases of

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57 It is interesting to note that this very process, namely, the widespread importation of and preference for European textiles and commodities became the focal point of later swadeshi and Gandhian nationalist movements. Cloth, once again, became reconstituted as an important material symbol – and, this time, a moral/spiritual symbol – of identity. For more on cloth and Gandhian nationalism see Lisa Trivedi’s excellent monograph, Clothing Gandhi’s Nation (2007).
English education in Bombay, those individuals who attended English schools did so in order to uplift their social and economic positions. “Accommodating” Europe, at least in the public sphere, was not necessarily a choice for the middle classes; it was, in fact, necessary. On the other hand, the wealthy merchant families in Bombay and Ahmedabad chose to adjust their domestic spaces, as well as their aesthetic and corporeal practices (dressing styles, choice of fabric, modes of transportation) according to European styles of consumption and tastes. I suggest that the ability to choose whether or not one wanted to accommodate Europe – “Europe” here being signified by an English education, English clothing styles, government jobs, and English consumption practices – informed and was indicative of class status in nineteenth century colonial Bombay.

In his memoir, *Shells from the Sands of Bombay* (1920), the Parsi writer and Elphinstone graduate, Dinshah E. Wacha, describes colonial Bombay in the years between 1860 and 1875. Apart from their business ventures, Wacha offers us a glimpse into the life-styles of the upper class elites, many of whom – including the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav families of Varjivandas Madhovdas and Mangaldas Nathubhai – lived in close proximity to each other in the Fort area of Bombay. According to Wacha, the homes of the affluent were furnished with Brussels carpets, large mirrors, Bohemian and Venetian chandeliers, musical clocks, glass globe-lamps (“the earliest foreign importation of luxury”), European toys for their children, and “a better style of picture decorations” (178-180). Though it is possible for us to gain access to the consumption and domestic practices of upper-class Puṣṭimārgīs today, it is difficult to extend Wacha’s description of such nineteenth century practices to the homes of Puṣṭimārg śetṣis as well.
While describing banīyā lifestyles several decades later, the 1901 Bombay Presidency Gazetteer illustrates how “Except young men in cities and large towns who are fond of tables, chairs, sofas, glassware and lamps, Vāniās do not spend money on flimsy or breakable articles. Their practice is to have little furniture …Their chief articles of furniture are strong wooden boxes cots and a large store of copper and brass pots” (75). The paucity of such historical evidence combined with the traditional view that orthodox banīyās were generally adverse to displaying their wealth so conspicuously, prevents us from drawing conclusions about the domestic environment of upper-class Puṣṭimārg families in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, we can assume that towards the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century urban elite banīyās began adopting more Western-inspired aesthetic and consumption practices. On the other hand, at least one aspect of the domestic space arrangement must have remained the same, namely, the space allocated for the performance of domestic ritual (the pūjā or sevā room/space). As we discussed in chapter one, we do have historical references indicating the practice of domestic ritual in Puṣṭimārg homes during the nineteenth century. In his study, The Interiors of Empire, Robin Jones corroborates this point further by demonstrating how visual representations of Indian middle-class homes from the nineteenth century seem to only consist of images of the pūjā room (145). Although most Hindu homes likely had spaces for the performance of worship, the nature of Puṣṭimārg sevā, in which Śrīnāthjī is regarded as a member of the family may have required that every Puṣṭimārg home have a space dedicated to the performance of daily worship. The existence, nature, and size of this space, whether it was a small corner in a room, or an entirely separate room within the home would depend on the economic background of a
household. As we will discuss in chapter five, domestic spaces became further implicated in the articulation and production of family status in the twentieth century through, for example, the size of the house, styles of furnishing, the types and value of commodities consumed and displayed in the home, et cetera. In a Puṣṭimārg context, the spaces dedicated to sevā, the articles used during sevā, and the amount of time dedicated to its performance also figured into this process of class display and status production.

A description of a Hindu baniyā’’s home is related to us through the writings of Lady Nora Scott, the wife of the Chief Justice of Bombay in the 1850s, when she visited the home of the wealthy, reform-minded Mangaldas Nathubhai. Nathubhai, who would later go on to support Karsondas Mulji in his attack against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, apparently lived “in a very grand, large house...enclosed in a high walled garden. The house is furnished in a half English style and portraits of the Queen and the Royal family hang on the walls” (qtd. in Jones, 134). This brings up another important point, namely, that the consumption practices of upper-class Indian elites did not necessarily conform to Anglo-Indian or Western elite practices. Class status in colonial India, by Indians, was articulated and produced through different forms of material culture, aesthetic choices, and cultural practices than Western modes of class production. This sometimes depended on the degree to which wealthy ściśhs engaged with Europeans, were less orthodox with respect to their caste customs, or as we have seen with the example of Nathubhai, this was also influenced by their background as social and religious reformers. Many Parsis, moreover, would also only furnish part of their homes with Western décor so as to facilitate their social interactions with Europeans who visited them (Jones, 133).
In addition to domestic consumption practices, one of the ways through which the baniyā upper-classes of western India demonstrated and reproduced their elite status was through public displays of class, such as hosting lavish wedding celebrations, the amount and quality of jewels they or their women would wear, and also through donative practices – both religious and non-religious. Many of the religious donative practices by elite Puṣṭimārg families remain similar to those from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which have been discussed in chapter one). For example, wealthy Gujarati Puṣṭimārgis śeths continued to host Gosvāmīs’ wedding and sacred-thread ceremonies, fund havelī construction or renovations, financially support the construction of dharm-śālas (pilgrimage “rest-houses”) and go-śālas (“cow sanctuaries”), organize pilgrimage tours, and donate money to Puṣṭimārg havelīs and their Gosvāmīs well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Several Puṣṭimārg śeths, however, also engaged with more modern forms of ābrā production by donating funds to educational institutes

58 The 1901 Bombay Presidency Gazetteer describes Gujarati baniyās’ spending-habits as follows: “… They are curiously thrifty in everyday life, but on special occasions they indulge in most lavish expenditure” (76-77).
59 The Bombay Gazetteer notes how both baniyā men and women are fond of ornaments: “If fairly off a man’s every-day ornaments are silver girdle and a gold armlet worn above the elbow; if he is rich he wears besides these a pearl earring, a gold or pearl necklace, and finger rings; if he is very rich he adds wristlets of solid gold. Costlier and more showy ornaments are worn at caste dinners and on other special occasions. A Vānia woman wears a gold-plated hair ornament called chāk, gold or pearl earrings, a gold or pearl nosering, gold necklaces, a gold armlet worn above the left elbow, glass or gold bangles or wooden or ivory wristlets plated with gold chudās, silver anklets, and silver toe and finger rings. Indoors a Vānia woman wears earrings, a necklace, bangles or wristlets chudās, and anklets.” (1901, 76).
60 Śeth Balabhai Damordas (b.1857) is said to have donated Rs. 80,000 to build a dharma-śāla in Mathura, called “Damordar Bhavan,” as well as one in Kankroli (“Mahakor Bhavan”), and in Vraj (“Kunj Bhavan”). He also served as the “chairperson” in the sacred thread ceremony of Gosvāmī Śrī Nathgopalji (Shah 1952, 105); śeth Achratlal Parikh (b. 1881) founded the “Vitthal Niwas” dharma-śāla in Dakor, and donated funds for building a go-śāla (106); śeth Govindlal Maneklal (b.1886) built several dharma-śālas throughout his life, including one in the memory of his first wife in Kisangarh, and “Manek Bhavan” in Kota (108); and śeth Ishwarlal Chimanlal (b.1900) helped in renovating Ahmedabad’s Natvarlal Shyamlal havelī, and provided funding for rebuilding the Mathureshji havelī in Kota (112).
and hospitals. Material expressions of their devotion and sectarian identities also took on more modern forms. For example, śeth Balabhai Damordas (b.1858) was a member of the Gujarat Vaishya Sabha, a society which was founded by Ahmedabad’s prominent Vaiṣṇav baniyās in 1903 (Shah 1952, 105-106). The Sabha provided a forum where śeths could debate social and religious issues, such as education policies and caste taboos on foreign travel. Śeth Achratlal Parikh was elected as the president of the Gujarat Vaishya Sabha several times during his life, and he is also said to have participated in the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇav Parishad (f. 1906) (106).

Print culture was another modern medium with which Puṣṭimārgīs engaged. Several śeths either published their own Puṣṭimārg-themed works or provided translations of Puṣṭimārg texts and literature. For example, śeth Girdharlal Harilal (b.1855) published a book called Līlā Prasaṅg about his pilgrimage tour to Nathdwara (113). Śeth Balabhai Damordas financially supported Dwarkadas Parikh in publishing his well-known work on the Puṣṭimārg vārtās: Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā in the late 1940s (105-106). Lay baniyās such as Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai edited and published Puṣṭimārg performance literature, such as the Dhol-Kīrtan Samgrah (1913) and Varṣ-utsav kīrtan samgrah (1936). Finally, several prominent śeths were also active members of havelī management committees. Śeths Govindlal Maneklal (b.1886) and Chamanlal Girdharlal (b.1874) at one time even became presidents of the Śrīnāthji Temple Committee (108-110). The engagement of śeths with forms of print culture, and their

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61 In addition to the education institutes mentioned earlier in this chapter, which several śeths helped fund, śeth Achratlal Parikh (b.1881) established the “Saraswati ben” maternity facility in Ahmedabad, and śeth Keela Chand Devchand (b.1855) invested Rs. 1,25,000 in helping to build a maternity centre in Patan (Shah 1952, 106-110).

62 By 1905 a resolution was reached where traditional social sanctions on those who had crossed the seas were withdrawn (Yagnik and Sheth, 2011).
participation in caste and religious societies and *havelī* committees, all of which are
informed by and helped perpetuate their sectarian identities as Puṣṭimārgīs, are also tied
to the processes of class formation. As Joanne Waghorne argues, in the face of
modernity, the reproduction of class begins to occur

> “in modern sites and through modern media closely associated with the new economic realm. The contemporary home, volunteer service associations and religious groups, lecture series in private homes or public halls, private temples in or near homes, and small associations within public temples – all of these sites emerged in the context of modern urban life…” (138)

If we return to Wacha’s description of the upper-class merchant families in Bombay, we are provided with a glimpse of the activities of women from these families, albeit mostly of Parsi women. Wacha remarks how, during the hot summer evenings, one could find “the ‘burra beebies’ wives of officials and merchants, sipping their glasses of ices” outside shops selling ice and cakes – other luxury items of the 1850s (120). Though Wacha here only briefly describes the activities of women from the upper-classes, elsewhere he does go into more detail. For example, he relates how only women from poorer Hindu families would be seen wandering out into the markets of the city, while the only upper-class women to be seen were from the Parsi community (92). Interestingly, Wacha explains how it was during the 1858 Proclamation of Queen Victoria, marking the end of the EIC rule in India and the beginning of the British Rāj, and which drew thousands of people out onto the streets of Bombay that upper-class Parsi women were finally seen riding in open carriages for the first time, “attired in their rich silk saris and bejewelled” (170, 693). However, it would be the Divālī celebration of 1864 that Wacha attributes as having a real “social consequence” in Bombay. The social consequence was, according him, represented by
“…the number of women of all classes, specially the Parsi, who turned out in their hundreds in the streets, either on foot or in open carriages! That was a phenomenon which was not allowed to pass unnoticed in the vernacular Press, notably the Rast Goftar – which was the special organ of the social reformers and founded by Mr. Dadabhoy Nowrojee and his friends … Parsi women of the better class used to go about in their carriages, mostly shigrams with the venetian windows closed. They used to peep, like their purdah sisters, through the venetians. But the Diwali of 1864 changed it all. They went about driving in open carriages …” (182-183).

While continuing to present Parsis as the most socially progressive community during this time, Wacha also describes the community as the only members of the upper-class who often socially intermingled with Europeans. Hindu and Muslim mercantile communities, who although kept cordial business relations with Europeans, only ever invited well-known Europeans to attend marriage ceremonies and “nautch parties” at their homes (683-84). Parsis, Washa explains, free from “the trammels of caste and custom,” mixed openly with English society (ibid). Perhaps due to their already close business and social connections with Europeans, Parsis were also among the only members of the upper-classes who from the beginning sent their sons to Elphinstone College. Although they were a small community, their success was unparalleled in the fields of commerce and trade.\textsuperscript{63} They owned vast amounts of land across Bombay, and were India’s leading ship owners. Many of the richest Parsi merchants, therefore, made large fortunes trading in cotton and silks with Europe and opium with China. As John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams demonstrate, during the nineteenth century, the Parsi community were not only participating in Bombay’s public culture through their business activities but they were also molding it through their pioneering work in education,

\textsuperscript{63} The 1872 Census showed that Parsis constituted only 6.8 percent of the population (Dobbin 1972, 38).
philanthropy, medicine, journalism, and social reform (2). These were areas which the Hindu educated middle-classes would also soon come to dominate.

II. “The Educated Classes” and Making of the Middle-Class Intelligentsia

Christine Dobbin characterizes the intelligentsia of Bombay city in the mid-late nineteenth century as those individuals who received an English education at the Elphinstone College, Bombay University, and those who also graduated from professional institutions, such as the Grant Medical College and the Government Law Classes (1972, 28). As discussed above, although many ārogyas were patrons of education, very few males from Hindu baniyā and bhātiyā communities attended these institutions. This may be due to the following reasons: (1) orthodox Hindus did not want their children exposed to Christian teachings at missionary schools; (2) they did not want their children mixing with children from poor families; and, (3) perhaps the most obvious reason is that wealthy merchants – at least in the early phases of colonial modernity – did not need to obtain an English education because of their already high economic status. Before the emergence of professional occupations, such as law and medicine, sons of merchants would earn more money if they continued in the same line of business as their families. On the other hand, students from poor Marathi and Gujarati Brahmin and lower caste families needed to obtain an English education to earn a better living and to eventually raise their economic status. Unlike the upper-classes such as the Gujarati baniyās, who for the most part were able to adapt to the new colonial economy, the emerging middle classes were wholly economically dependent on the colonial government. As Dobbin demonstrates, between 1827-1842 sixty-one percent of graduates
from the Elphinstone College entered government service positions as accountants, writers, or translators, and the next largest group, eight percent of the graduates, became teachers. Eventually, by the 1870s, teaching positions dominated the civil job market in Bombay city (39).

In the classrooms of Elphinstone, students were not only taught western sciences, such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry but they were also exposed to European literature and history, political theories, and philosophies. The ethical, moral, and aesthetic education of Indians, along European and Christian lines, was disseminated through the teaching of English literature, a discipline that was ushered in with the 1835 English Education Act of William Bentinck. The writings of European authors like Shakespeare, John Locke, John Milton, Francis Bacon, and Samuel Johnson were presented as secular texts in institutions of Western learning even though their writings contained explicit Christian themes and references (Viswanathan 1989, 85-86). On the one hand, such a moral education was expected to generate an impulse for reform in students, which it perhaps helped catalyze in future reformers like Dadabhai Naoroji, Narmadshankar Lalshankar, Mahipatram Rupram, and Karsondas Mulji. On the other hand, the moral and ethical virtues supposedly imbibed by the English educated would also make graduates “useful” subjects for bureaucratic roles. As Gauri Viswanathan demonstrates, in 1844 Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General, passed a resolution assuring that those who acquired an education in English literature would be given preferential consideration for public office appointments (89). Eventually, the study and practice of

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64 Books on history included Thomas Macaulay’s History of England and James Mill’s History of British India; political economy and utilitarian thought included works by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham’s Principles of Morals and Legislation (Scott 132-133).
law was pushed as a suitable profession for educated Indians who wanted to see their moral education put to more practical use. The combination of an English literary education and law would ultimately render these individuals “good servants of the State and useful members of society.” (91).

It is difficult to provide distinct characteristics of the new middle class in the rapidly changing economic and socio-political context of nineteenth century Bombay. Unlike the propertied upper-classes whom were merchants and/or mill owners, that is, those who owned the means of production, the middle-class English educated public worked in government positions as teachers, clerks, translators, and eventually as lawyers and doctors – the new professional class. They can also be differentiated from the property-less lower classes, who worked as physical laborers (as mill workers or servants, for example). The middle-classes would also become the most politicized group in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a group of individuals who worked in the colonial government service, the middle classes frequently faced racial discrimination and thus were normally held back from attaining higher positions in legal and bureaucratic services. As a consequence, Rajat K. Ray argues, “their behavior was ambivalent, switching easily between collaboration and resistance: loyal servants of colonialism and leaders of the freedom struggle often came from the same families” (510).

Those members of the Western educated middle class who went on to pursue a degree in law or medicine eventually bridged the gap between the English-educated middle-class and the upper-class mercantile community. Lawyers, especially Indian judges in civil courts, received respect from both the European governing class and from
the Indian elite. During the 1870s-1880s, those students who graduated from Medical and Law colleges in Bombay began to amass considerable wealth, as well as receive social distinction. Although most students who continued in these fields of higher education again came from Brahmin and Parsi families, the links with the colonial government that lawyers appeared to experience, their social status, and the growing affluence of lawyers and doctors began to attract the attention of šeths as well. As a result, a few šeths soon began sending their children to England to study law in the 1860s (Dobbin 1972, 46). This new professional class came to represent the upper ranks of the intelligentsia. Their wealth demonstrated how it was possible for individuals with no connections to mercantile resources to attain an elevated status in society. As Dobbin explains, “by 1885 the gap between the city’s commercial magnates and the higher stratum of the intelligentsia was beginning to close, particularly in areas connected with status and importance to society” (172).

Thus, the middle-classes of the Bombay Presidency in the mid-late nineteenth century, much like today, were not a homogenous group. The class included English educated government workers and professional elites, the vernacular literati, as well as the intellectual classes – politicians, activists, reformers, revivalists, and so on. Many reformers of the time certainly were English educated (such as Karsondas Mulji, Mahipatram Rupram, and Narmadashankar Lalshankar), or had some connection to English officials (such as Dalpatram Dhayabhai did with Alexandar Forbes). However, several reform-minded individuals did not attend any English institutes of higher learning (such as Durgaram Mehtaji, Dayananda Saraswati, and Bholanath Sarabhai). Christine Dobbin uses the term “intelligentsia” interchangeably with the Western educated middle
class, though I find Michelguglielmo Torri’s use of “the intellectual class” to be a more suitable designation, especially for describing the group of reformers and revivalists who drew from various class, caste, and educational backgrounds. Drawing on the works of Antonio Gramsci, Torri demonstrates how the concept of “the intellectual” is a “sharper and more useful methodological tool” since it includes those individuals who are politically aware and active as theorists, strategists, and organizers and who hailed from both the Western educated classes and the vernacular literati (1990, 6).

Many of the leading intellectuals or reformers in nineteenth century Bombay, such as Dadabhai Naorji, Narmadashankar Lalshankar, Mahipatram Rupram, and Karsondas Mulji were educated at the Elphinstone College. Based on the 1850-51 Annual Report of the Elphinstone Institute, Christine Dobbin illustrates how students were required to compose English essays critiquing Indian “social problems,” such as caste, early marriage, the status of widows, infanticide, and so on (53). The purpose of such an education was to inculcate students in the advantages of British rule, Western learning, and Western science and technology. As Viswanathan argues, however, the skill and success of English-learning institutions lay not only in the degree to which they compelled students to value Britain’s civilizing presence in India but also how English education was redeployed as an

“…instrument of authenticity… Far from alienating the reader [student] from his own culture, background, and traditions, English literature, taught less as a branch of rhetoric than of history, sought to return him to an essential unity with himself and reinsert him into the course of development of civilized man.” (1989, 141)

This point by Viswanathan perhaps helps to explain how social and religious reform movements, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth
century began reconstituting notions of improvement and progress along more “Indian”/Brahmanic lines. That is to say, even before social and religious reform movements collapsed with or fuelled twentieth century nationalist movements, social progress came to be defined in terms of a return to “authentic Indian” selves. This can be seen in Karsondas Mulji’s work as a social and religious reformer. As we discuss in the following chapter, Mulji, as Puṣṭimārg’s most vitriolic critic, often debated the authenticity of devotional traditions like Puṣṭimārg. He considered the sect obscene, not only by modern Western/Christian moral standards but also, ironically, because of its “modern” nature, as a tradition that did not originate in the Vedic age but only four hundred years ago. As B.N. Motiwala, the biographer of Karsondas Mulji, writes “Karsondas desired that his countrymen should aspire to have back the pristine glory of Hindu religion … As properly understood and as originally propounded, Hinduism is not at all hostile to progress among its followers nor does it retard their national evolution” (1935). Although couched in the language of “authenticity,” reform efforts were structured along the lines of Western moralities and sensibilities.

Reform minded Elphinstonians, like Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdunji, S.S. Bengali, and Bhau Daji helped establish the Students’ Literary and Scientific Society at the Elphinstone Institution in 1848 (Dobbin 1972, 55). At Society meetings members would share and listen to each other’s essays on topics ranging from the role of education and newspapers in society to the subject of metallurgy (56). Eventually the Society split along communal and linguistic lines, to form the Parsi centered Gujarati Gyan Prasarak Mandali, the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha, and, from 1851, the Gujarati Hindu Buddhī Vardhak Sabha. Each Society published its own journals, essays, and pamphlets on
social, scientific, and religious themes in their respective languages. The leading Elphinstone graduates, many of whom were Parsi, Marathi and Gujarati Brahmins (with the exception of one Hindu Gujarati baniyā, Karsondas Mulji) were active members of these Societies. At the same time, many of these men also realized that in addition to forming Societies and organizing meetings and lecture series, the most effective means of communicating their ideas to the general public was through the medium of the press.

From the 1830s to the 1860s, English-language newspapers were influenced by the Parsi šeths who financially supported the enterprise. Parsis were also instrumental in establishing the Gujarati press in Bombay (Dobbin 1972, 54). Soon, however, graduates from English institutions began to work for presses as journalists with some even starting their own newspapers. One such newspaper was the Rast Gofiar, the most popular and best-selling newspaper in late nineteenth century Bombay. The Rast Gofiar, a Gujarati reformist paper, was founded in 1851 by the Parsi social reformer and Elphinstonian, Dadabhai Naoroji. Although various presses of the city continued to draw on the financial support of wealthy šeths, print culture in the form of journals, pamphlets, memoirs, and newspapers became the primary medium for the middle class intellectual community to publically voice their political concerns and reform ideologies. As we discuss in the next chapter, by the middle of the nineteenth century, many of these reform ideologies would come to center on the opulent lifestyles of baniyā and bhātiyā šeths and their sectarian affiliations with Puṣṭimārg.

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65 The paper was finically supported by the wealthy Parsi merchant, Kharshedji Nasarvanji Kama, and operated with the help of another leading Parsi reformer and fellow Elphinstonian, S.S. Bengali. Another Parsi, Naorji Khaikhosru Kabraji, was the editor of the paper for several decades (Dobbin, 1972 60).
Conclusion

This Chapter demonstrated how elite Puṣṭimārg baniyā communities were constitutive of the upper-classes in the Bombay Presidency. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Puṣṭimārg śeths displayed their elite status by engaging in new forms of consumption practices and philanthropy, spending lavishly on wedding ceremonies, and constructing large bungalows in European styles. Material expressions of their devotion took the form of financing havelī renovations, building pilgrimage rest-houses, making public donations to Gosvāmīs and havelīs, sponsoring food-offerings, and so on.

Their opulent lifestyles and spending habits, however, would draw the criticism of the newly developing English educated middle-classes. What especially disturbed members of the reform-minded middle-classes is that while still wielding positions of power in civic administration, Hindu śeth families remained apathetic towards English learning and social reform. Reformers would eventually turn to print culture, especially newspapers, as a public forum for launching their ideological attacks on the wealthy śeth communities of the Bombay Presidency. In the minds of reformers, like Karsondas Mulji and Narmadashankar Lalshankar, the baniyā and bhātiyā communities’ adherence to a sectarian tradition such as Puṣṭimārg as well as their relationship with the sect’s leaders, the Gosvāmīs, marked the Puṣṭimārg śeths as “backward” and illfit to hold positions of authority.

However, as the next chapter demonstrates, the reformist campaign against wealthy śeths and Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs focused on the behavior of Puṣṭimārg lay women. The social and religious activities of Puṣṭimārg women became the sites upon
which middle-class moralities were mapped and debated by male reformers during the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By monitoring, sanitizing, and, eventually
reconstituting Puṭimārg religious practices to the domestic sphere, the religious and gender
reform movements of the period effectively cast Puṭimārg women as the producers of
family status and respectability.
CHAPTER 3

Domesticating Puṣṭimārg:
Middle-Class Modernities and Socio-Religious Reform

In the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class reformers launched an aggressive campaign against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and their wealthy mercantile followers. Reformers, such as Karsondas Mulji, saw baniyā patronage of Puṣṭimārg and the community’s worship of Gosvāmīs as living incarnations of Kṛṣṇa to be the result of baniyā ignorance and lack of Western education. However, the most important and scandalous allegation put forth by reformers concerned the alleged sexual relations that existed between Gosvāmīs and their female disciples. These reformist campaigns culminated in the infamous Mahārāj Libel Case of 1862, in which the colonial court and Indian intellectuals debated the authenticity of a devotional sect like Puṣṭimārg as well the authority of its religious leaders, the Gosvāmīs, on grounds of morality, rationality, and Vedic authority.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the discourses surrounding the libel case indexed larger ideological concerns of nineteenth-century socio-religious movements, including the regulation of female sexuality, the promotion of female education, and the bifurcation and gendering of domestic and public spheres. Emerging middle-class moralities and sensibilities informed and were marked by the close connections being drawn between women’s “proper” behavior, domesticity, and family respectability. I argue that reformist anxieties around Puṣṭimārg women’s activities in havelī contexts, including their relationships with Gosvāmīs, promoted the Puṣṭimārg home as the principal site of women’s religious practices. These debates, moreover, effectively
projected Puṣṭimārg women as the producers and performers of family status and of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity.

**Nineteenth Century Social Reform and Puṣṭimārg’s Fall from Grace**

In the nineteenth century, print culture – in the form of journals, handbills, and newspapers – served as an important medium for disseminating reformist ideologies. The *Rast Goftar*, a Gujarati reformist newspaper that was founded in 1851, was primarily concerned with issues of social reform in the Bombay Presidency. Many of these social issues essentially revolved around the cultural and sexual lives of women, such as early marriage, the lack of female education, and the stigma against widow remarriage. The *Rast Goftar* along with other reformist papers like *Jagat Premi* and *Gnan Vardhak* also focused on the social and religious behavior of women, which included criticizing their excessive wearing of jewelry, their participation in public festivals like Holī, their “superstitious” practices, the singing of “obscene songs” at marriages, and the practice of chest-beating during mourning rituals (Sodhan 1997, 123). The editors and writers of the *Rast Goftar* felt that some of these “social evils” continued to persist in society because they had been adopted and practiced by the leading śeṭh families. Moreover, the conservative, uneducated śeṭh community was considered ill-fit to continue holding positions of authority and wielding so much power in the public sphere. According to the papers’ writers, it was time for the newly educated intelligentsia, the ideal citizens of the Presidency, to appropriate leadership positions from the śeṭhs and guide the population towards moral and political regeneration. From 1859-1865, the *Rast Goftar* began publishing an English column, which was edited by S.S. Bengali. The column dealt with
public questions and concerns, and also demonstrated the frustration of the English educated middle classes with regards to their status: “One party which, we believe, represents the greater part of the capital of this place, does not appear to be, as yet, wide awake to what is going on in the world; while the other (whose ranks we hope are increasing) is probably not yet in a material position to lead” (Dobbin 1972, 86).

According to reformist papers, the Puṣṭimārg baniyā and bhāṭiyā communities epitomized the spectrum of social issues they were addressing. For example, many leading śeṭhs, like Gopaldas Madhavdas, the head of the entire baniyā mahājan in Bombay city, his brother, Varjivandas Madhavdas, and the bhāṭiyā śeṭh, Damodhar Madhavji, were affluent upper-class merchants who did not show much interest in the new English education system and were members of an orthodox sectarian tradition, Puṣṭimārg. What disturbed reformers, especially, was the śeṭhs’ loyalty and “blind-faith” towards the leaders of the sect, the Gosvāmīs. The dynamic relationship that existed between the Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, caste-guilds or mahājans, and the larger baniyā and bhāṭiyā community, appeared to be at the root of the community’s conservative and, therefore, “backward” status in the minds of reformers. Since most members of the baniyā and bhāṭiyā community in the Bombay Presidency belonged to the Puṣṭimārg sampradāy, śeṭhs like the Madhavdas brothers had to demonstrate their explicit support of Gosvāmīs or else risk compromising their positions of leadership within the community. On the other hand, if members of the community appeared to breach caste or social customs, like travel overseas, marry a widow, or publically challenge Gosvāmīs – as Mulji and his associates did – the leading śeṭhs of the city’s mahājans had the power to
excommunicate members from the castes, at least until colonial legal interventions began to displace these traditional sites of authority.

In the late 1850s the leading reformers of western India focused on scrutinizing religious behavior they considered “superstitious and blind.” Their criticism eventually focused on the Puṣṭimārg sampradāy and its leaders, the Gosvāmīs or Mahārājs. By the 1860s there were about four to five Mahārājs already residing in Bombay city. As Amrita Shodhan demonstrates, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs were criticized for “licentious, tyrannical, and immoral behavior” and were accused of abusing their religious authority by “giving arbitrary decisions regarding disputes within the families of devotees and for favoring rich devotees” (127). However, the most prominent and scandalous allegation put forth by reformers against the Gosvāmīs concerned their sexual promiscuity and their sexual exploitation of female devotees. The Gosvāmīs were publically criticized in vernacular and English newspapers and through the circulation of handbills for several years in the late 1850s. This public defamation culminated in the publication of an article by Karsondas Mulji in his Gujarati reformist paper, Satya Prakas, on October 21st 1860. In the article, entitled “The Primitive Religion of the Hindus and the Present Heterodox Opinions,” Mulji denounces Puṣṭimārg as heretical in light of Vedic authority. More importantly, Mulji accuses the Mahārājs of grossly manipulating the sect’s ideologies – especially the rite of initiation – by reportedly engaging in sexual relations with their female followers.

Karsondas Mulji, the Bombay Presidency’s leading Gujarati reformer in the 1850s, attended the Elphinstone Institute for six years, during which time he befriended

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66 The first Puṣṭimārg havelī in Bombay was opened in 1811 by Gokulnathji Mahārāj (Shodhan 2001, 120).
two Gujarati nāgar Brahmins, Narmadashankar Lalshankar (1833-86), the Gujarati poet, and Mahipatram Rupram (1830-1891), an important educationist and reformer (37). Mulji was an active member of the Gujarati Hindu Buddhi Vardhak Sabha and wrote for the Rast Goftar before starting his own newspaper, the Satya Prakas, in 1855. More importantly, as a kāpol baniyā, Mulji also came from a Puṣṭimārg family. With the support of Narmadashankar, who knew Sanskrit and thus helped Mulji in reading the works of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, Mulji wrote articles, circulated pamphlets, and printed handbills targeting the Puṣṭimārg sect and its religious leaders. Narmadashankar also held meetings in his home to “expose the immorality of Vallabhacharyan doctrines, [and] to encourage devotees to ‘shun the society of such nasty persons as the Maharajas’” (Times of India, 22 Feb, qtd. in Dobbin 1972, 66).

In his article, Mulji mentioned one particular Mahārāja by name, Jadunathji Brijratanji Mahārāja from Surat. In a remarkable turn of events, Jadunathji turned to the British Courts for support to uphold the sect’s reputation and his own authority as its leader. He filed a suit for libel in the Bombay Supreme Court against Mulji and his printer (Dobbin 1972, 68). Fearing that he might be humiliated by his own disciples in court, Jadunathji sought the assistance of his most prominent devotees, the leading seth of the Bombay baniyā mahājan, Gopaldas Madhavdas, and that of the bhātiyā community, Damodar Madhavji. On September 6 1861, Damodar convened a meeting of two thousand bhātiyās urging them to sign a bill assuring that they would not testify against the Mahārājs, and if they did, they would be excommunicated from the caste. Upon hearing about this document, Mulji charged the leading seths with conspiring to obstruct justice, a case he went on to win.
Soon after the “bhātiya conspiracy case” was completed, the libel case (popularly called the Mahārāj Libel Case) commenced in the early months of 1862. As Amrita Shodhan demonstrates, the case became the “‘crowning glory’ of the Bombay reformists’ battle against traditional religious practices” (128). The British court and Mulji, along with his supporters, ṣēthṣ Gokaldas Tejpal, Mangaldas Nathubhai, and Lakhmidas Khimji focused on interrogating the authenticity of the Puṣṭimārg sect and the authority of Mahārājs as religious figures. The Judge and defense lawyers called upon witnesses, who were adherents of Puṣṭimārg, to comment on “questionable” moral teachings in the Brajbhāṣā vārtās (Mahārāj Libel Case [MLC] 1911, 142-143), to testify whether or not they were well-versed in Sanskrit, and if they considered Gosvāmīs, their gurus, as representatives or incarnations of Kṛṣṇa (MLC 127-135). Throughout the trial the Gosvāmīs were repeatedly declared as not being authentic “preceptors of the ancient Hindu religion” (191).

The case was considered a victory for reformers and for the colonial courts on moral grounds. The verdict of Sir Joseph Arnould was published in vernacular and English newspapers for months after the trial concluded. In his final verdict he characterized Puṣṭimārgīs as a “weak and blinded people,” Mahārāj leadership as a “rapacious and libidinous priesthood,” and Kṛṣṇa as “a God whose most popular attributes are his feats of sexual prowess” (MLC 478-50). In addition to such Orientalist depictions, the discourses surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case echoed themes from earlier nineteenth century female reform movements, such as sati abolition. As Lata Mani has demonstrated in her study on sati (1998), what was ostensibly about women’s exploitation, the case instead became a site for debating “authentic” tradition,
“superstitious” beliefs, an emerging middle-class morality, and upper-caste patriarchal values. Throughout the trial, women are portrayed as passive objects whom were “defiled” or “enjoyed” by Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs. The voices of real women are never heard and if Puṣṭimārg women are commented upon they are portrayed, on the one hand, as succumbing to their “natural” immoral and passionate proclivities or, on the other hand, as infantilized “tender maidens.” Needless to say, the question of whether they wanted to engage in sexual relations with the Mahārājs was never discussed, and neither was female devotees’ willing participation in religious practices acknowledged outside the language of “immorality” or “blind faith.”67 The reformers seemed to be disturbed by any ritual activities performed by women, at least outside the home, such as when women would swing the Gosvāmī during festivals (hindolā), visit their gurus in the havelī, participate in public Holī celebrations at the havelī, and sing songs (garbās) of gopibhāva (“erotic love”) about or to the Mahārājs (Shodhan 1992, 130-132). At one point, Mulji even published the names of several baniyā ladies who continued “in their shameless practices of singing indecent songs” (Motiwala, 180).

Before the libel case took place, on November 18, 1861 authors of the Rast Goftar tatha Satya Prakas (the two papers merged in 1860), including Mulji, called upon the men of the Puṣṭimārg community to uphold their family’s honor by controlling and regulating the actions of their wives and daughters:

“Hindus, we exhort you to educate your females, that you may have a virtuous progeny from a pure and uncontaminated source; for, under the circumstances … a man cannot be sure that his child is his own…Divest

67 In his final verdit, Sir Josepeh Arnould notes how “It was profligacy, it was vice … The wives and daughters of these secretaries, (with their connivance in many cases if not with their approval), went willingly – went with offerings in their hands, eager to pay a high price for the privilege of being made one with Brahma by carnal copulation with the Maharaj, the living personification of Krishna” (430-431).
your females of the notion that intercourse with the Mahrajas is an honour, and that amorous connection with them is bliss. Make them renounce this vile superstition. Claim them as your own only, and bind them to yourselves and your families by the strong and hallowed ties of conjugal, parental, and filial affection. Let not the homes have the scent of the impurities of the temple, whose odour should be disgusting to your nostrils.” (Motiwala 141-142)

As Shodhan reflects, reformers were more concerned and disturbed by the promiscuity of Mahārājs and Puṣṭimārg men’s wives and daughters than the sexual assault or rape of women; “The problem then, according to the reformers, was not sexual exploitation and harassment by the Maharajas but their corruption of ‘respectable’ women” (1997, 131-132).

From at least 1855 till the commencement of the Libel Case, reform-minded men from the bhaṭiyā and baniyā communities were vocalizing their concerns over interactions between Mahārājs and female devotees. Over the years, they made several recommendations to limit contact between female practitioners and Gosvāmīs, including how women should stop going to the havelīs for darśan in the early mornings and late evenings, and how female Gosvāmīs should be introduced into the sect to better supervise and manage the activities of lay women in the havelī (Sampat 1938, 408-416 qtd in Simpson 2008, 100). Before the Libel Case began, in 1861, the author of an article in the Rast Gofīr tatha Satya Prakas also made suggestions to regulate the movement of lay women in the havelī: “they should have darshan only from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., they should enter the zenana only to meet the Maharaj’s wife and daughters…, they should not be allowed to visit in the afternoon, and they should not be allowed to visit the Maharaj to offer him fruit in private” (Shodhan 1997, 133). According to Mulji, it was in the afternoons that female devotees would come visit the havelī in large numbers. Here,
female and male Puṣṭimārgīs “intermixed” during the darṣan periods: “The crowd is so dense that, on extraordinary occasions, females are totally denuded of their slight and loose clothing in the crush. The practice, therefore, of permitting men and women to associate promiscuously in the room where the idol is worshipped is highly objectionable” (Mulji 1865, 104).

Most of the recommendations by reformers, including those by Mulji, called for the regulation, control, or complete prohibition of Puṣṭimārgī women’s religious activities in the havelī. The home and domestic spaces remained – or were now especially promoted – as the primary locus of Puṣṭimārg ritual practice. This reconstitution of the site of Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities from the havelī to the home is informed by and follows the ideological trajectory of domestic, gender, and religious reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The discourses surrounding the Mahārāj Libel Case index the various issues raised in these movements, including the regulation of women’s sexual practices, the bifurcation and gendering of domestic and secular spheres, domestic morality, and the metonymic connections between home, woman, nation, and “authentic” tradition. These discourses, in turn, cannot be separated from the processes of class formation and status production. On the one hand, many of the “respectable” Puṣṭimārg women who were the subjects of such gender and religious reform likely came from the upper-class baniyā and bhāṭiyā mercantile families, while many of the reformers themselves came from the English educated and vernacular middle classes. As Sanjay Joshi argues, the Western educated middle-classes were consciously self-fashioning and articulating a unique identity in the late nineteenth century: “Using new institutions of the public sphere, these men were able to recast ideas of respectability
to distinguish themselves from upper and lower classes in society, and to posit a moral superiority over both” (xx, 2010).

In order to better contextualize Mulji’s critique of the relationship between Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and their female devotees, I now turn to a discussion of nineteenth century reform discourses surrounding women and domesticity in the Bombay Presidency. This enables us to understand some of the implications of the Mahārāj Libel Case on Puṣṭimārg religiosity and on women’s domestic religious practices more broadly.

**Domesticating Women: Nineteenth-Century Gender and Domestic Reform Movements**

The Bombay Presidency constructed and deployed its strategies of reform along gendered lines. Upper-caste and middle class women’s actions – whether religious, domestic, public, or sexual – became sites for debating social progress, authentic Indian/Hindu identity, family prestige and status, and nationhood. In a volume entitled *The Status of Woman in India: A Handbook for Hindu Social Reformers* (1889), Dayaram Gidumal provides excerpts from symposiums and meetings held by each Presidency on reform issues such as infant marriage and “enforced widowhood.” 68 These constitute many of the reform debates leading up to the Age of Consent Act of 1891.

In the opening piece, *A Symposium of Hindu Domestic Reformers and Anti-Reformers*, Mr. P Desai criticizes early marriage because of what becomes of young mothers namely, inanely busy, superstitious housewives. He explains how, in Gujarat, Hindu families marry their daughters at the age of six or seven, and by twelve they have

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68 Dayaram Gidumal (1857-1927) served as an assistant judge in Ahmedabad, and was instrumental in founding the *Gujarat Hindu Sansarik Sudhara Samaj* (“The Gujarat Hindu Reform Society”) in 1888.
become mothers; “their life is then necessarily spent in looking after household affairs, and often in performing, in the higher classes, trivial religious duties” (xxii). Kumar P. Bhushan Deva describes his objections to infant marriage as follows: “Premature marriage is not only a pernicious custom because it ages wives at thirty, or gives us virgin or unhappy widows – but because it leads to the deterioration of the race. This was admitted even by the ancient medical science of the Hindus, the Ayur Vedas” (xxi). Other reformers share their concerns about the early onset of menstruation and how consummation of marriage should take place soon after puberty (xxiv-xxv). What appeared to be more of a concern for reformers was not so much the young age at which girls married but premature consummation by women and early pregnancy. Such debates reveal reformers’ anxieties around female sexuality and early pregnancy and its connection to child welfare, racial purity, and national health. For example, in the section on the Bombay Presidency deliberations on infant marriage, M.G. Ranade proclaims how “…early marriage leads to early consummation, and thence to the physical deterioration of the race, and it sits as a heavy weight on our rising generation…[it] cools their love of study, checks enterprise, and generally dwarfs their growth” (14). Rao Bahadur Bholanath Sarabhai, the founder of the Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, shares similar sentiments: “It is admitted by all enlightened Hindus that early marriages and unequal matches are mischievous. They believe that early union leads to the production of unhealthy families, and ultimately to the moral and intellectual deterioration of the whole race” (15). Early marriage, it was feared, could compromise the health of the offspring and, by extension, the larger community and nation. A secondary concern was

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69 Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) is the Marathi Brahmin political and social reformer who helped found the Indian National Congress and Indian National Social Conference.
that it also increased the probability of there being more child widows, many of whom were kept in a state of “enforced widowhood,” and were considered a material and social burden.

Throughout the late nineteenth century and leading into the twentieth century, reformist concerns with eugenics as well as national moral and physical health motivated the proper regulation and reform of middle class women’s bodies and activities in the “private” domain. This was attempted through managing the age of marriage and consummation, as we have seen, as well as by the introduction of proper hygiene practices and the scientific education of housewives (in the form of Domestic Science). The threat of miscegenation can be read into Mulji’s protest against the nature of Puṣṭimārgī women’s relationship with Gosvāmīs since, according to him, this would inevitably lead to sexual relations between the two. As cited above, Mulji exhorts men from the Puṣṭimārg community to uphold their families’ honor by ensuring “virtuous progeny from a pure and uncontaminated source,” that is, not by Gosvāmīs, and to prevent the contamination of the home with the impurities of the Puṣṭimārg havelī – embodied by the person of the Gosvāmī (Motiwala 141-142). This call for the reconstitution of women’s place in the home by reformers like Mulji marked the new links being forged between home, “authentic tradition,” and nation. The degree by which women could crystalize or rupture these connections, moreover, determined family prestige and status. As Karsondas Mulji reflects: “If you do not respect your own home, then how is it possible for you to increase your honour in the world? Woman constitutes your home and therefore, you ought to treat her with respect. Without such honour, our country’s status will never be high” (Motiwala, 237).
Early marriage also became tied to debates around women’s education. According to Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912), the Parsi Gujarati reformer and journalist who helped mobilize the movement for increasing the age of consent, the marriage of young girls prevented many of them with the opportunity to acquire a proper education. Govardhanram Tripathi (1855-1907), the influential Gujarati reformer and intellect of the late nineteenth century, also shared this view and criticized child marriage because he felt the practice fostered female illiteracy (Shukla 1987, 69). According to many such reformers, who most likely drew on Enlightenment themes of order, reason, and science, unmarried young girls and housewives also needed to be educated so that they could more efficiently, economically, and hygienically conduct their household affairs. Educated housewives, moreover, were not only considered more useful in the management of domesticity but they were also fashioned as intellectual and emotional companions who could support and share in their husbands’ public and work aspirations.

R.P. Karkaria, in his biography of Behramji Malabari, describes how rare it is for a man to find such a companion-wife:

“In the matter of marriage the life of the educated Indian of to-day has many and serious drawbacks. If he finds in his wife a loving partner of his worldly fortunes, a good manager of his domestic affairs and trainer of his children, he should consider himself happy… But if he seeks for an intelligent companion, on anything like terms of equality, with intellectual sympathy for his hopes and aspirations, a helpmate in his affairs beyond those of the household, he is in most cases doomed to disappointment. His life is in this way seriously handicapped, as compared with that of the European…” (1896, 60-61)

70 Govardhanram Tripathi engages with the theme of an educated Gujarati male in his writings, such as in the novel Saraswatichandra. Govardhanram insists that this modern male graduate needs an educated wife; “a wife who will manage his house skilfully, be his companion, stand by him in adversity, and always remain witty and cheerful. She will be his inspiration” (Shukla 1987, 63). According to Tridip Suhrud, Govardhanram, more than anyone else before Gandhi, shaped the “consciousness of the Gujarati educated middle class” (4).
The caricature of “wife-as-handicap” is echoed by B.N. Motiwala in his biography of Karsondas Mulji. Mulji’s wife is described as “a drag on all his public activities” since, on account of being “ignorant and illiterate,” she did not appreciate the public reform efforts of her husband. Instead, she often “cried, taunted, remained grief-stricken” when the family was excommunicated from the kāpol caste and the baniyā mahājan after Mulji’s journey to England in 1863 (1935, 200-205; 371).

In addition to constructing women as companion-housewives, reformers especially encouraged domestic reform and female education because of the supposed close and prolonged contact mothers had with their (male) children. In his Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform (1881), Elphinstone graduate, Ganpat Lakshman, argues for the education and “enlightenment” of women because of their central role in domestic management and in child rearing: “She has a greater authority over them than anyone else in the family...But it is often the case that she is uneducated. She has received no share of the mental enlightenment which is adequate enough to enable her really to appreciate the blessings of knowledge, and efficiently to discharge the important duties of her station” (54). At the same time the bifurcation of domestic and public spaces along gender lines was beginning to take place – and perhaps because of it – domesticity became a central theme in public discourses since domestic order was considered to be a blueprint for and precursor of social and national order. This relationship hinged on women’s roles as companionate wives, as efficient and competent home-makers, and especially in their roles as mothers. They were responsible for both producing and imparting moral knowledge to their (male) children – the nation’s future citizens. The
construction of an intimate mother- (or father and mother-) child relationship, moreover, is fairly novel since most middle-class families during this period lived in joint-families, where the up-bringing of children was a task shared by grandparents, in-laws, siblings, and even servants (Bannerji 11). This new, bourgeois patriarchy effectively reconstituted women as a mother and moral educator. The education of women unlike for men was indeed mobilized for different reasons: “whereas education for males was directly related to the pursuit of employment, female education had no economic function” (Borthwick, 61). Although deployed using the logic and language of reform and “emancipation,” the education of women aimed to instill “feminine” values in women, which would not make them into Western, more masculinized women as was feared, but into more authentic Hindu mothers and housewives. It is clear from Ganpat Lakshman’s text on domestic reform, for example, that a young girl’s education was intended for her to become a more useful companion and a more competent housewife.

71 In his text, An Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform (1881), Ganpat Lakshman discusses the condition of children in lower-class laborer families and describes their home-life as though there are no other family care-takers present. He notes how both the parents are absent during the day due to work: “The children are left to themselves without that control or superintendence which must needs be exercised over them, – they run about in the streets with all the wantonness of freedom. They are there exposed to the hurtful changes of the weather, their morals are there exposed to contamination; there they listen to the language of profaneness; they are confirmed in all the wildness of insubordination and disobedience, – and their whole character is tainted by practices which they ought never to know, and from which they ought ever carefully to be far removed” (76).

72 Throughout his text, Ganpat Lakshman, who is clearly drawing on Pietist/Lutheran and Enlightenment ideas of “rational” religion and morality, contends how, without an education, a mother cannot impart any relevant knowledge onto her children: “She is incapable from her own ignorance to pour into their minds wholesome lessons of piety and morality, and can therefore have no right conception of the manner in which their understanding might be improved, or the several powers of their mind be properly regulated and disciplined” (54).

73 After describing Mulji as the “great emancipator of the Gujarati women,” Motiwala quotes Mulji’s description of an “ideal woman”: “Look at the picture of a woman who delights the heart of a man and who overpowers him by her pure love. Observe her traits. She walks gently, she speaks only sweet, melodious words. She is both mild and guileless. She neither sits idly nor wanders here and there. She puts on neat and clean clothes… By her good and amiable position her smiling face is suffused with love. From her lips only kind and affectionate words come out …In all her work she uses her God-given intelligence and tries to remain honest and virtuous in all her deeds” (366).
and daughter-in-law: “Neither does she prove, such as she is, an easy and useful companion to her husband. She has received no education which could enable her to discharge with judgment and skill the most important duties of her husband’s family, or to assist him in any difficult part of his undertakings” (116-117).

In the Bombay Presidency, female education was initially launched by Christian missionaries in 1824 in Bombay city (Basu 67). From the 1840s several Parsi families, including those of Manockjee Cursetjee and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, began educating their daughters in English at home. Cursetjee’s efforts would eventually culminate decades later in the opening of the first English school for “girls and ladies of the most respectable families,” the Alexandra Native Girls’ English Institution, in Bombay in 1863 (Chandra 2012, 35). Meanwhile, Parsi reformers and Elphinstone graduates like Dadabhai Naoroji and Kharshedji Nasarvanji Kama mobilized support to establish the Presidency’s first vernacular Parsi girls’ schools in 1849. By 1852, four schools had already been opened, where girls up to the age of twelve were learning to read and write Gujarati, as well as study themes in geography and natural history (Dobbin 1972, 57). Simultaneously, girls’ schools were also being established in cities like Surat and Ahmedabad. In Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vernacular Society, with the financial help of Harkunvar Shethani (the widow of the millionaire Jain businessman Hutteesing Kesreasing), started the city’s first girls’ school in 1849. In the same year, Maganlal

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74 Harkunvar also established an institution called the Harkunvarba and Jyotiba Kanyashala in Ahmedabad in 1855, where subjects such as history, geography, mathematics, Sanskrit, and Gujarati were taught. She also founded a teachers’ training college for women (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 126).
Karamchand also financed the construction of two more schools (Yagnik and Sheth 2011, 124).\textsuperscript{75}

In all areas of the Presidency, the enrolment of girls from Hindu families was initially limited due to conservative ideas about women leaving the home, traditional taboos against female literacy, and the lack of female teachers. Despite this, it was families of upper-castes, like nāgar and saraswat Brahmins and Prabhus, whom were among the first to send their daughters to schools. Women from the Brahmin communities were also some of the first to train as teachers in the Mahalakshmi Female Training College in Ahmedabad (f. 1874) and the Barton Female Training College of Rajkot (f. 1885) (Mukta 1999, 32.) In accordance with their general attitude towards modern education, members of the wealthy Gujarati baniyā communities were apathetic towards the movement for female education. However, reformers like Naoroji knew that in order to build more schools, the financial support of the wealthy Gujarati śeths was necessary. It was only after the government placed pressure and solicited the help of Gujarati baniyās that a few śeths, such as the reform minded Mangaldas Nathubhai, came forward to support female education in Bombay city (Dobbin 1972, 58).

Female education in the Bombay Presidency always faced some form of resistance from the more conservative members of the population. However, it drew vociferous criticism in the early years of the 1850s when members of the Students’ Literary and Scientific Society (formed by students of Elphinstone College) endorsed Erskine Perry’s proposal for involving European ladies in the education of young girls. This was viewed by many as a method for introducing the teaching of English to Indian

\textsuperscript{75} In Gujarat specifically, by the end of 1859, nine schools for girls were established: three in Ahmedabad, two in Surat, and one each in Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Limadi, and Gondal (Raval 51).
girls. Shefali Chandra, in her examination of the gendered transmission of English in school curricula, notes how Gujarati newspapers in Bombay voiced their objection to the introduction of English because of the perceived threat it posed to conjugal or domestic ties: “The outburst of the Chabuk shows the already entrenched fear that educated women would have the power to invoke legal procedures to shun their husbands’ authority and initiate separation; educated women would repudiate the marital bond” (2012, 43). Years after the Alexandra Institution was opened, the Anglo-Marathi weekly paper, Native Opinion, opposed the introduction of English in girls’ schools as well. It had already claimed that English in boys’ schools made these institutions “anglicized, classicalized, and thus denationalized,” and by introducing the language to girls, it could “only lead to the transplanting in India of the manners and customs of another society” (Dobbin 1972, 77). English, as a language that could potentially be spoken by women (mothers) at home – as a new “mother tongue” – only appeared threatening because of the metonymic connections being forged between woman, home, tradition, and nation in the nineteenth century. Women were reimagined as the custodians of authentic Hindu/Indian culture. The resistance to teaching English to young girls and women is symptomatic of this gendered bifurcation of public and domestic spheres. The home, which was increasingly being constructed and politicized as the site of social, cultural, and national reproduction, needed to be protected by western influences and forms of cultural miscegenation – here embodied by Indian women speaking English.

For reformers, the English education of Indian girls appeared encouraging because it was institutionalized through a specific pedagogical logic, one based on ideal (Victorian) femininity. In schools like the Alexandra Institute, where girls learned
arithmetic, geography, English, and vernacular languages, they also learned needlework, music, and singing (Chandra 2005, 67). The education of girls was not expected to compromise their femininity; instead, it ensured domestic bliss by molding women into more companionate spouses and useful housewives. However, reformers also had reservations about female education due to the lack of female teachers and, when in 1883, a proposal was made to increase the maximum age until which girls may attend schools (Chandra 2012, 48). The threat of a young woman or housewife becoming too “independent-minded” always loomed in reformers’ debates on the age of marriage and consent and female education. In the Bombay Presidency deliberations, included in Gidumal’s *Status of Woman in India* (1889), Bhaskarrao Balkrishnaji Pitale and Nana Moroba expressed their concerns about how early marriage – but not necessarily child marriage – preserved the harmony of a joint-family:

A woman introduced into the family at the age of about twenty, will not easily yield to the orders, wishes, whims and caprices of the old ladies of the family. She will have no sympathy for them, nor will they have any for her, while a young girl at the age of 12 or so, introduced into the family will soon be attached to it. Sympathy for each other will reciprocally be generated in both. On the other hand, in the case of a woman, the chances of a rupture are imminent. This will entail dismemberment of the family and of the family estate. (10)

Women, in their roles as housewives and daughter-in-laws, were considered to be the preservers of traditional practices like the joint-family.\(^{76}\) For both reformers and conservatives, increasing the age at which women could marry or enter school presented a possibility for young girls and housewives to disrupt domestic harmony by becoming

\(^{76}\) Much like the caste system, European sociologists and anthropologists as well as urban high-caste Indian reformers and nationalists, saw the “joint-family” as a vestige of India’s ancient patriarchal societies (Uberoi 1994, 31-32). The joint-family system was constructed as a marker of India’s “traditional” values in contrast to the individualism which characterized the values of Western societies.
“too independent” or “too educated.” Domestic harmony is here explicitly characterized with the degree to which family elders, in-laws, and husbands are able to wield authority over their new wife/daughter-in-law. Manilal Nathubhai Dwivedi (1858-1898), a nāgar Brahmin from Nadiad – who was a Sanskrit scholar, Vedantist and an Elphinstone fellow – was concerned with the impact of Western education in India precisely because it appeared to threaten India’s primary social unit: the family. In a series of articles on “The East and the West,” he lamented on how this new education, which seemed to transfix reformers, encouraged “ego-centric individualism…materialism…and licentiousness” (Rawal 200). Modernity, Manilal argued, should not be pursued at the cost of losing tradition; “The Indian tradition gave more importance to the collective social life as represented by a joint family system; while the Western tradition encouraged individualism at the cost of family life” (ibid). According to Manilal, “modernity” and “tradition” could be made compatible, if modernity was the result of tradition. Taking the education of Indian women as an example, he felt that if a woman was “rightly educated” – with an emphasis on morality – she would be instilled with such noble virtues that she would not want to marry again in the event that she became a widow (200).

Govardhanram Tripathi was also concerned with the rapid modernization and westernization he saw occurring around him. Like Manilal Nathubhai, Govardhanram valued the joint-family system, which he believed was disintegrating into nuclear family units under the reformist and nationalist rhetoric of “rationalism and individual freedom” (217). In this context, the tipping-point for when one became “too modern” was determined by a woman’s ability to negotiate modernity – here marked by an English education – and “traditional values,” represented by the joint-family system. Nineteenth
century reform debates thus ushered in a new patriarchy: “‘new’ because it challenged indigenous patriarchal traditions by allowing women’s literacy and education, and by encouraging them to travel outside the home; but ‘patriarchy’ because it maintained women in a dependent and subordinate status within Indian society” (Chatterjee 1993; Walsh 2004, 3-4).

In addition to educational institutes, for women who learned to read, printed works in various genres and forms including manuals, journals, magazines, and advice columns became the primary medium through which women were exposed to nineteenth century ideas of domesticity. In Bengal, for example, between 1860-1910 close to eighty manuals, magazines, and journals were published for women on themes such as women’s family relations, home management, proper hygiene practices, cooking, and account keeping (Walsh 22). Similar works were published throughout the subcontinent in Hindi (Orsini 1999; Dalmia 1997), Urdu, Telugu (Rama کrishna, 1991), and Gujarati (Shukla 1991), et cetera. In fact, it was in the Bombay Presidency that the first journal for women, *Stribodh* (“Women’s Enlightenment” or “Advice to Women”), was launched in 1857 and continued until 1950 (Shukla 1991, 63).

*Stribodh* was established and supported by Bombay city’s leading Parsi and Hindu social reformers of the time, including Sorabji S. Bengali, Khaikhosru Naoroji Kabraji, and Karsondas Mulji. Mulji was one of the journal’s earliest editors; he edited *Stribodh* from April 1859 to May 1861 and wrote in twenty-two editions during which time the journal had only about one thousand subscribers (Motiwala 304). After Mulji,

\[77\] School enrolment statistics from the late nineteenth century can help illustrate what may have been female literacy rates in the Bombay Presidency during this period. Though, of course, women could have learned to read outside educational institutes. From 1881-82, there appeared to have been 16,766 girls in schools throughout the Presidency, and this number rose to 187,265 by 1921-22 (Basu 71).
Kabraji became the journal’s chief editor for many decades, and after he passed away in the early 1900s, his daughter and daughter-in-law edited *Stribodh* (Shukla 1991, 66). The journal included articles on geography, scientific inventions, history, fictional stories, as well as *garbā* songs by the celebrated Gujarati poet and reformer, Dalpatram Dhayabhai. By the 1880s more than half of the journal was dedicated to serialized novels, adapted from European classics, in favor of the more informative pieces (64). As Sonal Shukla explains, these didactic narratives “always carried morals against greed, disloyalty, vanity, pride, laziness, and superstition” (63). Although the journal was founded, promoted, and patronized by social reformers, many of whom championed the cause of widow remarriage, for example, disseminating ideas of proper domesticity and ideal womanhood was the central preoccupation of the journal’s writers. This, according to Shukla, is made evident by the lack of articles addressing some of the contemporaneous social reform and political activities of the late nineteenth century, such as Behramji Malbari’s efforts to raise the age of consent, the remarriage of the first higher caste Gujarati Hindu widow (Dhankorbai with Madhavdas Raghunathdas), and the Mahārāj Libel Case (64-65).

*Stribodh* was initially directed towards an upper-middle class, urban, Parsi female audience. However, because it was published in Gujarati, literate Hindu and Muslim females from more modernizing families in western India also read it (64). The journal’s chief aim was to disseminate advice to women on how to become more productive, economical, and docile housewives and mothers in emulation of Victorian-
styled domesticity. Instructional material on sewing, knitting, ‘chikkan’ embroidery, and drawing was included so that women from rich families “can spend their leisure hours pleasantly and creatively and poor women can add to their families’ incomes in a decent and respectable way” (63). Women were encouraged to wear shoes and socks while traveling outdoors, to not shy away from accompanying their husband to social gatherings, and to cease wasting time idly gossiping with other women and performing lengthy and complicated rituals. The journal also ran a series called “Governor of The House,” in which women were advised on how to purchase and arrange furniture for their homes, hire servants, and utilize western-styled utensils (65).

Although the domestic education of Indian women followed Victorian models, their over-westernization was at the same time also a concern for Gujarati reformers and cultural revivalists like Govardhanram Tripathi, Karsondas Mulji, and Nathubhai Dwivedi. These anxieties would eventually culminate in the nationalist resolution of the “woman’s question,” which constructed middle-class Indian women as different from, and morally superior to, both Indian men and western women (Chatterjee 1989). Mulji, who was a champion of colonial interventions in India, resisted the total adoption of western practices by Indian women. For example, on the one hand, Mulji insisted that women should not put heavy ornaments on their legs and wrists and should begin wearing stockings, slippers, or shoes. On the other hand, he very much liked the “custom

78 Sonal Shukla, in her examination of the Stribodh journal, summarizes the journal’s advice on how one can become a good housewife: “(i) Arrange the house neatly and aesthetically. (ii) Keep the children neat and disciplined. (iii) Do not shout at children or beat them. (iv) Dress in nice clothes, especially to receive him when he returns home in the evening. (v) Manage the servants well but do not mix with them. (vi) Never sit idle. (vii) Do not sit with other women to gossip and make idle talk. (viii) Do not complain to your husband about problems in household management. (ix) Sing or play a musical instrument to help your husband relax when he returns home. (x) Speak to him in a soft and pleasant manner. (xi) Do not ever nag him” (1991, 65).
of our women putting on silk saris” (Motiwala 238). He also called upon women from
the higher classes to imitate the philanthropic activities of English ladies, and to perform
all housekeeping activities. Yet, he denounced the aesthetic practices of wearing tight
bodices, artificial hair, and applying face powder like English women: “Women should
show only the natural beauty they possess” (239). It was important for reformers and
cultural revivalists/nationalists to demonstrate the inherent, natural beauty, virtue, and
morality of Indian women over and above western women. This “new Indian woman,”
moreover, was not to be a product of Victorian ventriloquism but she was modeled after
an imagined upper-caste female archetype in India’s ancient past when women were
supposedly educated (in Sanskrit) and were more spiritually grounded. Interestingly, at
the same time, and very often by the same reformers and revivalists, the authenticity of
Indian culture and religious traditions was also being located in a golden, Vedic age.
Thus, both the golden age of Indian womanhood and that of upper-caste Hinduism were
located in the same imagined past. It comes as no surprise then that late nineteenth and
eyearly twentieth century cultural revivalists and nationalists began to couch their
constructions of ideal womanhood in the śāstric language of pativratā (“devoted wife”) and strī-dharma (“women’s duty”), cementing the connections between ideal middleclass
womanhood and “authentic” upper-caste patriarchal Indian tradition.

The Domestication of Puṣṭimārg Women’s Religious Practices

Returning to Mulji’s critique of Puṣṭimārg, it is his construction of woman as
custodian of tradition and imparter of morality, as well as the heuristic reading of religion
through the language of morality that fueled Mulji’s attack on the sect.\textsuperscript{79} Puṣṭimārg, according to Mulji, was a tradition that was incompatible with the civilized, Enlightenment virtues of morality and reason: “It must astonish every one that such debasing practices should proceed from the religious code of intelligent, if not educated, persons; and those who are accustomed to think and to test everything by reason and common sense, can scarcely believe that such fanaticism can exist in an enlightened age” (1865, 123). For Mulji, the most corrupt and superstitious aspect of the tradition was that Gosvāmīs identified themselves as incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and that female devotees legitimized this by worshiping Gosvāmīs as deities and – allegedly – engaging in sexual relations with them. Mulji describes women as already inherently virtuous and blames Gosvāmīs for “ruining the morals” of Puṣṭimārg women whom, because of their lack of education, were blindly following their gurus: “although woman, normally, has perhaps a keener perception of right and wrong than man, her intelligence is enfeebled by the want of education and enlightened society” (128). Gosvāmīs, on the other hand, were repeatedly described as over-sexed promiscuous men, who were “addicted to the society of loose and light life” (MLC 55-56), as hosting “nautch” dances in the havelīs (128) and indulging in all sorts of “blasphemous adultery and sacrilegious pleasures” (159).

Mulji disapproved of female devotees visiting their gurus in private, participating in public Holī festivals at the havelī, and singing “lascivious poetry” to Gosvāmīs (109). During a testimony in the libel case, a supporter of Mulji, Mathooradas Lowjee, described what he thought were the motivations behind women singing these

\textsuperscript{79} Most likely drawing on Enlightenment and Protestant themes Mulji insists on the importance of both religion and morality: “A man as much needs to worship God as he needs to be moral; and just as you need to be moral, so also equally you need to worship God. A man does not get salvation unless he has both religion and morality” (Motiwalā 327).
devotional songs (*garbās*): “Licentious songs are sung by females on occasions of marriage; but when they are addressed to the Maharajas, the females singing them wish for carnal intercourse with them [the Maharajas]” (MLC 277-283). Lowjee exclaimed that “If the Bhattias of Bombay were educated at all, such adulteries would not prevail amongst them” (Motiwala 283). Thus, according to Mulji and his fellow reformers, the lack of education among members of the mercantile community – and especially among their women – was responsible for the irrational beliefs held by Puṣṭimārgīs with regards to their gurus (157). Mulji insisted that Puṣṭimārg women needed to reevaluate their relationship with Gosvāmīs, to no longer view them as embodiments of divinity and to cease having immoral relations with them. In January 25, 1857 Mulji even placed a call in the *Satya Prakas* for someone to write an essay on “what out to be the ideal moral relation between spiritual guides and their votaries, specially female ones?” (100).80

On the one hand, it is clear on many accounts that Mulji objected to the overall legitimacy of the Puṣṭimārg tradition. On the other hand, while Mulji reproached the ways in which female practitioners approached their gurus and conducted themselves in public spaces, he did not explicitly call for the complete abandonment of sectarian ties with Puṣṭimārg, nor did he break from the tradition himself. Much like his discourses surrounding gender reform, Mulji’s personal religious views and relationship to Puṣṭimārg were contradictory at times, and ambiguous at best. For example, Mulji is remembered as a great advocate of widow remarriage in the Bombay Presidency; however, he married three times but never to a widow. Even when the wife of his close friend *śeṭh* Madhavdas Rughnathdas, passed away, Mulji advised him to marry “a virgin”

80 His friend, and fellow Elphinstone graduate, Narmadashankar is said to have written the best piece (Motiwala 100).
Similarly, although he was Puṣṭimārg’s most vitriolic critic, he still initiated his daughter into the sect and accepted his own guru as a spiritual guide. As Mulji states, “Jeevanji is still my Guru, but I have stopped visiting him. I look upon the Maharajas as spiritual guides, not as Gods… I have a daughter round whose neck I put a “Kanthee” myself, according to the ceremonial forms of my sect” (258).

Mulji’s views on the reformation of Puṣṭimārg are intimately linked to his ideologies on gender and domestic reform as well as his positivist view of colonial modernity. His campaign can be further circumscribed within the larger gender reform discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which we have discussed above. At the same time that the home was being reconstituted as the site of authentic tradition, women’s bodies and corporeal practices (sexual, religious) became closely aligned with domestic spaces and the production and articulation of proper domesticity. Any threat on women’s propriety or honor (ābru) could jeopardize domestic and familial dignity and status. Efforts to reform the relationship between Puṣṭimārg women and Gosvāmīs, which involved positioning the home as the principal site of female Puṣṭimārg religiosity, casts women as the primary performers, producers, and pedagogues of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity.

Instances where Puṣṭimārg women do not remain silent observers or passive recipients of reformist activities further demonstrate the vital role of female practitioners in the maintenance and articulation of Puṣṭimārg religious identity and culture. For example, in 1858, a few years before the libel case, the Mahārājs in Bombay allegedly

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81 It was in fact Madhavdas who insisted that he wanted to marry a widow, which he did in 1871. Her name was Dhankore bāī, and she was the niece of ṣetḥ Varjivandas Madhavdas. This was the first upper-caste or baniyā widow marriage in the community and they were subsequently ex-communicated by the baniyā mahājān (Motiwala 207-217).
compelled the editor of the newspaper *Chabuk* to publish articles discrediting the reformers, Gokaldas Tejpal and Lakhmidas Khimji. The *Chabuk* then printed these pieces on three separate occasions during September and October of 1858. Lakhmidas Khimji filed a suit for defamation against the editor of the paper, who was then requested to subpoena one of the Mahārājs, Jivanlalji, as a witness. In an effort to avoid appearing in court, Jivanlalji closed the doors to his havelī, preventing Puṣṭimārgīs from performing *darśan* for one week. Many of his followers, who felt that they could not consume their food without offering it to the svarūps in the havelīs, voiced their disapproval (Motiwala 101). In protest, women from the Puṣṭimārg community allegedly took to the streets, and “showered volleys of abuses on the reformers” (ibid). Amrita Shodhan notes how these women also symbolically mourned the social deaths of reformers as part of their public demonstrations (1997, 131). The Mahārājs declined to reopen their havelīs until all Vaiṣṇavīs signed a document pledging to never summon a Gosvāmī to court or write defamatory articles about them. Motiwala explains how the women from these communities were ultimately responsible for convincing the men from their families, which included rich ās, Justices of the Peace, and members of the Grand Jury, to sign the document (186). Ironically, for Mulji and his supporters, the very women who were the subjects of their reform resisted attempts made to disrupt their religious practices.

**Sanskritization and the Defense of Tradition**

In addition to questioning the relationship between Gosvāmīs and female practitioners, reformers targeting the Puṣṭimārg community attempted, more generally, to subvert the authority of Gosvāmīs as leaders of the sect. Mulji in his book, *History of the*
Sect of Vallabhacharyas (1865), demonstrates how Gujarati writers before him illustrated the “profligacy of the Maharajs” in their works. He refers to a Sanskrit drama, Pākhaṇḍa Dharma Khaṇḍan (“The Smashing of Heretical Religion”) from the year 1639 in which the writer, Dāmodar Svāmī, ridicules the founder of Puṣṭimārg, Vallabhācārya (1865, 133-134). He cites excerpts from eighteenth and nineteenth century Gujarati poets, such as Śyāmal Bhaṭṭa, Akha Bhagat, and Krsnaram, who criticize the lavish lifestyles and licentious behavior of Gosvāmīs (134-137). He also provides English language material from the “Transactions of the Literacy Society of Bombay,” which describes one of the chief Mahārājs of the time as “a man worn to a skeleton and shaking like a leaf, from debauchery of every kind” (138). Finally, Mulji offers the full testimony from the Mahārāj Libel Case of one of the Bombay Asiatic Society presidents, Dr. John Wilson, a missionary who is treated as an authority on the sect by the British court. In great Orientalist fashion, Wilson denounces the Puṣṭimārg tradition as the “way of enjoyment, in a natural and carnal sense” (141).

During the Mahārāj Libel Case, several witnesses were asked whether or not they considered Gosvāmīs incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. In the opening days of the trial, the head of the baniyā mahājan, Gopaldas Madhavdas appeared perplexed by this line of questioning. On the one hand, he denies ever hearing any baniyās regarding their gurus as “almighty God incarnate in the flesh” (MLC 127). On the other hand, he does go on to admit how “some people do say that they are gods, while some deny that they are” and how Gosvāmīs “deserve to be worshipped with the mind, property and body of their followers” (127-128). Another witness, Jumnadass Sevaklal, was threatened with a fine and jail time if he did not answer the question to the satisfaction of the judge. The
following line of questioning between Mulji’s lawyer, the judge, and the witness dramatizes the discourse of “priestly imposture,” which informed both British and reformist opinions of Puṣṭimārg (Scott 126):

Mr. Anstey. Do some Banias believe the Maharaj to be a God?
Witness: We consider him to be our gooroo.
[Judge] Sir M. Sausse: Tell witness if he does not answer the question, he will be sent to jail.

....
Witness: Some consider the Maharaja god in the shape of gooroo.
Mr. Anstey: Is Gooroo a God?
Witness: Gooroo is gooroo.
Sir M. Sausse: Tell him if he does not answer the question, most indubitably will he go to jail.
[Judge] Sir Joseph Arnould: Tell him he is asked what others believe, not as to his own belief.
Witness: I don't know if others believe him as God; I consider him as simply a gooroo. I don't know under what name others worship him. (MLC 134-135)

Similarly, even when Gosvāmī Jadunathji Mahārāj himself was cross-examined during the trial (February 25th, 1862), he denied the claim that Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, other than Vallabhācārya, are worshipped as deities: “I have not heard any one say that we are worshipped as gods… The devotees regard us as Gurus, as guides to God” (344).

The British court not only interrogated the alleged divine status of Gosvāmīs but also questioned their authority as religious leaders. Since Mulji himself argued for the heterodox nature of Puṣṭimārg, in light of its “modern” formation, his lawyers insisted that Puṣṭimārg Mahārājs are not authentic leaders: “…the persons called Maharajas, most improperly so called, are not the preceptors of religion…The sect of the Vallabhacharyas is a contemptible sect of 500 years old, and not an ancient ruling sect, as the plaintiff has averred” (MLC 147). If the tradition itself is not considered authentic, only because it is not “ancient,” its leadership is also delegitimized on similar grounds. It is not surprising
that the only form of Hinduism that both the British court and Indian reformers accepted as being authoritative was Sanskritic/Brahmanic Hinduism, which emphasized Vedic authority and the values of chastity and asceticism. Jadunathji Mahārāj and his supporters defended their sectarian position against this Orientalist and reformist attack, even in the years leading up to the trial, by promoting Sanskrit literature and learning in favor of Puṣṭimārg vernacular textual sources (such as the Brajbhāṣā hagiographies or commentaries by Puṣṭimārg theologians), and also by deemphasizing the explicit, erotic gopī bhāv that permeates Puṣṭimārg religiosity.

Jadunathji, although he later became the fulcrum of the libel trial, was respected by Mulji and his fellow reformers. This is because he appeared sympathetic to the cause of social reform, which he demonstrated by opening a girl’s school in Surat. He was even invited to preside over the prize distribution at śeth Mangaldas Nathubhai’s school for girls in Bombay in 1860 (Motiwala 30). His father, Brajratanji Mahārāj, frequently discussed the need to eradicate superstitious or “magic” practices in Gujarat with reformers like Durgaram Mehtaji, the founder of the Manav Dharma Sabha in Surat (Shodhan 2001, 121). However, soon the relationship between Jadunathji and the reformer community grew tense when newspapers like the Satya Prakas and Rast Goftar zealously began maligning the Puṣṭimārg sect in their articles. Jadunathji responded by starting his own publications: a journal called Vaisnav Punch (“Arbitrators for Vaiṣṇavism”) and Swadharma Vardhak ane Sanshaya Chhedak (“Propagator of our Religion and Destroyer of Doubt”), in which, according to Mulji’s biographer, “reformers were styled as fools, rogues, atheists, etc.” (31). Jadunathji also established a

Joshua Barton Scott (2009), in his study on the representation of Mahārājs in the libel case, demonstrates how in the early issues of the *Swadharma Vardhak* (in the early 1860s), Jadunathji attempts to disassociate Puṣṭimārg bhakti from any erotic themes. In Puṣṭimārg, Jadunathji insists, bhakti is characterized by sākhya bhāv (“friendship”) and vātsalya bhāv (“parental love”). He rejects those who claim that the erotic love of the gopīs for Kṛṣṇa (mādhurya, jār bhāv) is paramount in Puṣṭimārg; “To love God adulterously is, he assures his reader, a sin” (155). Gopīs, Jadunathji explains, are merely avatārs of Parvati or Sita, who have come to be reunited with their husbands, Śiva or Rām, respectively. Thus, in his publications, the love of the gopīs is likened to or reduced to marital love. A few years later, during the libel case, Jadunathji appears ambivalent about the place of mādhurya bhāv in Puṣṭimārg bhakti. On the one hand he appears to vehemently dismiss any claims made to the erotic or “adulterine” love of the gopīs; elsewhere he acknowledges how the love expressed by the gopīs is exemplary of the highest devotion: “Adulterine passion is intense love, and the same intensity of love should be shown towards God. Such love towards God is very good…Such an illustration is given in the Bhagwat” (MLC 361).

Jadunath Mahārāj had to repeatedly legitimize his theological claims by making reference to textual sources, like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. And although this

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82 When Jadunathji is cross-examined by Mr. Anstey on February 27th, 1862 he replies to a question on the portrayal of gopīs in Vaiṣṇav texts by stating: “I cannot say whether it is the belief of my sect or not that, the gopees loved God as their paramour and that God loved them and made them happy” (MLC 349). He reiterates this point later: “I have not observed in any book if it is the doctrine of my sect, that true Vaishnavas, after death, become gopees and have amorous and improper intercourse with God. I do not believe in this doctrine, nor am I aware if any of my followers does or do believe in it” (352).
*Purāṇa* is a Sanskrit text, for the most part only select texts, such as the Vedas, the *Manuṣmṛti*, and the *Gītā*, were considered authoritative of “authentic” Hindu tradition by both the reformer community and the British court. Throughout the trial both “modern” or vernacular texts, like the Brajbhāṣa *vārtās* and commentaries of Puṣṭimārg theologians were not accepted as representative of “true” Hinduism. John Wilson, in his testimony in the libel case, explains how “It is an historical fact, that the more modern religions are less moral and less pure” (254). Thus, throughout the trial, the more “ancient” a (textual) tradition was determined to be, the more moral and rational it was considered. In many ways, Jadunathji Mahārāj could only defend Puṣṭimārg as an authentic, *moral* Hindu tradition by turning to and invoking Vedic Sanskritic authority, which he does by insisting how “our faith is not opposed to the doctrines of the Veds and the Shastras…Krishna occurs in the portion of the Veds” (MLC 344-348). This apologetic stance is put to test when Jadunathji is asked to comment on the vernacular literature of the tradition. Although the Mahārāj does claim that the Brajbhāṣā commentaries of Gokulnāthjī are considered authoratative in the sect (344), elsewhere he explains how he has never read any “theological or philosophical work in the Brij Bhasha on the Vallabhacharya religion” (349). He later states how the *Caurāṣī* and the *Do Sau Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtās* (hagiographies of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha’s disciples) hold no authority in the sect whatsoever (354).

Earlier in the trial, the Brajbhāṣā *vārtās* are invoked in an effort to demonstrate the immoral character of Puṣṭimārg. Runchor Munjee, a Puṣṭimārg *baniyā*, is called to testify on a particular *vārtā* in which a devotee, Kṛṣṇadās, is described as assisting his
wife in carrying out an adulterous affair. Mulji’s lawyers are interested in knowing whether the texts condemn or condone such conduct. Runchor Munjee admits that all characters in the vārtā are indeed praised, and after being asked to further comment on other vārtā narratives of questionable morality, he qualifies his statements by saying: “Not being acquainted with the Shastras, I cannot say whether or not these stories are repugnant to religion or morality in one sense” (143). In the same testimony, Runchor Munjee is later questioned about “rās maṇḍalīs” – the rumored orgiastic gatherings of Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇavs – and the line of questioning again returns to Kṛṣṇadās’ vārtā.

Throughout the duration of the libel case, as well as in reformist critiques of Puṣṭimārg in the years prior to and after the trial, attempts such as these were constantly being made. Mulji and others collapsed or drew connections between any implicit or explicit references to “adulterine” or erotic love in the Vaiṣṇav Purāṇas (such as the Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu, and Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas) and especially in the Brajbhāṣā vārtās and vernacular songs being sung in gopī bhāv, with actual acts of sexual impropriety, such as the organization of so-called rās maṇḍali and the alleged sexual relations between

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83 The vārtā they are referring to appears to be vārtā 75 from the Caurasī Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā, which is about the Brahmin Kṛṣṇadās and his wife. The narrative may be summarized as follows: When, one day, several Vaiṣṇavs visited Kṛṣṇadās’ home while he was away, his wife realized there was no food in the house to offer them. She went to the home of a wealthy trader in the town who had once promised to give her anything she wanted if she spent the night with him. She asked him for grains and groceries and told him she would come to his home later that night in exchange for the items. She cooked the food, offered it to Śrīnāthji, and fed the prasād (consecrated food-offerings) to the Vaiṣṇavs. When Kṛṣṇadās came home and realized what his wife had done, he prostrated before her and praised her for preserving their dharma and moral obligations of feeding fellow Vaiṣṇavs. He told her they needed to fulfill her promise to the wealthy trader and even carried his wife to the trader’s home so as to make sure her feet do not become wet and dirty since it was raining outside. In the end, of course, the wealthy trader realized how spiritually dedicated the couple are, and prostrated before them. The wife’s chastity remained preserved, and the couple are praised in the vārtā (Dalmia 2001b).
Gosvāmīs and their female disciples. Puṣṭimārg was portrayed as a sect that both institutionally and doctrinally sanctions adultery. Thus, the sect and its leaders could be delegitimized on grounds of immorality by the British court and not necessarily on theological claims of “heresy” or “heterodoxy” as Mulji alleged in his article.

In response, Jadunathji repeatedly attempts to draw clear ties between Puṣṭimārg and Sanskrit culture and learning. He testifies how he opened a Sanskrit school in Surat, in addition to a Gujarati school, so children may learn the Sanskrit language (MLC 341). He also insists on locating Puṣṭimārg textually authority only in its Sanskritic sources and not in the vernacular literature, such as the Brajbhāṣā vārtās. This claim to Sanskritic authority by Jadunathji, by later Gosvāmīs, and even by lay followers indexes the ways in which “Hinduism” in general was being constructed by European Orientalists and by Hindu reformers and revivalists along more upper-caste, patriarchal, and Sanskritized lines. In order to contextualize Jadunathji’s own persistence and anxieties over legitimizing Puṣṭimārg vis-à-vis Sanskritic/Vedic authority, it is helpful to take a look at some of the religious reform movements of nineteenth century Gujarat.

84 In his History of the Sect of Maharajas in Western India (1865), Mulji describes these “Rās Maṇḍalīs” as “carnal love meetings,” which are held at the homes of wealthy Vaiṣṇavīs. At these meetings, Mulji claims, “licentious narratives” are read from the Caurāsī and Da Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav kī Vārtās: “The reading of these books excites and stimulates the passions, and we may be prepared to expect what must follow” (129).

85 In this testimony on March 1st, 1862 Jadunathji Mahārāj explains how “All the sacred books of my sect are in Sanskrit; they are regarded as authorities even in Brij Bhasa, if they correspond with the Sanskrit originals” (MLC 360). Amrita Shodhan demonstrates how, after the trial, Jadunathji denounces all the vernacular literature of Puṣṭimārg in his journal, Swadharma Vardhak ane Sanshaya Chhedak, after determining that the vernacular commentaries do not match the Sanskrit works (1995, 240fn95).
Religious Reform and the Quest for Authority

R.L. Raval, in his work *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Gujarat during the Nineteenth Century* (1987), argues that the process of Brahmanization/Sanskritization in the religious traditions of Gujarat had already begun in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the efforts of Sahajananda Svāmī and his Svāminārāyaṇ sampradāya. Sahajananda (1781-1830), a *sarvaria* Brahmin born in the outskirts of Ayodhya, became an ascetic early in his life and arrived in Gujarat in 1800. He eventually gathered a large following among the Rājpūt, *kathi, kuṇbī/pāṭidār* and artisan castes of Gujarat and was revered as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇ by his followers. Although he never explicitly made references to Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, Sahājānanda earnestly critiqued the debauchery of priests and *sādhus* of his time, and demanded a “thorough moral cleansing of the society of Gujarat” (Hardiman 1988, 1907; Williams 27-28). He advocated for “blood-less” fire sacrifices, and even performed several large-scale *yagñas* during his lifetime (Raval 15-16). Unlike the hereditary leaders of the Puṣṭimārg sampradāya he is said to have practiced strict celibacy, which included refusing to make any physical or even ocular contact with females. This practice was endorsed by later leaders and ascetics (*sādhus*) in the sect and it materialized institutionally with the gendered separation of space in Svāminārāyaṇ temples, the creation of separate temples just for females, and the exclusive initiation and teaching of female disciples by female ascetics (*sādhvīs*) of the tradition.86 Sahajananda demanded that his disciples adhere to a strict vegetarian diet, relinquish the consumption of alcohol and drugs like opium, cease

86 Among the two-hundred and twelve precepts or regulations Sahajananda included in his *Śikṣāpatri* (1826) twenty-six vows correspond to the relationship between women and *sādhus*: “Even seeing a woman or her portrait or pronouncing her name was prohibited” (Raval 12).
“superstitious” practices such as excorcisms, and stop believing in evil spirits or ghosts, and village gods and goddesses. Instead he encouraged the worship of Nārāyaṇ-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and the “high-gods” of smārta Brahmins: Śiva, Ganeṣa, Pārvatī, and Śūrya. He also vehemently attacked the practice of women singing “bawdy and lewd” songs during Holi festivals and weddings. In fact, Sahajananda is said to have requested a few of the sects’ sādhus, such as Svāmī Muktananda and Premananda, to compose more appropriate songs for these occasions (Williams 24-27; Hardiman 1988, 1907; Raval 18-19; Parekh 174). Needless to say, many of these injunctions correlate with both contemporaneous and later reformist appeals for change in the religious cultures of Gujarat. It is therefore not surprising that, unlike the Puṣṭimārg sampradāy, the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect met with general approval by British officials of the time (Williams 21, 29).

Later Gujarati religious reform societies, like Durgaram Mehtaji’s Manav Dharma Sabha (founded in Surat in 1844), would go on to criticize both Puṣṭimārg and Svāmīnārāyaṇ because of the claim made by Puṣṭimārgī Gosvāmīs and Sahajananda to be living incarnations of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu. The sabhā also denounced superstitious or “magical” practices, as well as image worship (“idolatry”) and the performance of pilgrimage. Instead, the society promoted Sanskrit learning, Upaniṣadic philosophy, and a belief in one God (Raval 68-72). Due to Durgaram Mehtaji’s own commitment to Sanskrit literature as well as his monotheistic readings of religion, he and Karsondas Mulji’s friend and supporter, Narmadshankar Lalshankar, eventually invited Dayananda Sarasvati on a lecture tour in Surat in 1874 (102). By this time, Dayananda Sarasvati had

87 In the religious literature of the Svāmīnārāyaṇ sect, the relationship between Sahajananda and Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay at the time, is very much celebrated, to the degree that it is alleged Governor Malcolm even converted into the sect (Williams 5; Hardiman 1988, 1908).
already arrived in Bombay due to the persistent efforts of Mulji’s close followers, such as Dharmsi (the brother of Lakhmidas Khimji, who was an important witness in the libel case) and Jaikishendes Jivanram. Upon arriving in Bombay, Dayananda was also close to completing the first edition of his famous *Satyarth Prakas* and he began to launch an aggressive and successful reform campaign against sectarian traditions like Puṣṭimārg and Svāminārāyaṇ. For Sarasvati, the sects’ ritual practices, theologies, and emphasis on Purānic literature were the antithesis of Vedic culture, which for him constituted “authentic” Hinduism. However, his unilateral advocacy of the Vedas and ritual fire sacrifice, and his admonishment of any form of image worship, prevented his Arya Samaj from gaining a strong hold in parts of Gujarat. For example, in Ahmedbad only about thirty people joined the Samaj in 1875 – including Gopal Hari Deshmukh and Mahipatram Rupram – who were already members of the more popular Ahmedabad-based Prathana Samaj (Raval 140-141).

Mahipatram Rupram (1829-1891), an important educationalist and Elphinstone graduate, was associated with institutions like the Gujarat Vernacular Society, the Vidhava Vivahottejak Mandali (widow remarriage association), Bal Lagna Nisedhak Mandal (anti-child marriage association), and the Hindu Sansar Sudhar Samaj

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88 In Varanasi on November 1869, Dharmsi and Jaikishendes witnessed Dayananda’s public disputation with orthodox *pundits* on the issue of whether image-worship was sanctioned by the Vedas (Jordens 140). Dharmsi and Jaikishendes were impressed with Dayananda’s polemical skills and Sanskrit learning and urged him to come to Bombay, the head-quarters of Mulji’s crusade against Puṣṭimārg. Although, by this time, Mulji had passed away (in 1871) he did publish a short book called “Ved Dharma and Sacred Books after Vedas,” in which he discredits Purānic literature in favour of the Vedas. In this text Mulji also refers to Hinduism as “Arya Dharma” (Motiwala 73, 318). Furthermore, as we know, Mulji named his newspaper *Satya Prakas*. Mulji’s reform activities and writings must have influenced Dayananda Saraswati’s own campaigns and ideologies. In addition to sharing their general aversion towards Purānic literature, image worship, and the Puṣṭimārg sect, Dayananda titled his most important work *Satyartha Prakas* and named his society “Arya Samaj.” The Arya Samaj was established in Bombay in 1875, within a year after Dayananda’s arrival in western India, and Mulji’s supporters and friends became the founding members of the society (Jordens 141-142).
(Hindu reform society). As an educationalist, he was a member of the Hope Text-Book Committee and translated many English texts into Gujarati. He wrote several books himself, including one on his travels to England (England nī Musāfarī), a satirical novel on the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws (Sāsu Vahunī Laḍānī), as well as biographies on Durgaram Mehtaji and Karsondas Mulji. In 1871, he eventually helped Bholanath Sarabhai establish the Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, and when Sarabhai passed away in 1886, Mahipatram Rupram became the society’s president (133-134). The Ahmedabad Prathana Samaj, which was modeled after the Bombay-based Prathana Samaj founded Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, shared a similar ideological platform as Durgaram Mehtaji’s Manav Dharm Sabha. That is, like Mehtaji, Bholanath Sarabhai advocated for the worship of one “omnipresent God,” a God who should be worshipped “not by external ceremonies, but only by heart” (136). Sarabhai was critical of “idol worship,” did not believe in the performance of rituals like śrāddha (ancestor rituals), acts of pilgrimage, and, not surprisingly, detested the leaders of the Puṣṭimārg sampradāya (136).

It is clear that the religious reform movements of nineteenth century Gujarat share a general aversion towards Puṣṭimārg. The Svāmīnārāyana sampradāya, by contrast, escaped some of their criticism. For example, Narmadashankar Lalshankar, who was one of Karsondas Mulji’s greatest supporters and reform-minded Gujaratis of his time, did have some reservations about the Svāmīnārāyana sect but nevertheless felt that

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89 The Prathana Samaj was established in Bombay by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang in 1867. However, as Christine Dobbin illustrates, the Society also owed its formation to the encouragement offered by the Brahmo Samajis of Bengal, including K.C. Sen, the President of the Bengal Brahmo Samaj, who visited Bombay in 1864 and 1867. It was apparently under the influence of Sen, as well as the English social reformer, Mary Carpenter, who was visiting Bombay at the time that the Prathana Samaj was finally established (Dobbin 1972, 249-250).
Sahajananda introduced “many changes for the betterment of the social life in Gujarat” (Raval 101). Narmadashankar was also critical of Dayananda Sarasvati’s promotion of Vedic literature and ritual. It would seem that for someone like Narmadashankar – and for many other Gujaratis who perhaps became disenchanted with Puṣṭimārg due to the controversies surrounding the sect – the Svāmīnārayaṇaṃ sampradāyī provided a “middle-ground,” a reconciliation between the extreme views held by Dayananda against image worship, bhakti practices, and Purāṇic literature, on the one hand, and the impropriety apparently condoned and embodied by Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, on the other hand.

Svāmīnārayan provided a familiar Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇaite ritual culture, which was modeled on Puṣṭimārg after all, but also institutionalized gender exclusion and patriarchal values by separating female disciples from both the sect’s male leaders and male followers.

Finally, although the late-nineteenth century activities of the Vaiṣṇav traditionalist, Harischandra (1850-1885), were centered in Banaras and not Gujarat per se, his concerns, in many ways, were common to the reform and revival movements of the period. Like his contemporaries, Harischandra’s prolific engagement with print culture and his involvement with the Dharma Sabha and Tadiya Samaj were motivated by a concern of what it means to be “a Hindu” in a modernizing world. More importantly, however, a focus on Harischandra is valuable because, like Mulji, Harischandra was interested in addressing these issues as a Puṣṭimārgī.90 Vasudha Dalmia (1997), in her comprehensive and detailed study on the life and literary activities of Harischandra, notes how Harischandra (like Mulji) was critical of the opulent lifestyles and sexual exploits of

90 Like Mulji, who was an editor for the Strībodhī, Harischandra was also an editor for the first women’s journal in Hindi, the Balabodhīni (Dalmia 1997, 129).
Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs. Harischandra also insisted that Gosvāmīs could not demand or exercise religious authority by virtue of their status and positions as members of the Vallabha-kul; they had to “prove their credentials” (365). However, similarities with Mulji end here. That is to say, although Harischandra called for a “cleansing” of Hindu religion, he extended it to Vedic religion as well, such as the practice of Vedic animal sacrifices (359). On the one hand, his ideologies were couched in the language of Sanskritic traditions (such as his invocation of hindu dharma or veda purāṇa vihit ārya dharma) and, like Durgaram Mehtaji and Bholanath Sarabhai, he presented a strictly monotheistic view of Hindu traditions. On the other hand, unlike his contemporaries, Harischandra never distanced himself from his Puṣṭimārg or theistic affiliations; instead, he constructed his vision of a pan-Indian Hindu (sanātana dharma) through the prism of a Puṣṭimārg-Vaiṣṇav ethos. Harischandra defended image worship and saw bhakti as constitutive of “modern Hinduism” (340-390).

Sanskritization and Middle-Class Moralities

The nineteenth century reform movements of Gujarat index the ways in which the rising middle-classes promoted new ideas of status, respectability, and comportment, which, as we have discussed above, were mapped onto the bodies of family women. The middle-classes also wanted to position themselves as morally superior to both the upper-classes and lower-classes. Reformers like Karsondas Mulji criticize the upper class Šeṭh community for their political and social apathy as well as their opulent spending habits on caste dinners and on rites-of-passage like weddings, pregnancies, and death rituals (Motiwala 352). Even in debates on early marriage and consummation, “high and
luxurious living” is blamed for early puberty (Gidumal 1889, xxvi). Both the upper and lower classes are berated for their lack of (western/English) education, and reformers see this as the cause of śeths’ irrational acceptance of the divinity of Gosvāmīs and in their belief in the ritual efficacy of religious ceremonies and acts of pilgrimage. Members of the lower classes and castes are criticized for their superstitious beliefs in “magic,” exorcism, animal sacrifices, the evil-eye, possession, and their worship of village gods and goddesses.91

Reformist societies like the Prathana Samaj, Manav Dharma Sabha, or the Arya Samaj sought to establish their moral superiority over sects like Puṣṭimārg and Svāminārāyaṇ on rational grounds: the sects are critiqued for their ritual orthodoxy, “polytheistic” beliefs, and their followers’ deification of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and Sahajananda Svāmī. However, reform-minded Gujaratis like Narmadashankar, who were sympathetic towards a sect like Svāminārāyaṇ, project the moral superiority of the sect over one like Puṣṭimārg based on the patriarchal and Brahmanical values prescribed by Sahajanand. Finally, as noted above, Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, such as Brajratanji Mahārāj, the father of Jadunathji, engaged in discussions with the likes of Durgaram Mehtaji about the need to eradicate superstitious or magic practices in Gujarat. Here, a Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmī is seeking to establish the moral superiority of Puṣṭimārg by distancing the sect from what are considered “popular,” rural, and lower-caste religious practices of the “un-educated.” Similarly, Hariachandra critiqued Tantric-based ritual practices – along with

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91 For example, in 1849 the well-known Gujarati poet, reformer, and Svāminārāyan follower, Dalpatram Dhayabhai, submitted a prize-winning essay to the Gujarat Vernacular Society on the various “superstitious” practices of Gujarat, such as possession, the belief in ghosts, and the evil-eye. The book is titled Bhut Nibandh, and his friend and colleague, Alexander Forbes, later translated it into English, with the title “Demonology and Popular Superstitions of Gujarat” (1849).
Vedic religion (such as animal sacrifices) – saw (Vaiṣṇav) bhakti as a unifying force under which all the “sectarianisms” existing in India could be subsumed. Thus, by invoking practices and values such as western education, Sanskritic traditions, or “superstitious” and Tantric practices, intellectual elites from various backgrounds – members of the English educated middle-classes, Sanskritists such as Dayananda, as well as religious leaders like Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs and Harischandra – were all engaged in various degrees of moral positioning with one another.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of founders and participants of these social and religious reform societies in the Bombay Presidency drew from the Brahmin castes, with the exception of a few baniyās and bhāṭiyās like Karsondas Mulji, Mangaldas Nathubhai, and Lakhmidas Khimji. Ironically, although the practice of excommunication from caste was critiqued by reformers, individuals like Durgaram Mehtaji, Mulji, and Bholanath Sarabhai all respected caste rules of purity and pollution. For example, when the Rast Goftar tatha Satya Prakas urged the formation of reformist “clubs” or societies, it was made clear that meals would not be provided on site to mitigate anxieties around inter-caste dining (Shodhan 2001, 124).

What we can conclude from this discussion is that throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, middle-class moralities and status is being articulated by either one or all of the following markers: urbanization, an English education, an adherence to upper-caste values of purity and pollution or Sanskritization, the critique of “superstitious” practices, and the promotion of the patriarchal nuclear family. Women become implicated in this process of status production by the degree to which they embodied or breached any of these “moral” criteria.
Reform and Revival: Puṣṭimārg Post-Libel

The swift circulation, in both English and Gujarati newspapers, of the court’s proceedings from the libel case certainly helped to reify reformist efforts to malign the Puṣṭimārg sect and its leaders. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that after this point – with the exception of a few scholarly writings – almost every English source alluding to the Puṣṭimārg sect (as well as Indian religious sources with a reformist angle) used the events surrounding the libel case as a hermeneutic lens through which they filtered their discussion of Puṣṭimārg.92 The sect embodied all that was “Other” in Orientalist discourses of India: the over-sexed Indian male, orgiastic religious rituals, women as victims of Brahmin male corruption and vulgarity, and an effete God. Ultimately, the sect epitomized the moral degradation and irrationality of modern Hinduism. Within the mercantile community, the reform activities surrounding the libel case are said to have elicited a series of schisms within the bhātīyā caste, which may have led to the caste group’s eventual disintegration (Shodhan 2001, 180; Simpson 2008, 101). According to Karsondas Mulji’s biographer, B.N. Motiwala, most members of the Puṣṭimārg community sympathised with Jadunathji Mahārāj throughout the case. He explains how “Even in the Kapole caste to which Karsondas belonged, ninety nine per cent of that caste was dead against Karsondas” (137). Mulji himself admitted that not more than fifty śeṭhs in all of Bombay were responsive to reform efforts, and only two

92 There are, of course several exceptions to such representations of Puṣṭimārg. Two notable works include F.S. Growse’s Mathurā, A District Memoir (1882) and George Grierson’s Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians (1907), both of which Vasudha Dalmia underscores in her work on Hariścandra (1850-1885) and his efforts to systemize and consolidate Vaiṣṇav identities in the nineteenth century. Growse attempts to argue for doctrinal and ritual similarities between Christianity and Puṣṭimārg, whereas Grierson viewed bhakti religion (including Krṣṇa bhakti as propounded by Vallabha) as characterizing “mainstream” Hindu religion in India. Although he does make note of the Libel Case, he explains how such degeneracy is no longer present in his age (Dalmia 1995, 196-199).
prominent \textit{śeṭhs} from the \textit{baniyā} and \textit{bhāṭiyā} communities (Mangaldas Nathubhai and Lakhmidas Khimji, respectively) explicitly supported Mulji in his campaign. According to the \textit{Rast Goftar}, only four or five large families in the city had attempted to stop the women of their homes from visiting \textit{havelīs} in the months leading up to the libel case, and even such efforts did not prove successful (Shodhan 1995, 224). In the months following the closure of the case, the paper continued propagating messages of guilt by stating that men who sent their wives to the \textit{havelīs} of Gosvāmīs, and risked their family’s honor and reputation should be ashamed of themselves.

The libel case was perhaps indicative of the larger concern the \textit{baniyā} and \textit{bhāṭiyā} communities had in monitoring the public movement and activities of women from their families. For example, during his testimony in the case, the \textit{bhāṭiyā} \textit{śeṭh} Bhimjee Purushottam, described how during a caste meeting in 1855 a resolution was reached, which stipulated among other things that

Bhattia women should not go about in their Garries without ‘purdas’ or screens. It was also resolved that the women should not sit in the roads on the occasion of any death in the caste; also that they should attend early at the general caste dinner, etc. It was also proposed to prevent women from going astray on the pretense of visiting the Maharaja’s temples; but that proposition was not acted upon. (MLC 333)

During his cross-examination by Mr. Anstey, Varjivandas Madhavdas voices a similar concern made by the \textit{bhāṭiyās}: “There was talk, I believe, among the Bhattias that their females should go at proper hours to the temples of the Maharajas. The women were to go only in the morning and evening. This was about ten months ago” (MLC 140). As Amrita Shodhan indicates, discussions such as these centered on questioning “the morality of the temple and its effect on women, family and the home” (1995, 224).
same time that the home was being reconstituted as the primary site of cultural
production, reformist debates promoted a repertoire of actions that characterized “proper”
public conduct for women, such as pardā, observing proper mourning behavior, cease
singing “obscene” songs, and demarcating when, how, and if women can go to the havelī.
This “new patriarchy” ushered in by the social and religious reform movements of the
nineteenth century were not necessarily advocating for the total removal of women from
public spaces, rather they were concerned with regulating and monitoring their
movements. For example, as we discussed above, what disconcerted Mulji and perhaps
many families about the presence of women in havelīs was not only the potential threat of
“liscentious” activity between guru and lay woman, but also the close interaction of
female and male lay practitioners that occurred in the havelī during darśan periods, in
public festivals like Holī, et cetera. This is why several recommendations were made as
to the appropriate times women should go for darśan at the havelī (such as from 7 a.m. to
9 a.m., and to not visit in the afternoons) and what they can do there (they should enter
the zenānā only to meet the Mahārāj’s wife and daughter, and they should not be allowed
to visit the Mahārāj to offer him fruit in private). The complete exclusion of women’s
participation in temple-based activities was not necessarily advocated. Though, when this
almost did occur in 1858, when Jivanlalji Mahārāj in an effort to resist appearing in court
closed the doors to the havelī, women from the community vehemently challenged this
attempt to totally prevent them from visiting the temple. Ultimately, Jivanlalji re-opened
the havelī doors when many women convinced their husbands to sign a document, which
stipulated that no member of the community could solicit the Mahārāj to appear in court.
For the most part, reformers, like Mulji, were not even recommending a complete break from the sect but were encouraging shifts in the ways female lay practitioners approached the tradition and its leaders. Indeed Mulji himself did not totally abandon his connections to Puṣṭimārg. He, along with other reformers, wanted lay practitioners to regard Gosvāmīs as spiritual leaders and not as living-incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. The successful expansion of the Svāminārāyaṇ sect in Gujarat demonstrates that regulating the movement of women in temple contexts worked: it was not that women could no longer visit a temple but their visit had to be marked by certain actions, such as adhering to the gendered separation of space in the temple and by the gendered relationship between the female sādhvī and lay woman. Finally, although I have not come across examples where Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs requested that the content of garbās and dhols be changed, Sahajananda of the Svāminārāyaṇ tradition did explicitly attempt to do this. Again, women were not necessarily encouraged to abandon the singing of devotional or wedding songs in public altogether. Instead the songs had to be cleansed and sanitized by removing any “vulgar” or erotic connotations so as to make them more palatable to emerging middle-class moralities and tastes.

As for institutional changes, drawing on D.D. Sampat’s writings in the bhāṭiyā caste journal (Bhāṭiyā Yuvak), Edward Simpson explains how reformers within the bhāṭiyā community called for both an organizational and doctrinal shift in the Puṣṭimārg community during this period. Doctrinally, they urged that the “original” writings of Vallabha and texts like the Gītā should be taught at havelīs in place of Brajbhāṣā Puṣṭimārg texts. It was proposed that a committee should be established to overview religious literature in havelīs, and classes should be offered to practitioners on the
improved texts. Institutionally, reformers wanted women to cease going to the havelīs for early morning and late night darśans and that eventually female Gosvāmīs be introduced so as to better supervise the movement of female Puṣṭimārgīs in the havelīs. Finally, reformers called upon Gosvāmīs to relinquish their sole monopoly of Puṣṭimārg temples by denouncing their status as divinities or incarnations of Kṛṣṇa and to finally open the havelīs to public “ownership”: “Private ownership of the havelīs and their profits was to be abolished in favor of a general management by the Vaishnava society” (Sampat 1938 qtd in Simpson, 100).

Both Amirta Shodhan (2001) and Shandip Saha (2004) corroborate Sampat’s description of the potential ramifications of these late nineteenth century reform efforts on the Puṣṭimārg sect. Shodhan notes how leading theogians from the sect, particularly Pandit Gattulalji and Devakinandacarya, actively sought to re-fashion elements of Puṣṭimārg throughout the 1870s in Bombay city. For example, they engaged in a series of public lectures on “the principles of Vaishnava dharma” and guru-śīya (guru-devotee) relationships, published handbills, and drew on the sect’s Sanskrit literary sources, such as the Subodhinī, Vallabhācārya’s commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Shodhan 180). Devakinandacarya is said to have preached weekly on themes related to “Vaiṣṇav dharma and sanātan dharma,” and demanded that lay practitioners not touch the feet of Gosvāmīs. Furthermore, in response to critiques launched by Madhavtirtha Sankaracarya of Dwarka/Dakore Devakinandacarya published a work titled Puṣṭimārg Vedic he (Vaidya 251). Saha explains how the then tilkāyat (chief Gosvāmī) of Nathdwara, Govardhanlal, also proposed a return to Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit treatises and provided
accessible commentaries for practitioners to read. In addition, the tilkāyat advocated for the opening of schools to teach the “younger generation” about Puṣṭimārg (310).

Briefly, if we take a look at contemporary Puṣṭimārg, many of these changes appear to have materialized in some form or another. This is not to suggest that there is a direct causal relationship between the two, however, it is important to take note of these late nineteenth century transformations and their on-going effects. For example, the recommendation that schools be opened for the purpose of teaching individuals about Puṣṭimārg appears to have found its culmination when the Dwarkadīś havelī in Kankroli established a centre known as “Vidya Vibhag.” This institution appears to have formed over several decades during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the havelī’s contemporary website (www.vallabhkankroli.org), the Vidya Vibhag was most active during the 1930s-1940s but seems to be less operational today. The site describes the Vidya Vibhag as “not only [now] the centre of collection of literature and the centre of Academic activities but also the centre of Arts like painting, poetry etc.” In addition to funding an extensive library, other insititutions established under the auspices of the Vidya Vibhag include the Dwarkesh Sanskrit Paatshala, with branches in Mathura and Halol, the Balkrishna Pushtimargiya Pustakalaya, the Swayam Sevak Mandal Vibhag, a Dwarkesh Kavi Mandal, Dwarkesh Chitrashala, and the Dwarkesh Suddhadvaita Brahmcaryashram. In the brief biographical sketches of lay Puṣṭimārgīs included in the Gujarati historical work, Puṣṭimārgna 500 Varṣ Gauravpurṇa Itihās (Shah 1952), a Puṣṭimārg woman by the name of Yashodaben Ramanlal Shastri (b. 1913) is described as having passed examinations offered by such institions as the
Pustimargiya Vaisnav Mahasabha, the Balkrsna Suddhadvaita Mahasabha, as well as the Kankroli Vidhya Vibhag itself (155).

Although it is not certain when such “classes” or “examinations” in Puṣṭimārg theology for lay practitioners began to occur, today many Puṣṭimārgīs, including both adults and children, participate in such pedagogical activities either by attending Puṣṭimārg śivīrs (“retreats”), classes at their local havelīs, or by taking long-distance classes and examinations. More recently, Gosvāmī Vrajeshkumar of the Kankroli havelī established the “Shri Vakpati Foundation” in 1995-96, with its headquarters located at the Śrī Beṭhak mandir in Baroda. According to the same Kankroli havelī website the Vakpati Foundation is described as a charitable trust, established “with a view to undertake multifarious activities for the social, religious, spiritual and overall upliftment of mankind, leading to highest sublimation of their life, by propagating Indian Vedic Philosophy especially propounded by Jagad Guru Shri Vallabhacharyaji.” Vrajeshkumar Gosvāmī’s eldest son, Vagishkumarji Gosvāmī, is the Foundation’s president and managing trustee today. Since 1996, the Foundation has established a Puṣṭimārgiya Open University (the SriVallabha Vidya Pith), which offers long-distance courses in Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy, and even grants a PhD if a student completes all ten years of the degree. Another open university, the Vitthalesh Vidyapith, was established in 2006 and offers seven years’ worth of courses. Other projects of the Foundation include compiling a Puṣṭimārg Encyclopedia, with a focus on Śuddhādvaita philosophy, charitable work for “the sick and hungry,” publishing a bi-monthly magazine (Charnamrt Raspan), releasing audio-video media and literary publications, as well as organising a “shri Vallabh Young parivar for inculcating Pustimargiya Sanskar in [the] younger generaton.”
The libel case also successfully demonstrated the undoing of the exclusive social and religious authority wielded by Puṣṭimārgī Gosvāmīs as well as by caste leaders of baniyā and bhātiyā mahājans. Through their engagement with the colonial judicial system, Gosvāmīs, seṭhs, and ordinary baniyā-bhātiya caste members were treated as citizens, all equal and subject to the same universal law. In some instances, even the religious authority of Gosvāmīs over Puṣṭimārg temples was starting to be undermined when several Vaiṣṇavs began building havelīs through the 1870s and 80s. Although these new temples followed the daily liturgy of Puṣṭimārg havelīs, they no longer required a Gosvāmī presiding as the sole custodian. Instead such havelīs were to be named after the patrons who financed their construction and were controlled by a board of trustees.

Shodhan describes how, in Bombay, during the 1870s and 1880s some seṭhs like Gokuldas Tejpal (a bhātiyā leader and reformer), Mulji Jetha (a bhātiyā leader) and Varjivandas Madhavdas, the kāpol baniyā leader and supporter of Gosvāmīs during the libel case, were involved in building new temples (2001, 181). There are also many examples of “trust havelīs” being established later during the twentieth century, such as the Murlidhar temple built by the Thackerseys in Santa Cruz in 1960, the Vallabhasadan temple in Ahmedabad (f.1954), the Govardhannathji mandir (f.1995), and numerous others since.93

Finally, print culture was another arena through which lay Puṣṭimārgīs began to, in some ways, circumvent the religious authority of the Gosvāmī in the late nineteenth century.

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93 It is important to note that with the Charitable and Religious Trust Act of 1920 and the Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950, all religious and charitable public trusts came under the administration of the Indian government. This included Puṣṭimārg havelīs operated by Gosvāmīs as well. Meanwhile in “trust havelīs,” built and administered by Puṣṭimārg lay persons and where no Gosvāmī presides, all ritual activities are performed by Brahmin ritual specialists known as mukhiyās. There are numerous such trust havelīs being constructed across Gujarat every year.
and early twentieth centuries. As discussed in chapter two, lay Puṣṭimārgīs engaged in the publication of Puṣṭimārg performance literature, vārtā materials, and translations and commentaries on Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. An individual like Lallubhai Pranvallabhdas Parekh (1850-1911), who published a series of books in Gujarati and English on Puṣṭimārg themes, serves as a good example of an individual who was molded by the social and religious reform movements of the late nineteenth century. Parekh came from a Puṣṭimārg family in Nadiad and moved to Ahmedabad to acquire an English education. After working as a teacher in the high schools of Ahmedabad, Rajkot, and Kheda, he furthered his education and eventually become a judge. Perhaps through his friendship with Manilal Nathubhai Dwivedi (1858-1898), the Guajrati educationalist, Vendantist, and Elphinstone graduate, Parekh joined the Prathana Samaj – only to later abandon it. He also became a member of the Theosophical Society, which, with the help of Nathubhai Dwivedi had begun to establish several branches in Gujarat and Kathiawad. Parekh would eventually go on to become the Chair Person of the Theosophical Society’s Nadiad branch for the remainder of his life. However, in the meantime, and as a staunch Puṣṭimārgī, Parekh was also closely acquainted with Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, like Gosvāmī Jaydevlalji Maharaj, whom he met in 1890-91, and Gosvāmī Narsinhlaḷji Mahārāj. During this time, he published books on Vallabhācārya’s life and on themes related to Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophies, such as Śrī Vallabha carita, Śrī Krṣṇa Lilāmṛt, Śrī Māḷāprasaṅgsār, Śrīmad Vallabhacāryājī Nu Vṛtānt, Śrīmad Vallabhacāryājīkṛt Tattvādīp, et cetera.

In April 1909, Parekh appears to have presented a work in English at the Convention of Religion in Calcutta. In the essay, entitled Śrīmad Vallabhacārya: His
Life, Philosophy, and Teachings, Parekh depicts Puṣṭimārg theology as wholly in line with Vedic knowledge and the Gītā. He of course makes no mention of the Brajbhāṣā vārtās or of the practice of sevā. When he does discuss sevā, he argues that “mental sevā” (mānasi sevā) is the most superior. Parekh’s reading of Pustimarg in this light is not unfounded since he is clearly drawing from Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and later Puṣṭimārg theologians’ discourses on Puṣṭimārg philosophy. What is noteworthy, however, is that he is not a Puṣṭimārgī Goswāmī or traditional scholar, but a lay practitioner, who was very active in his role as a defender of Puṣṭimārg identity in the face of reformist critiques. He acknowledges how “the nineteenth century did unfavorable injustice to Śrīmad Vallabhācārya.” His active role in perpetuating a Vaiṣṇav identity through print culture and through institutions like “societies” is illustrated by his efforts in establishing a Puṣṭimārgī library in Nadiad, and by being among the key founders of both the Gujarat Vaisya Sabha in 1903, and the Vaisnav Parisad in 1906 (Kesav Seth, 47-65).

Shodhan also notes how towards the end of the nineteenth century, the printing and publishing of Vaiṣṇav texts increased rapidly. Puṣṭimārg journals like the Vaisnav Dharmpatak solicited help from lay Puṣṭimārgīs Vaiṣṇavīs for the acquisition and publication of texts, and to raise funds for building libraries that would house Puṣṭimārg literature (2001, 181). The engagement of figures like Lallubhai Parekh with print culture should be understood as part of a larger process of “democratizing” Sanskrit learning, which was perhaps most notably initiated by reformers like Rammohun Roy and his Brahma Samāj in Bengal. Though not all of the texts that lay Puṣṭimārgīs helped circulate through publication were Sanskrit treatises, their engagement with print culture
nevertheless demonstrates another mode by which the authority of Gosvāmīs was being challenged and reconstituted.

By way of concluding, I turn to the question of women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg during this period of reform. Thus far, it is clear that Puṣṭimārg women were involved in the sect’s living religious culture as patrons, practioners, pilgrims, and as performers of devotional singing. The high degree of anxiety around Puṣṭimārg women’s activities during the libel case is itself an indication of women’s active positions in the sect. However, this is also illustrative of the gendered mode by which reformers have always used women as discursive sites to debate tradition, morality, patriarchal values, and caste/class politics. Furthermore, as discussed above, women were also not the silent objects of reform; they protested their disapproval at Jivanlalji Mahārāj’s attempts to close the havelī doors for darśan by lobbying volleys at the reformers, and pressuring their husbands to rectify the situation by signing the documents Jivanlalji requested.

Women’s roles as patrons can also be deduced from Jadunathji Mahārāj’s testimony in the libel case when he denies having told Lakhmidas Khimjee that improving the behavior of other Mahārājs with their female devotees cannot be accomplished, or must be done gradually, because “our income is chiefly derived from females” (testimony from February 27th 1862, MLC 346). Jadunathji Maharaj also states several times how many women visit the havelī daily and enter the zenānā to visit his wife and children (testimony from Tuesday February 25th and Thursday the 27th, MLC 343, 347). Historical examples of female patrons include James Tod’s description of the large donation made by a widow at Nathdwara, which was discussed in the first chapter (see page 45). Furthermore, a court case in the Supreme Court of India from 1969
between Mahalakshmi bahūjī (wife of the Gosvāmī) and Ranchhoddas Kalidas over whether a havelī is considered a public space or a private property reveals the historical donative activities of several female patrons. The case notes that in 1861 Jasu bāī gifted “two fields and a house” to the Mahārāj of the Gokulnāthji havelī in Nadiad. In 1881, one Harkore bāī made certain bequests in her will for providing the food-offerings (sāmagrī) for the Gokulnāthji svarūp, and finally, in 1888 and 1897, two bequests were executed from the will of a Vasant bāī for the Gokulnāthji havelī as well as for the bahūjī.

In the Puṣṭimārga 500 Varṣ Gauravpurṇ Itihās (1952), Shah provides several short biographies of female Puṣṭimārgis who lived towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Gujarat and Bombay. The chapter is entitled “Vaiṣṇav Sannārīonā Jīvancaritro.” Rukshmani Damordas (b. 1864, the wife of śēth Balabhai Damordas, see page 81), was born into a Vaiṣṇav family, and is described as a very devoted follower of the sect. After accompanying Balkrishnalalji Mahārāj of Kankroli on a pilgrimage tour to Braj (Braj parikrama) with her family, she began performing sevā to her personal svarūp at home. She would invite other Puṣṭimārgis and Gosvāmīs to her home for satsaṅg (“religious gathering”), and attend Bhāgavata Purāṇa kathās on a weekly basis. She is said to have annually made pilgrimage tours to Braj and Nathdwara, where she offered charitable donations of clothes and food to individuals, as well as made donations to the local temples. Rukshmani is also said to have financially supported the publication of Puṣṭimārg texts, and urged her husband to build a dharmaśāla (“rest-house”) and help with the renovations of havelīs (150-151).

Lalitagauri Popatlal Shah (1890-1947), whose husband was an accountant general and the director of civil supply in Bombay – a couple who moved in high society
would never dine with her husband and family outside the home. Instead she would only eat after offering food to her Thakurjī svarūp. She is described as spending her time reading Puṣṭimārg texts, singing kīrtans, and performing sevā at home. She also went on pilgrimage to places like Nathadwar and Braj, where she would make donations (152-153). Another woman, named “Golok vāśī” Mani Ba, was born into a Vaiṣṇav family in 1880. Her inlaws, who apparently followed another sectarian tradition, would pose problems for Mani Ba because of her affiliation with Puṣṭimārg. It was only after the death of her mother-in-law that her house was visited by Gosvāmīs and other “experienced” Puṣṭimārgīs. She would perform sevā to her Śrīnāthjī svarūp with the help of her three daughters and son daily, and her daughters are described as being very good in singing kīrtans. She, along with other women, organized satsaṅgs at their homes and Mani Ba also went on pilgrimage to places like Braj, Nathdwara, and Kankroli over a dozen times (153). Finally, Chandaben Bhaidas (b. 1844) from Bombay, who was married to Bhaidas Maganlal, is described as performing sevā daily for one hour. She also spent large amounts of money organizing Bhāgavata saptāhs (seven day discourses on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa) in her home, and would invite other Puṣṭimārgīs at her home for satsaṅg. In addition to making donations to Puṣṭimārg insitutions (like the “Lad-seva Samaj”), she is also described as being a great supporter of female education; she apparently donated 10,000 Rupees to a girl’s school in Surat. She donated money to the Gujarati Hindu Ladies’ organization and was even president of a ladies’ group in her caste community (152).

These examples describe the religious and social activities of women who lived through the reformist activities of the late nineteenth century. From these
descriptions, lay women can be understood as key participants in the maintenance and embodiment of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity. Examples of their religious activities include making donations to havelīs, going on pilgrimage, singing Puṣṭimārg devotional songs, organizing kathās and satsaṅgs in their homes, and performing domestic sēvā daily. Taking into consideration the potential costs of undertaking annual pilgrimage, offering gifts to havelīs and to their Mahārājs and bahūjīs, as well as organizing Bhāgavata kathās and patronizing and participating in women’s organizations, it is clear that many of these women came from wealthy, upper-class Puṣṭimārg families.

**Conclusion**

In the nineteenth and early-twentieth century socio-religious reform movements of Gujarat, women and their religious activities became the sites upon which family status and respectability were debated. In the final chapter of this thesis, we trace these discourses to the present, and discuss how contemporary women’s domestic ritual activities become implicated in the production and display of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and family prestige. Before we can do this, it is important to gain further insight into the religious lives and activities of Puṣṭimārg women in the sect’s history. Thus far, chapters one, two, and three have highlighted several elements of Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities through the prism of historical texts, reformist writings, and socio-religious movements. However, in order to appreciate the vital role Puṣṭimārg women have played – and continue to play – in maintaining and perpetuating the sect’s living traditions, in the following chapter we turn to traditional sources of Puṣṭimārg social history: the Brajbhāṣā hagiographies (vārtās) and the popular poetic compositions.
produced by Puṣṭimārg women in Gujarati and Hindi. On the one hand, as texts that straddle the boundaries between hagiography and history, the vārtās provide us with a sense of how the tradition itself perceived of lay women’s social positions and religious roles in Puṣṭimārg. On the other hand, the devotional writings of Puṣṭimārgī women demonstrate one of the significant ways in which women have participated in the sect, namely as authors and performers of Puṣṭimārg devotional songs.
CHAPTER 4

Gender and Genres:
Towards a Social History of Women in Puṣṭimārg

Throughout the social history of the Puṣṭimārg tradition, women have been the key actors in the performance of domestic ritual. They also remain the primary organizers of Puṣṭimārg-related social activities, such as satsaṅg gatherings, bhajan maṇḍalīs (“devotional singing groups”), and Bhāgavata Purāṇa kathās (commentarial discourse on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa). In an effort to historically contextualize my discussion of contemporary Puṣṭimārg women’s religious participation in the following chapter, the present chapter outlines a social history of women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg more broadly. I do this by turning to traditional sources of Puṣṭimārg history, (1) the hagiographies which narrate the lives of both Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanatha’s exemplary disciples, and (2) the devotional compositions written and sung by Puṣṭimārg women.

My discussion of Puṣṭimārg women is divided between female lay practitioners and those women who hail from the Gosvāmī household, namely the wives (bahujiṣ) and daughters (beṭijīṣ) of Mahārājs. In addition to the brief historical references provided in the previous chapters, the sect’s hagiographical literature known as vārtās (“accounts”) are a rich source for understanding Puṣṭimārg women’s religious practices. Through portraying the exemplary devotion of female lay practitioners, the vārtās provide us with an indication of the kinds of religious activities Puṣṭimārg women typically engage in. These include the performance daily sevā in the home, the offering of donations to
havelīs, the organization of feasts or satsangs for fellow Vaiṣṇavs and, finally, the vārtās also provide examples of female poet-composers.

As for bahūjīs and beṭijīs, traditional historical sources highlight how bahūjīs assumed leadership positions as “Mājī Mahāraja” (mother Mahāraja) after their husbands – the Mahāraja – passed away. Using nineteenth century manuscript sources, early print material, and other historical texts from within the tradition I also demonstrate how the wives and daughters of Mahārajs were actively engaged in the production of devotional songs in the popular genres of dhol-pad and garbā.⁹⁴

Although the ritual and caste status of bahūjīs and beṭijīs differ from those of female lay practitioners, their modes of religious participation overlap in one significant way: both women from the Gosvāmī household and female lay practitioners produced dhol-pads and garbās in the vernacular languages of Gujarati, Hindi, and Brajbhāṣā. Puṣṭimārg lay women, moreover, continue to preserve, perform, and transmit these compositions through women-centered oral traditions. In an effort to contextualize our examination of the vārtā-hagiographies as well as our discussion of the performance genres in which Puṣṭimārg bahūjīs and beṭijīs composed, I begin by providing a brief outline of Puṣṭimārg literature more broadly.

⁹⁴ Examples of manuscript materials include Kakko (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088), Kṛṣṇa-Ras (B.J. Institute., ms. 6671), Gupta-Ras (B.J. Institute, ms.8511a), Sevā-Vidhi-Utsav (B.J. Institute, ms. 2177), Puṣṭi-Sevā (B.J. Institute, ms. 1089), Padsamgrah (Oriental Institute. 144.7357), Vaiṣṇavāna Vasant Holi Dhol (Oriental Institute, ms.14359), Vaiṣṇavāna Sevā Srīgār (Oriental Institute, ms. 14364).
Brajbhāṣā and the Vernacular in Puṣṭimārg

Vallabha, the founder of the sect, grounded himself in Brahminic authority and the ācārya philosophical lineage by composing all of his works in Sanskrit, including the Tattvārthadīpanibandha, his major theological work, the Śoḍaśagraṃthāḥ, sixteen treatises delineating his philosophical (Śuddhādvaita) and devotional (Puṣṭimārg) systems, and by writing commentaries on important treatises such as the Brahmaśūtras (his Anubhāṣya) and on several cantos of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (his Subodhinī). His second son, Viṭṭhalanātha, also contributed to the Puṣṭimārg Sanskritic literary tradition by writing further commentaries on Vallabha’s writings and through composing his own major works, such as the Bhaktihetunirṇāya, the Bhaktihaṁsa, and the Vidvanmaṇḍanam. It was only in the third generation of the Vallabha-kul or hereditary lineage, with the figure of Gokulanātha (1552-1641) – the fourth of Viṭṭhalanatha’s seven sons – that compositions began to appear in a language other than Sanskrit.95 Although Gokulanātha continued to write commentaries in Sanskrit, he composed numerous texts in Brajbhāṣā, literally “the language of Braj.”

The Braj region or maṇḍal (“circle”), which includes Mathura, believed to be Kṛṣṇa’s birthplace and Vrīḍivān, the home of Kṛṣṇa, refers to both the heavenly realm where Kṛṣṇa is said to be performing his eternal līlās (“sports”), and to its earthly manifestation, the region located in north India just south of Delhi. The Braj maṇḍal played an important role in the development of Vaiṣṇav-Kṛṣṇa sects in the sixteenth and

95 Subsequent descendants of Viṭṭhalanātha, the most prolific being Puruṣottama, son of Piṭāmbara (1668-1725), still continued producing commentaries and primary works in Sanskrit.
During this period followers of Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇav tradition in Bengal, made pilgrimages to the Braj region and mapped out different areas mythopoetically associated with the life of Kṛṣṇa.

By the turn of the seventeenth century Brajbhāṣā had become North India’s most important literary and courtly vernacular language, that is, the language of classical Hindi literature (rīti). Celebrated Vaiṣṇav poets, such as Sūrdās and Tulsidās, had already composed devotional works in the language of Braj, believed to have been Kṛṣṇa’s own native tongue. As Allison Busch illustrates, the imbricating processes of developing Vaiṣṇav religious cultures, the consolidation of Mughal rule during Akbar’s reign (r. 1556-1605) – with its capital located close to the area of Braj – as well as Rājpūt sponsorship of temple constructions in the region facilitated both religious and courtly interest in the language. Meant for devotional singing, the Brajbhāṣā kīrtans or pads of Vaiṣṇav poets were less formal in style and technique compared to the courtly context in which Brajbhāṣā flourished and rose to literary prominence: “…Brajbhasha was from the beginning a highly versatile poetic idiom that appealed to many people: used by Vaishnavas as a vehicle for devotion, it was transformed – and, the historical record suggests, suddenly and with great éclat – into a major court language from Akbar’s day” (7).

As Busch indicates, in a time when theological and formal literary texts were still being composed in Sanskrit, several prominent figures in the Braj region, like Hit Harīvaṃś (1502-1552?), remembered as the founder of the Radhavallabha sampradāya,
and his contemporaries Svāmī Haridās and Harirām Vyās, began to write vernacular devotional songs in the genre known as pad (“foot” or verse) (27). They, along with poets like Sūrdās, wrote of Kṛṣṇa’s childhood līlās as well as the intense love and longing (vīrāha) gopīs experienced for Kṛṣṇa. Through the medium of vernacular languages, the most cherished narratives from the ninth century Vaiṣṇav magnum opus, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, were beginning to seep through the elitist grip of Sanskrit pandits to the everyday Vaiṣṇav public. Within the tenth canto of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which is dedicated to the life of Kṛṣṇa, the five chapters describing Kṛṣṇa’s dance (rāsa-līlā) or “love-games” with the gopīs of Braj, collectively called the Rāsa-Paṇcādhyāyī, have played a significant role in the theological and aesthetic development of Vaiṣṇav traditions. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Rāsa-Paṇcādhyāyī was singled out and rendered in Brajbhāṣā by the middle of the sixteenth century by Harirām Vyas, who was the first bhakti writer to have done so. He is followed by the Puṣṭimārg poet, Nanddās (fl. 1570), and later by Bhupati (fl. 1687) (28).

97 For Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha and other Puṣṭimārg thinkers, like Gokulanātha, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is counted amongst the most revered scriptures (after the Vedas, the Bhagavat Gītā, and the Vedānta sūtras). The largest section of Vallabha’s philosophical treatise, the Tattvadīpanibandha, is dedicated to his exegesis on the Purāṇa. In his commentary on one of Vallabha’s verse-treatises, “An Exhortation to My Heart,” Gokulanātha even proclaims the Bhāgavata Purāṇa to be a descent-form or verbal avatār of Kṛṣṇa (Redington 2013, 77-78). Furthermore, Puṣṭimārg theologians raise the rāsa-līlā chapters high above other Kṛṣṇa narratives. The Subodhini, Vallabha’s commentary on several chapters of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (canto 1-3, 10, and part of 11), is structured in such a way that the rāsa-līlā section is part of the sub-treatise on the “Rewards” of Puṣṭimārg bhakti (Redington 1990, 21). The very structure and style of the Rāsa Paṇcādhyāyī reveals how the five chapters hold a special place within the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. As Schweig demonstrates, its poetic language is distinctive and its structure resembles that of a Sanskrit drama. Throughout the chapters, moreover, as many as eighteen other līlās from within the Bhāgavata Purāṇa are recalled (2005, 15). The rāsa-līlā is anticipated as early as the third canto (BP 3.2.24), and is also the only narrative after which a benedictory verse appears declaring that if one hears and recites this story, one achieves supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa (BP X.33.36-39).

98 A Gujarati rendition of the Rāsa-Paṇcādhyāyī by Nanddās in the dhol genre can be found in the second volume of Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Sangrah (Lallubhai Changlal Desai, 1913), pp.173-206.
If we return to Gokulanātha, who appears to have been active towards the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, it is now understandable why he would have chosen to write in the Brajbhāṣā language – a move that significantly departed from traditional Puṣṭimārg literature practices. By this time Brajbhāṣā was flourishing as the lingua franca of north Indian bhakti poets, and it was serving as the medium of classical courtly literary genres (rīti). Given the popularity of Brajbhāṣā as simultaneously a courtly and devotional language, Brajbhāṣā would have helped facilitate Gokulanātha’s project of vernacularizing Puṣṭimārg literature most successfully.99

According to traditional accounts, Gokulanātha’s greatest contribution in Brajbhāṣā is the production of a “practical guide” to Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s teachings. This guide, according to Richard Barz (1994), took the form of a hagiographical collection of stories, vacanāmṛt, “nectar in speech,” which were then collected, ordered, and supplemented by commentaries into written accounts or vārtās (44). Among the vārtā hagiographical literature, the stories of the lives of the eighty-four disciples initiated by Vallabha, the Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavān kī Vārtā (CVV), is the oldest and is held in high esteem within the sampradāy. The CVV is also one of the earliest extended narrative prose compositions in any form of Hindi (45). In addition to the CVV, the tales of the two hundred and fifty-two (84x3) disciples initiated by Viṭṭhalanātha, the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavān kī Vārtā (DSBVV), are also attributed to Gokulanātha and traditionally hold canonical status within the tradition.

99 In his History of the Sect of Mahārājas (1865), Karsondas Mulji provides an extensive list of Brajbhāṣā texts, which are considered “as authorities by the sect” (97-98). The list consists of seventy-four Brajbhāṣā texts in total, thirty-nine of which are translations of Sanskrit works.
Although Gokulanātha is credited with the oral composition of the vārtās, which in all likelihood were transmitted to Puṣṭimārg laity in congregational settings, it remains uncertain when and by whom these narratives were put into writing. One popular opinion holds that Gokulanātha supervised his grand-nephew, the prolific Harirāy Gosvāmī (1590-1715!), in collecting and editing his oral narratives (46-47). In his commentary on the two collections of vārtās, known as the Bhāv prakāś, Harirāy describes the present life of each disciple in the context of three “births” or “lives”: their life before their initiation by either Vallabha or Viṭṭhalanātha, their life after initiation, and the life of each disciple as a participant in Krṣṇa’s eternal līlā in Golok, the Puṣṭimārgī heavenly abode (49). Due to their rendition in a vernacular language such as Brajbhāṣā, these didactic tales of Puṣṭimārg devotees, which illustrate their exceptional devotion and spiritual transformation upon initiation, were more accessible as Puṣṭimārg teachings than any of the Sanskrit works of the sampradāya, such as the Subodhini, the Anubhāṣya, the Śoḍaśagranthāḥ and so on. For our discussion, especially, the vārtās also serve as an important source for understanding how the Puṣṭimārg tradition perceived of women’s devotional practices and roles in the sect, a subject which we now turn to.

The World of Women in the Puṣṭimārg Vārtās

The Brajbhāṣā vārtā literature can serve as an important heuristic lens through which we can map “women’s worlds” in Puṣṭimārg’s history. As didactic tales that

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100 As Vasudha Dalmia argues, Harirāy’s Bhāv prakāś or commentaries secured the rise of the vārtās to canonical status in the tradition. The siddhānta or axiom, which he drew from each narrative and each devotee’s life, articulated Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanatha’s teachings and authority. The Bhāv prakāś even introduces the vārtās as a bhagavadvārtā (“godly discourse”), “in stature and splendor higher than the Bhāgavatapurāṇa itself, or Ācāryajī’s commentary thereof, the Subodhini” (2001a, 132).
narrate the paradigmatic devotion of Vallabha’s and Viṣṭhalanātha’s followers, the
_Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā_ (CVV) and the _Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā_ (DSBVV)
describe religious activities that Puṣṭimārg women have typically engaged in, such as the
performance of domestic _sevā_, offering gifts to Puṣṭimārg _havelīs_, and organizing events
with fellow Vaiṣṇavs. The _vārtās_ also provide examples of female poet-composers,
whose poetry is continued to be performed to this today.

As texts that stand at the intersections of social history and hagiography, the
_vārtās_ must be read through the dual perspectives of history and polemics. In keeping
with the egalitarian rhetoric of “the _bhakti_ movement,” the _vārtās_ describe how Vallabha
and Viṣṭhalanātha initiated men and women from lower castes and poor families.⁹⁰¹
However it is important to keep in mind that the Puṣṭimārg _vārtās_ were compiled and
orally transmitted during a time when the tradition was not only continuing to attract new
followers and expand its influence to parts of western India, but when the tradition was
also in the process of consolidating and demarcating itself as a radically distinct _bhakti_
sect. Therefore, like the hagiographical literature of other sectarian traditions, the _vārtās_
constituted what Rupert Snell calls the “mechanics of propagation” (Snell 1). Although
the hereditary leaders of the sect are Brahmin men, Puṣṭimārg’s own “mechanics of
propagation” eschewed and subverted Brahmanic orthodoxy and asceticism in favor of an
emotionally engaging and personal devotional practice. Moreover, Puṣṭimārg stressed
devotional practices that shifted away from the temple and instead centered upon the
family and were located within the household. The rhetoric of domesticity – with its

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⁹⁰¹ From the narratives in the _Caurāsī Vaiṣṇavan kī Vārtā_ we can deduce that thirty-nine of Vallabha’s
disciples were Brahmin, thirty-six belonged to the warrior caste, five drew from the mercantile community,
while six were _śudrās_ (Saha 2004, 114).
emphasis on performing sevā in the home, preparing elaborate food-offerings, and worshiping Śrīnāthjī as a child – was undoubtedly an important vehicle for Puṣṭimārg community formation. “The family setting,” Vasudha Dalmia argues, “was important for the community. However, the family in its turn had to be amenable to integration within the greater social unit which was the community” (2001a, 135).

Examples of female initiates are interspersed throughout the vārtās. An important female figure in the religious imagination of Puṣṭimārg is the child-widow Ajab Kūvari, whose life is briefly narrated in vārtā 98 of the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav ki Vārtā. As a child she is said to have lived with Mīrābāī in the town of Sinhad (present day Nathdwara), but soon left to become a disciple of Viṭṭhalanātha. Because of her earnest devotion, the vārtā tells us, Śrīnāthjī would come from his home in Braj to play a game of dice with her in Sinhād daily. Oral tradition attributes the reason for the permanent move of Śrīnāthjī to the town of Nathdwara out of his love for Ajab Kūvari (Anne-Marie Gaston 1997, 51).

An important theme, which threads through many vārtās, is the subversion of Brahmanic authority and values, such as rules of ritual purity and pollution, caste status, and asceticism. Vallabha unequivocally questions and defies “ved aur lok, the norms laid down by the dharmaśāstras and by custom” (Dalmia 2001a, 147) and maryādāmārg (“path of limitations”) – those practices characterized by smārta ritual and Vedic prescriptions. This theme, on many occasions, is also connected to representations of

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103 Several vārtās from the CVV highlight Vallabha’s disapproval of renunciation. For example, vārtā 33 describes how Rāmdās Sāṅcorā, who apparently was inclined towards ascetic practices from a very young age, was forced to marry when he was nine years old. After meeting with Vallabha, he abandoned his wife.
women’s exemplary devotion in the vārtās. For example, in the Caurasī Vaiṣṇa anv kī Vārtā, Rukmiṇī, described as the daughter of a wealthy merchant (śeṭh) and follower of Vallabha, questions the ritual efficacy of bathing in the Ganges. In the vārtā (6.1), Rukmiṇī argues that one only bathes in the sacred river to fulfill “worldly desires” (kāmnā), while she is already “bathed in the sevā of Kṛṣṇā” (maī to yāhī [sevā] bhānti nḥat ho). As a demonstration of the superiority of Puṣṭimārg devotion over Brahmanic religiosity, the vārtā ends with Viṭṭhalanātha stating how the the sacred river-goddess Gaṅgā in fact “came to Rukmiṇī” (gaṅgājī ne rukiminī pāī) when Rukmiṇī passed away.

Another note-worthy vārtā in the same compilation (61) also illustrates a similar polemic vis-à-vis ritual purity. Ūrbāi, a woman who has just given birth, is in a state of ritual pollution. She does not perform sevā to Śrīnāthji because of this but also laments the fact that no one else in the household is performing sevā. Śrīnāthji appears before Ūrbāi and tells her that the rules of purity and pollution can be compromised in order to ensure the continuance of domestic sevā. Similarly, vārtā 9 narrates the tale of Mādhodās who keeps a prostitute, who he eventually abandons after speaking to Vallabha. Later, it is described how the prostitute waits for Viṭṭhalanātha to come to her town and initiate her into Puṣṭimārg. When he refuses, she decides to fast to death until he bestows her with her own svarūp for sevā. Viṭṭhalanātha concedes after seeing her steadfast devotion. However, soon other Vaiṣṇavas become upset when they realize she continues to perform sevā while menstruating. When Viṭṭhalanātha questions her about to become a renunciant. When he returned home one day and again tried to leave his wife, Ranchoṛjī (the svarūp in Dwarka) told Rāmdās that since he is now a disciple of Vallabha he cannot be selfish and and must accept his wife. Vārtā 41 narrates the tale of two young men who, like Rāmdās, also tended towards renunciation when they were young. However, Vallabha explained to them how devotion to Śrīnāthji and his sevā should take place “within the world and within the framework of family life” (Dalmia 2001a, 140).
this, she proclaims how she has had many masters before, but now, because of his grace, she has one true master, Śrīnāthji. How can she abandon his worship? Viṭṭhalanātha saw how pleased Śrīnāthji was with her sevā and allowed her to continue even in her state of impurity. However, he did note how her case was a special one; she was the exception to the rule of performing sevā in pure (apras) states. Another vārtā (5), where Brahmanic ritual orthodoxy is undermined in favor of bhakti to Śrīnāthji, is one about a female practitioner by the name of Rājo. She is requested by Vallabha to bring ghee (clarified butter) for use in a śrāddha (ancestor ritual) ceremony for his father. Rājo repeatedly declines to provide the ghee to the Vaiṣṇav messenger who was sent by Vallabha. When she later brings food-offerings to Vallabha, he asks her how she could have cooked them without using ghee. It becomes clear that all along Rājo did have ghee but only enough to make offerings for Vallabha, her guru – which clearly took precedence over a “worldly” or Vedic custom like śrāddha (even if it was for Vallabha’s own father!).

In some vārtās it is made clear how traditional Brahmanic understandings of widowhood as inauspicious is also overlooked. These vārtās narrate the tales of women who are widows and perform sevā daily. One vārtā in particular (31) illustrates how it was only until a woman became a widow that Vallabha would grant her initiation. This was because her husband was not a religious man (“bhagavat dharma ko dveṣi hato”). Vallaba predicted when her husband would pass away – after she had two sons – and asked her to wait till then to come to him for initiation. Vārtās 42 and 60 also tell the tales of two widows, a Brahmin and a Kṣatriya respectively, who are also described as too poor to present adequate offerings to Śrīnāthji during sevā. When other Vaiṣṇavas began to criticize the way the Brahmin widow from Adel performed sevā and how she
did not have the financial means to do so, (“…yah kachū ācār samujat nahī, kachū dravy nāhī…”), Vallabha silences them by commending her on the sincerity of her loving sentiments (prūt), rather than on the quality of her offerings: “…ācār, kriyā, dravyon, Śrīthākurjī prasan nāhī, Śrīthākurjī mē prūti cāhiye.” The vārtā narrating the devotional life of the Kṣatriya widow from Sinhad also makes a similar point. When the widow did not have enough money to buy proper materials for making food-offerings, she only made a few rotīs for Śrīnāthjī. She felt distressed for doing this and the next day decided to borrow money to ensure the adequate preparation of sāmagrī. Śrīnāthjī himself reproached her for borrowing money to make his food. He comforted her to not worry; he is content with her offering rotīs if that is all she can afford to do.

Like all hagiographies, the vārtās blur the boundaries between history and the miraculous. That is to say, on the one hand, the vārtās may serve as a useful hermeneutical framework for understanding the social history of Puṣṭimārg, its ritual traditions, and modes of female participation in the sect. On the other hand, the vārtās, as embellished didactic tales of Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s chosen disciples, also tell us something about what the tradition sought to idealize: the transformative power of initiation and (the fruits of) practicing sincere bhakti to Śrīnāthjī, Vallabha, and Viṭṭhalanātha. Vārtā 144 from the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavan ki Vārtā demonstrates the supernatural abilities of a female bhakta who had become a disciple of Viṭṭhalanātha when she was a child-widow. When she grew very old she had the ability – with the grace of her guru – to see death approaching. On eight occasions, which coincided with different Puṣṭimārg festivals, she requested death to wait for a more suitable time to take her away from her body, for she needed it to continue her sevā of Śrīnāthjī. This vārtā not
only demonstrates the extraordinary abilities one is granted by becoming Puṣṭimārgī and performing sevā, but also how important it is to continue the performance of sevā, so much so that even death should – and can – be postponed.

In addition to vārtās which relate the miraculous, there are many vārtās, which I believe, reflect or can help shed light on women’s religious lives in Puṣṭimārg’s history. For example, in the CVV, vārtā 78 describes a wealthy Puṣṭimārg couple from Ujjain: Mavaji Patel and his wife, Birajo. Birajo is portrayed as a generous female patron, one who sponsors grand celebrations and feasts for Vaiṣṇavs, donates large amounts of grains to cows, and makes donations of jewels and clothes for ritual offerings at Puṣṭimārg temples in Gokul. This may be an indication of women’s donative activities in Puṣṭimārg. Elsewhere, women are described as receiving initiation at the time of marriage if they are marrying into a Puṣṭimārg family (DSBVV 36), reading devotional literature (CVV 4, DSBVV 223) and performing sevā several times a day in their home. Sevā includes adorning Śrīnāthji’s shrine and image and offering all the meals cooked in the house first to Śrīnāthji and then to the family. Śrīnāthji is ultimately adored as a son and treated as a member of the household (see vārtās 4, 12, 15, 43, 44 from the CVV, and vārtās 27, 83, 195, 223 in the DSBVV).

In the DSBVV, there are also several vārtās that illustrate familial tensions that can arise when no one but the wife/daughter-in-law is Puṣṭimārgī. For example, vārtā 102 describes how a woman who was a long-time Puṣṭimārg follower married a devotee of the god, Rām. Even after marrying him, she continued to perform sevā to Śrīnāthji. The vārtā describes how she also adorned the image of Rām as Kṛṣṇa by placing peacock feathers and a yellow shawl on him. Eventually they had a disagreement about the
superiority of Kṛṣṇa and Rām. Before the argument intensified, however, Śrīnāthji interceded and blessed them both so that they no longer quarreled over such matters and could continue performing sevā to their deity of choice peacefully.

In the DSBVV, vārtā 27 provides a lengthy description of a family who eventually converted to Puṣṭimārg when they witnessed the earnest devotion of their daughter-in-law. When it initially dawned upon the daughter-in-law that her in-laws’ home is devoid of any devotional activity, she vowed to not drink the water in the house and die. However, after praying to Viṭṭhalanātha and asking him to give her the courage to voice her desires (“…ab to tum merī sahāī karoge to mero kahyo yāke man mē āvego”), she asked her mother-in-law if she could have new utensils to prepare offerings and also requested that no one interfere with her sevā. Her mother-in-law agreed. The daughter-in-law then cooked every day, offering her food to Śrīnāthji, and feeding the prasād (consecrated food-offerings) to her husband and in-laws. Everyone, including the mother-in-law was so moved by her devotion that they eventually received initiation from Viṭṭhalanātha. In this vārtā, by way of being an exemplary devotee, the daughter-in-law is ultimately presented as a woman who teaches her family about Puṣṭimārg devotion and ritual (“…sab pranālikā tumhārī bahū tumhāre āge kahegī. Tab ve sagare ghar ke jo kachū kām karte so sab vā bahū sō pūchte. Tab jo bahū kahatī soī ve sab karte.”).

Finally, if we turn to examples of female poets in the vārtās, in the Caurasī Vaiṣṇāvan ki Vārtā we find the figure of Kṛṣṇadāsī who, although was initiated by Vallabha, became the maidservant of Viṭṭhalanātha’s wife, Rukmiṇī, and lived in their house (vārtā 45). Kṛṣṇadāsī is described as being constantly absorbed in the mood of Kṛṣṇa (bhagavad rasmē magan rahatī), and in this state she would compose songs about
her experiences of Kṛṣṇa’s lilās. Another example of a female composer comes to us from the Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇav ki Vārtā in which Gaṅgābāī Kṣatrāṇī is born after her mother, Rūpyantī, dreamt that she made love to Viṭṭhalanātha. Gaṅgābāī Kṣatrāṇī is described as having written many kīrtans under the male pen-name of Śrīviṭṭhalagirdharan (vārtā 65). Even today we find examples of Gaṅgābāī’s Brajbhāṣā poems in several kīrtan compilations, such as the Kirtansaṅgraha: Varṣutsav ke kīrtan (kīrtan compilation for annual festivals) published in 1936, and in the large four-volume kīrtan collection used in havelī liturgy. In these anthologies, examples of pads written by Gaṅgābāī as Śrīviṭṭhalagirdharan are found for Janamaṣṭīmi badhāī (felicitations for Kṛṣṇa’s birth), and are composed in the sāraṅg rāg (“classical melody”).

Brajbhāṣā compositions by figures like Gaṅgābāī, in specific rāgs, demonstrate how women produced poetry in Puṣṭimārgī canonical or classical genres, namely, that of havelī kīrtan or temple music. However, in the Gujarat context Puṣṭimārg women appear to have produced many more devotional compositions in the popular performance genres of dhol-pads and garbās. The authors of such songs have traditionally been the wives (bahūjīs) and daughters (beṭījīs) of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs, while Puṣṭimārg lay women continue to remain the primary keepers and performers of such genres. Like the vārtās, dholīs and garbās composed and sung by Puṣṭimārg women help illustrate the ways in which women have both participated in and contributed to living Puṣṭimārg religious cultures. I now turn to my discussion on the production and performance of Puṣṭimārg dhol-pads and garbās by first introducing the traditional roles and literary activities of bahūjīs and beṭījīs in historical contexts.
The Religious Roles and Literary Activities of Bahūjīs and Beṭījis

For the most part, scholarly investigations of Puṣṭimārg have focused on the sect’s Brahmin, male hereditary leaders, the Gosvāmis or Mahārājs. As descendants of Vallabha-cārya, the founder of Pustimārg, Gosvāmis are granted both the authority to initiate individuals into the tradition and to perform Puṣṭimārg sevā in temple (havelī) contexts. Moreover, they locate themselves in Brahminic authority by producing commentaries on the Sanskrit treatises written by Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha, and later Puṣṭimārgī theologians. As householders, Gosvāmis are expected to secure the hereditary expansion of the Puṣṭimārg lineage by marrying women from outside the Vallabha vaṇuśa or kul (“lineage”). If they are not already followers of Puṣṭimārg, newly married bahūjīs must obtain initiation (dīkṣā). The grooms of beṭījis must also obtain dīkṣā before the wedding and, until recently, the husbands of beṭījis would live with them in the Gosvāmī household.

As Brahmin women, bahūjīs and beṭījis have traditionally observed pardā, remaining in the zenānā of havelīs or their homes most of the time. Their private, secluded lifestyles have made it difficult to document their social histories and their ritual and literary activities. The extent of bahūjīs’ and beṭījis’ participation in the performance of temple sevā, therefore, is unclear. According to the current chief mukhiyā (primary temple officiant) of the Nathdwara havelī, both caste and gender rules prevented women from entering the main sanctum, thus excluding them from the performance of abhiṣek (“ablution”), ārtī (“waving of lamps”), and sṛṅgār (“adorning the svarūp”).104 However, in the event that the Gosvāmī passes away and has no male heir, biological or adopted, to

104 Personal communication, December 29, 2007.
take on the leadership position, or if the son has not reached an appropriate age, bahūjīs are known to have acceded to the authoritative position of the Mahārāj. For example, Padmāvatī bahūjī (ca. 1835-1882) took over both the administrative and ritual activities of the prominent Kankroli havelī in Rajasthan after her husband Gosvāmī Śrī Puruṣottamjī Mahārāj passed away. She commanded leadership of the havelī as Padmāvatī “Mājī Mahārāj” for approximately thirty-six years during which she (and her beṭījīs) performed the daily sevā of Dvārakādhīśjī’s svarūp, maintained gracious and profitable ties with Rajasthan’s reigning families and patrons, and initiated individuals into the sect.¹⁰⁵

A contemporary example, enabled by the modern justice system, reifies the traditional practice of bahūjīs taking on leadership roles within the sampradāy. A court case from 1969 (which we came across in the last chapter) between Mahalaksmī bahūjī and Rannchoddas Kalidas in which the status of the Gokulnāthjī havelī in Nadiad was debated, demonstrates how a bahūjī has appropriated all the ritual and legal rights of a havelī after the death of her husband.¹⁰⁶ During the case, it is also mentioned how a lay

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¹⁰⁵ Padmāvatī Mājī Mahārāj is said to have initiated members from royal families including Baisahiba Rupkavari of Alvar in 1872, and Rajasthan’s rājā Mokhamsingh Raval in 1875. Additional historical information concerning the lives and activities of Mahārājs from the Kankroli havelī, including accounts about their relationship with the Mewar royal family, can be found in Kanṭhmanī Śāstrī’s large compilation entitled Kāmkroli kā Itihās, published in 1932. Using information from private manuscript collections in the Kankroli havelī library, Mewari land grants, and unpublished Sanskrit texts, Śāstrī’s Kāmkroli kā Itihās serves as an important source for the history of Puṣṭimārg in Rajasthan.

¹⁰⁶ There are several additional legal examples of a bahūjī representing the interests of the Vallabh-kūl and that of her havelī. One is a Gujarat High Court case between Daniraiji Vrajlalji vs. Vahuji Maharaj Chandraprabha on 16 April, 1970. Bahūjī Chandraprabha, the widow of Purusotamlalji Raghunathji Gosvāmī of the Junagadh havelī, was attempting to revoke the adoption of Vrajlalji that was made after the death of her husband. Another case, which took place in the Bombay High Court on June 17, 1937, was between Kamala Vahuji Maharaj vs The Collector of Bombay. Kamala bahūjī filed a suit against the Collector’s Office, contesting the legality of an assessment made by the office on land belonging to her in Bombay. The land was granted to Gosvāmīs of the Kutch havelī in 1788, and was thus inherited by later descendants leading up to Kamala bahūjī.
devotee, Vasant bāī had her will executed in 1897 in which she made two bequests, one to the Gokulnāthī havelī and another in the name of “Maharāṇī” bahūjī (“Queen mother”), the female leader of the Gokulnāthī havelī at the time.

If we turn to another popular North-Indian Vaiṣṇav sampradāy, the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇavs of Bengal, we find an analogous practice in place. Hagiographical sources of the sect illustrate how Sitādevī, the principal wife of the conservative Brahmin thinker, Advaita Ācārya, became the defacto leader of Advaita Ācārya’s followers after his death. Advaita Ācārya, who was born decades before Caitanya (b. 1486) is traditionally remembered as one of Caitanya’s prominent disciples and as a figure who helped facilitate the rise of Caitanya as the leader of the Gauḍiyā movement (Manring 1998; 2011). Although several of Advaita Ācārya’s followers accepted Sitādevī as their new leader, many orthodox practitioners were concerned over the possibility of Sitādevī initiating male disciples. According to Rebecca Manring, Sitādevī, herself, assured would-be disciples that she would only be able to provide spiritual instruction to her female followers (2005, 196). Jāhnava Īśvarī, the second wife of Nityānanda – Caitanya’s other well-known and more liberal-minded disciple – also took on a leadership role when he passed away. However, unlike Sitādevī, Jāhnava initiated male disciples, starting with Vīrabhadra, the son of Nityānanda’s first wife (who also was Jāhnava’s sister). By becoming Vīrabhadra’s guru, Jāhnava inaugurated and secured the lineage of Nityānanda’s followers, and is remembered as a woman who solidified ties between the Vaiṣṇavs of Bengal and the leaders in the Braj area (Brzezinski, 67-68; Wulff 1997, 68).

One could argue that examples of Puṣṭimārg bahūjis – or Gauḍiyā theologians’ wives – taking on the ritual and administrative leadership of religious lineages after their
husbands pass away is not exceptional, since their accession can be understood through the logic of inheritance practices. And though it is important to point out such historical incidences, we should be careful not to romanticize these as evidence of women’s “equal status” in religious traditions. In this context, women’s leadership roles are contingent upon their husbands’ inability to rule; they are appropriating authority, which ultimately rests in the figure of male Gosvāmīs.

What can perhaps be considered remarkable, however, is an instance when the daughter of a Mahārāj takes on the leadership position. The figure of Yamunā beśījī (ca. 1669-1730), better known as Yamuneśprabhuji among her contemporary followers in parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat, is perhaps the only beśījī who took on the leadership role of “Mahārāj” in the history of the Puṣṭimārg tradition. Her early dates make it difficult to extract historically verifiable data from later hagiographic materials such as her jīvan carīts or “life stories.” Nevertheless, according to these jīvan carīts, in 1684 at the behest of a well-known Puṣṭimārgī disciple by the name of Kṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭ, the un-married Yamunā beśījī is said to have ascended to the gaddī (“seat”) of her late father, Gosvāmī Gopendraprabhuji, in Dungarpur, Rajasthan. Rājā Jaswantsiṅgh Rāval of Dungarpur is

107 Again, in the Gaṇḍīya Vaishnava context, a similar occurrence takes place when Hemalatā Thākurāṇī, the daughter of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya – one of the principle leaders of the “second generation” of Gaṇḍīya Vaishnavs and a contemporary of Jhānāvā – began to initiate disciples (Brzezinski 72-73).

108 Today, in Gujarat and Rajasthan, the followers of Yamunā beśījī belong to a sub-sect of the Puṣṭimārg sampradāy, known popularly as the Gopālapanth. Since Yamuneśprabhuji, the only beśījī who has assumed an authoritative position such as that of a Mahārāj is the contemporary figure of Indirā beśījī Gosvāmī (b. 1939). Indirā beśījī Gosvāmī, a prominent beśījī who never married, maintains her own havelī – the Vrajdhām havelī in Baroda, and to the disapproval of male Gosvāmīs she also initiates individuals into the sect. Indirā beśījī draws parallels to the figure of Yamuneśprabhuji herself, and is a guru figure for hundreds of female disciples. Today, she is the centre of an ever-expanding global community of Puṣṭimārgī Vaishnava.

109 Yamuneśprabhuji’s hagiography are found in several contemporary Gujarati reprints including Śrī Jamunā Śvarūpāmṛt (1992), Śrī Jamunē Jaśnānī Sāyānī Arth (1994), Śrī Jamunē Caritāmṛt (2000), and Śrī Jamunē Mahāprabhujiṇā Jīvan Caritāmṛt (2002). For the purposes of this section, the Śrī Jamunē Mahāprabhujiṇā Jīvan Caritāmṛt serves as my primary source.
said to have consecrated the event by placing a *tilak* on her forehead, bestowing upon her the title of Tilkāyat (“leader”) (Figure 1). The *carits* go on to describe how she undertook pilgrimages all around Rajasthan and Gujarat, giving talks on Puṣṭimārg theology, performing various miracles, and even initiating individuals into the tradition. In emphasizing how Yamunā *beṭījī* was perhaps the first female of the Gosvāmī household to step outside the *zenānā* and assume such an authoritative role, her hagiographic accounts also describe how she dressed in the manner of a male Gosvāmī and “even rode horses”.110 Although such an event, of a *beṭījī* assuming leadership status, is unprecedented in the history of Puṣṭimārg, it can perhaps be legitimized by the fact that she is the daughter of a Gosvāmī and therefore a rightful descendent of Vallabhācārya. Furthermore, since she did not marry she preserved her position as a part of the Vallabh-κūl or family. This is a strategy that is used by Indira *beṭījī*, a contemporary figure whose actions resonate with the historical Yamunā *beṭījī*. By never marrying, yet remaining and living in her own home/*havelī* surrounded by her entourage of female devotees, Indira *beṭījī* hovers between an ascetic-householder lifestyle. This certainly helps her mitigate her authoritative and controversial status as an influential Gosvāmī figure in the Puṣṭimārg community.

110 Śrī Jamuneś Mahāprabhujiṇā Jīvan Caritāmiṇī, 14.
Turning to the literary activities of historical women from the Vallabh-kul, although they are part of an orthodox Brahmin household, women from these families are described as being able to know how to read, at the very minimum, by the mid-nineteenth century. In his testimony during the libel case (February 27th 1862), Jadunathji Mahārāj states how “The wives and daughters of the Maharajas read books in the Brij Bhasha” (MLC 344). As we discussed in chapter three, in the Bombay presidency, women’s public education – both in English and in vernacular languages – only began in earnest in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Certainly, no daughter or wife of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs attended these schools. In fact, males from these families also perhaps did not begin attending public education institutions until the twentieth century. The bahujīs and betjīs of Gosvāmīs were, therefore, most likely exposed to Puṣṭimārg literature and learned how to read and write in their household, and via their male counterparts.

One is tempted to ask if Brahmin women in Gujarat or in the Bombay Presidency during the nineteenth century (or perhaps even earlier) were more likely to be literate if they were part of a devotional community such as Puṣṭimārg. Again, if we turn
to the Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇav tradition, Donna Marie Wulff argues precisely this – that it is in the Vaiṣṇav context that literacy among women has been very high, at least in the Bengal region. “The Caitanya movement,” Wulff explains, “with its great outpouring of Sanskrit and vernacular literature, appears to have served as a powerful stimulus to literacy” (1985, 222). She claims that the Vaiṣṇav community can be distinguished from other religious communities of Bengal due to the high rate of literacy among its female mendicants, which was even noted by British officials in the early nineteenth century (1997, 69-70). Extant Sanskrit works and vernacular poetry composed by women starting from the sixteenth century demonstrates that non-mendicant women from the leading Gauḍiyā Vaiṣṇav families were also participating in the production of literature.

In the social histories of these two north Indian Vaiṣṇav communities, what parallels can be drawn in terms of women’s presence and modes of participation? We already discussed how the widows of leaders in both sampradāyas assumed authoritative roles. Women from both communities, whether they were the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs or were lay practitioners, also composed literature in the form of devotional poetry. It would, however, be difficult to mirror Wulff’s argument and claim that it was in the Vaiṣṇav context of the Puṣṭimārg community that the women of Gujarat became literate. A significant difference between the two sampradāys is the presence of learned female mendicants in the Gauḍiyā sect. Since Puṣṭimārg does not ascribe to an ascetic worldview there has been no prevailing tradition of renunciation practised by members of the Vallabh-kul or by the lay community, as we observe in the Jain and Śvāminārāyaṇaṇ sects of Gujarat.
Furthermore, in the Gauḍīyā context, in addition to Sīṭādevī and Jāhnavā, who took on leadership roles in the sect, the tradition’s hagiographical material also illustrates how certain females, such as Śacī and Viṣṇupriyā (the mother and wife of Caitanya, respectively) were admired by the early community and are continued to be revered by Gauḍīyās today. Although there are many women who are mentioned in the Puṣṭimārg hagiographical (vārtā) literature as the devotees of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha, I do not believe there are analogous to the figures of Śacī and Viṣṇupriyā. None of the figures in the vārtās are held in especially high esteem nor do they have shrines dedicated to them. Similarly, historical bahūjis and beṭijīs are also not revered in the same way as some of the wives and daughters of Gauḍīyā leaders are (with the exception of Yamunā beṭijī and Indirā beṭijī).

With respect to female composers of devotional poetry and songs, although both sampradāys certainly appear to have active female poets and writers, there are no Puṣṭimārg or Gauḍīyā equivalents of Janābāī, Muktaāī, and Bahīnābāī of the Vārkarī tradition, Akkā Mahādevī of Vīrāśaivism, Āṇṭāl of Śrīvaiśṇavism, Karaikkālammaiār of the Tamil Nāyaṉar, or a Mīrābāī. A distinction, therefore, has to be made between female bhakti poets who have risen to the status of sainthood, on the one hand, and female poets more generally. Foregrounding the lives and literary practices of extraordinary female poet-saints is certainly important, however, scholarly emphasis on such figures has come at the expense of silencing the voices of numerous “ordinary” female poet-bhaktas – those who do not “defy social norms and taboos,” “overturn models of femininity,” or “overturn caste hierarchy” (Ramanujan 1982, 318-319). It is these every-day female disciples, who are married, have children, and yet continue to
demonstrate their devotion to Śrīnāthji through producing and singing devotional compositions that constitutes the subject of the following section.

**Locating Dhol and Garbā in the Historiographies of Gujarat and Gujarati Literature**

In Gujarat, *dhol-pads* and *garbās* constitute the most popular performance genres in which *beṭijīs* and *bahūjīs* have composed their devotional songs. Francoise Mallison (1986, 1989, 1996) provides a history of the *dhol-pad*, describing it as an “old folkloric” (1996) form belonging to the *pad-bhajan* genre, and also discusses the performance of *dhols* by Puṣṭimārgī women in Gujarat. According to Mallison, *dhol* comes from the Sanskrit *dhavala*, meaning “white” (*dhavala > dhaula > dhola*), and represents a kind of panegyric found in Prakrit and Apabramsha literature, and is also present in later post-Apabhramsha, Old Gujarati and Medieval Gujarati, as well as Rajasthani literature. Neelima Shukla-Bhatt corroborates this by explaining how the origins of *dhol* or *dhavalgīt* can be found in the *rāso* poetry in Gurjar Apabramsha, the language of Gujarat before the development of the Gujarati language. *Rāso*, she explains, was a long poem divided into short sections of varying length, and was meant to be sung.

111 The Gujarati literary historian, H.C. Bhayani, describes *dhavala* in Gujarati and Rajasthani literature as “a song, a panegyric, in praise of a person for whom some ceremonial occasion is being celebrated. Wedding songs constitute a special class of Dhavalas, and the Dhol sung in the Vallabhaite Vaiṣṇava sect make up another class” (1988, 99; 1993, 91). He also acknowledges how in contemporary times, the scope of the application of the term “dhol,” compared to the earlier use of “dhavala,” has been extended to include Purānic and social themes, “and the lines of distinction between Pad, Bhajan, Garbī and Dhol have become blurred” (1988, 100; 1993, 92).

Different communities and castes, Mallison argues, “have their own *dhol* and their own specific way of singing them” (1989, 88). *Dhols* also do not have a fixed form nor do they necessarily have known authors, and even though they can have difficult rhythm patterns, they do not always follow set tunes and styles of singing. Combined with the fact that they have circulated in primary oral forms, *dhols* constitute fluid genres that have remained difficult to define.

Like *dhol*, *garbā* (pl. of *garbo*) is also a popular performance genre in Gujarat. The word *garbo* traditionally denotes a perforated round clay pot with a lamp inside symbolizing (the womb of) the Goddess, Devī. The term also refers to the popular ritual dance performed by mostly women in open spaces around the *garbo*, or around any other image representing Devī (Shukla-Bhatt forthcoming; Mallison 1989, 91n.16; Thompson 1987, 170). The dance is performed especially during Navarātrī, the nine-night goddess festival in the Hindu calendar month of Aśvin, and during other auspicious occasions such as weddings, pregnancy rituals, the birth of a child, and so on. Finally, the songs which women sing while performing the ritual dance are also called *garbā*. With the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in Gujarat, *garbās* have moved beyond their traditional Śākta context and have come to include songs about Kṛṣṇa, describing his *līlās* and the love between him and Rādhā and the *gopīs*.

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113 A more “vigorous” form of the dance is performed by men and is known as *garbī*. The songs on which men perform this dance are also called *garbī* (Thompson 172, 177). Mansukhlal Jhaveri, in his *History of Gujarati Literature* (1978), explains that the terms *garbā* and *garbī* are used interchangeably, however, he does note some differences between the two: “Garbo is longer than garbī. The metrical tune of the garbo is different from that of the garbī. Garbi dilneates a single emotion or feeling; while garbo describes a person, an event or an object…Most of the garbas of the mediaeval period are related to the devotion of Mata; while most of the garbis of the period are related to the love between Krishna and Radha or Gopīs” (248-249). Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, on the other hand, describes *garbī* as we understand *garbā*: “A garbi means a song or poem generally recited by ladies” (1914, 35). For this reason, I do not distinguish between *garbā* and *garbī*, unless the author I am referencing does so. I use the term “*garbā*,” more broadly, to denote this genre of popular Gujarati song and dance.
Historical texts, such as Behramji Malabari’s *Gujarat and the Gujarātis* (2nd edition, 1884) and Alexander Forbes’ *Rāsmālā* ([1878] 1973), provide nineteenth century descriptions of women singing popular genres such as *garbās* during religious festivals in Gujarat. Here Malabari – who, we should note is a Parsi reformer – offers a general overview of the “native singing” practices of Gujarat as follows:

“At home it is incumbent on every Hindu – man or woman – to sing a few snatches of devotional music at stated hours…Hindu women also sing what we call season songs, at times sitting, at times in a circular dance, with rhythmic hand-clapping. There is music to celebrate birth, marriage, etc. Much of it is good and wholesome, tinged with religious ideas, with superstitious, and at times demoralising associations” (307-308).

Although it is clear from these descriptions that he is discussing the performance of *garbā*, elsewhere, Malabari does specifically refer to *garbā*:

“The nine nights [Navarātṛi] are sacred to *garbās*, popular songs sung in the street of Gujarāt… a bevy of from twenty to sixty women of all ages circle round and round, taking up a refrain, and often repeating in chorus a verse sung by one and, at times, two women, keeping time to the clap of hands. These *garbās* are evanescent scintillations of the genius of Dayaram, the Byron of Gujarat. The hero of the songs is mostly Krishna” (338-339).

Finally, in typical reformist fashion, Malabari ultimately ties the erotic themes of such performance genres to the debauchery of Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs:

“This harmless legend [of Kṛṣṇa] is worked by Dayaram into various orgies of songs whose luscious sweetness and witchery of style have done more than any other social vagaries to perpetuate the horrors of those dens of iniquities, the Vaishnava Maharajas' Mandirs. In this respect Dayaram's poetry works in Gujarat as ‘procuress of the lords of Hell’” (339-340).

Another historical source, which provides examples of women’s singing practices in late nineteenth-century Gujarat is Alexander Kinloch Forbes’ *Rāsmālā* ([1878] 1973). Again, during the festival of Navarātṛi, Forbes describes how “people, walk or dance, clapping their hands and singing songs” around an earthen vessel, pierced
with numerous holes and containing a light (613). Forbes also provides examples of women singing during weddings: “Their songs are usually poetical compositions in honour of Seetā or Rookmunee, the wives of Rām and Krishn, or else ludicrous and not unfrequently obscene stanzas” (623), as well as a description of women’s “labor songs,” sung by the wives of cultivators as they, too, toil the land. Forbes provides a full translation of a song called “The Koonbee’s Griefs,” which is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, and which describes the hardships and struggles of farmers (543-544).

Scholarly texts on Gujarati literature, such as Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri’s Milestones in Gujarati Literature (1914) and his Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature (1924), as well as Mansukhlal Jhaveri’s History of Gujarati Literature (1974), offer very brief histories and descriptions of performance genres like the garbā. There is in fact little to no reference found on the dhol genre in such texts. Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri (1914) notes how the celebrated fifteenth and sixteenth century poets of western India, Mirābāī (1499-1547) and Narsiṁha Mehta (1414-1480), are among the earliest bhakti writers to have composed devotional poetry on Vaishnav themes in the Gujarati language. He provides a terse description of the performance of popular genres such as the garbā when he describes how Mirābāī’s songs, which “on the surface seem to be mere erotic verse,” are sung by mothers and daughters “in the Garbās” (35).

Elsewhere Jhaveri illustrates how the poet Vallabh Mevaḍā Bhaṭṭ (fl.1700), who hailed from Ahmedabad, wrote many garbās in praise of the goddess Bahūcharāji and also composed several on Kṛṣṇa-related themes (1914, 149-151). It is here that

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114 In his discussion on the various types of genres in which poets and writers composed, Manusukhlal Jhaveri simply lists “dhol” as one amongst these genres, without offering further information. Composers of dhol include Pritamdas (1720?-1798) and Dhiro (1753?-1825) (50-52).
Jhaveri provides another short indication of women singing and dancing *garbā*, which according to him is an activity “most indulged in” during Navarātrī in cities like Surat, Baroda, Ahmedabad, and Bombay. Mansukhlal Jhaveri also indicates how, before Vallab Mevaḍā Bhaṭṭ, no *garbās* of earlier writers seem to be available; Vallabh Bhaṭṭ is, therefore, considered the earliest and most distinguished writer of *garbās* in this early period (48). A later poet, Raṇchhodjī Divān (1785-1841), who served as the *diwan* of Junagadh, is also remembered for his *garbās*. Both Raṇchhodjī and Vallabh Bhaṭṭ, Mansukhlal Jhaveri argues, “are the two poets whose garbas had captured the minds and hearts of Gujarati women” (55). Finally, Dayārām (1776-1852), who was a follower of Puṣṭimārg, is listed as the last of the major poets of “medieval” Gujarati literature and, in terms of his literary output he is held on par with his well-known predecessors, such as Premānanda (1636-1734) and Śāmal Bhaṭṭ (1690-1769). Dayārām composed works of prose, *pads*, *caritra kāvyas* (biographies, such as *Mīrān Charitra*, a poem narrating Mīrā’s life), “dialogues,” poems elaborating the tenets of Puṣṭimārg, and *garbās* and *garbīs*. Despite having such a prolific output, Mansukhlal Jhaveri insists that Dayārām

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115 Jhaveri (1914) notes the names of other authors who composed *garbās/garbīs* dedicated to Krṣṇa and/or the goddess. These include Pritamdās (1730), Raṇchhod Bhaṭka (1804), Raṇchhodjī Divān (1768-1841), Raghumāthdās (19th century), Shāntidās, Devānand, and Dayārām (1767-1852) (159; 192-197; 206-207; 239-249). In his later book, *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (1924) he describes the writer and friend of Alexander Kinloch Forbes, Dalpatram Dhayabhai, as a composer of many *garbīs* (“verses intended for girls and women”) as well as wedding songs (26).

116 Rachel Dwyer acknowledges that 1852, the date marking the death of Dayārām, is late to be termed “medieval.” The designation of medieval in this context, she argues, should be understood in the widest possible sense to mean “pre-British period” (2001, 5).

117 Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri enumerates Dayārām’s publications as follows: forty-eight works in Gujarati, forty-one in Brajbhāṣā, seven thousand “miscellaneous” *pads* in Gujarati, twelve thousand in Brajbhāṣā, two hundred in Marathi, forty in Punjabi, fifteen in Sanskrit, and seventy-five in Urdu (1914, 239). As a well-known Puṣṭimārgī poet, Dayārām helped with the process of disseminating Puṣṭimārg theological and philosophical themes in a vernacular language such as Gujarati. Some of the most important Puṣṭimārgī philosophical works written by Dayārām in Gujarati include the *Rasikvallabha* (“The Beloved of Connoisseurs,” 1838) and the *Puṣṭipatahrahasaya*. In the *Rasikvallabha*, which is structured as a dialogue between a teacher and pupil, Dayārām introduces important Puṣṭimārg doctrines such as the nature
is best known for his *garbīs*, which celebrate the love between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and the gopīs. And although writers before Dayārām have composed *garbīs*, “…it was Dayaram who brought the form to perfection and created many masterpieces distinguished for their superb lyricism” (64).

With regards to the presence of female poets, Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his *Milestones in Gujarati Literature*, does offer short descriptions of female authors. However, he prefaces his discussion by stating how no female poet can be “named in the same breath with the Rajput Queen of Mewad,” that is Mīrabāī, yet they did manage to “turn[ed] out verses of a very mediocre, if not of quite an inferior quality” (209). Jhaveri mentions a Brahmin widow, Divali bāī, who became a pupil of a religious teacher by the name of “Dādā Guru Bhagavān.” Divali bāī wrote approximately five-hundred poems on themes and narratives drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic (211). Another Brahmin female poet, Radha bāī (1834-1857), was the disciple of a guru named Avadhutnath. Jhaveri notes how Radha bāī wrote in a language “which is neither unadultered Gujarati, Marathi, nor Hindi. It is a curious mixture of the three, and unless one knows all the three languages, it is difficult to follow her” (212). Based on his description, she appears to have been a Vārkari follower, for in addition to composing *garbās* on Vaiśṇav themes she also wrote biographies of saints like Jñāneśvar and Tukarām. Kṛṣṇa bāī, another Brahmin poet, composed several poems including *Kṛṣṇaharaṇī* (“Lullabies for Kṛṣṇa”) and *Ṣitājīnī Kāncalī* (“The Bodice of Sītā”), which according to Jhaveri are well-known
to women across Gujarat (213). Finally, Jhaveri mentions two more female poets: Puri bāī, who is known for her poem on the marriage of Sītā (Sītā Maṅgal), and Gāvri bāī (b.1759), another Brahmin widow, who led an ascetic lifestyle and wrote philosophical verses. Jhaveri describes her as the “only Vedanti poetess in Gujarat” (214).  

Very little information is provided about dholś and garbāś in English-language historical texts on Gujarati literature. However, it is clear from such sources that although garbāś and dholś were composed by the celebrated male poets of Gujarat, these genres were most often sung, remembered, and passed on by women. Women have traditionally been the experts and authorities of these popular genres, singing dholś and garbāś during social gatherings together with other women (such as during satsaṅg groups), or while performing domestic chores, during pilgrimage or congregational settings, and at auspicious occasions such as Navarātrī, weddings, pregnancy rituals, or births (where they are called dhol-maṅgal).

**Locating Dhol and Garbā in Puṣṭimārg**

In Gujarat, there are dholś and garbāś found in the Jain, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇav traditions. In the Vaiṣṇav context, much like the Brajbhāśā pads discussed above, dhol-pads and garbāś have enabled the transmission of epic and purāṇic narratives – most often drawn from the Rāmāyaṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa – through their rendition in a more simple language that can be understood by all, including women and children. In the Vaiṣṇav setting, Mallison defines dhol as a kind of bhakti song, “sung in the Gujarati

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118 Sonal Shukla, in her essay on women sant poets of Gujarat (1989), discusses the life and oral poetic compositions of three additional female poets, Gaṅgasatī, Toral, and Loyal. According to Shukla, all three sang of nirguṇa bhakti, “with a touch of Sufism” (65).
language and to a *desī* tune, with the function of praising God in order to earn *puṇya* ‘merit’” (1989, 90). In Gujarat one finds *dhols* in the vernacular languages of Hindi, Gujarati, and Brajbhāṣā; even if they are in Braj, however, it is not the courtly *bhāṣā* of *rīti* literature.

In the Puṣṭimārg context, more specifically, one way of characterizing *dhols* and *garbās* under the larger rubric of Puṣṭimārg performance genres is by distinguishing them from their elitist counterparts: the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtans* of havelī liturgy. The *kīrtan* repertoires, which are performed as ritual service in havelīs, constitute another category of Brajbhāṣā religious literature of significance in the Puṣṭimārg *sampradāy* in addition to the vārtās. Among the thirty to forty poets whose compositions are found in the Puṣṭimārg temple *kīrtan* repertoires, the most celebrated and revered composers are the *aṅṭachāp* (“eight-seal”) poet-saints believed to have been initiated into the sect by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha.119 Since the time of Viṭṭhalanātha and his earliest descendants, the *kīrtans* of the *aṅṭachāp* along with the compositions of other poets, which are in the form of short *pads* or poetic verses, have been set to elaborate rāgs (“classical melodies”) and have become integrated as part of daily havelī *sevā*. The *pads* vary thematically but are performed with the specific aim of capturing the *rasa* (mood) of each of the eight daily *darśans* or *jhānkis* (“viewing period”), festival, and/or season in

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119 The first four poet-saints initiated by Vallabha are Kumbhandās, Sūrdās, Kṛṣṇādās, and Paramānandādās; Viṭṭhalanātha is said to have initiated the last four: Nandādās, Govindaśvāmi, Cittasvāmi, and Caturbhujādās. According to Milieu Ho (2006) the *aṅṭachāp* became prominent in the tradition with the composition of the seventeenth century Śrīnāthji *kī prākṛtikā prākṛtikā vārtā* (“The Manifestation of Śrīnāthji”), which describes the eight poet-saints as descending on earth with Śrīnāthji in order to sing his praises (199). The hagiographies of the *aṅṭachāp* along with other composers are found in the CVV and DSBVV. In his extensive study of the poet-saint Sūrdās, Hawley (1984) interrogates Puṣṭimārg’s claim that Sūrdās was a disciple of Vallabha and argues, how over time, the *sampradāy* appropriated the literature of Sūrdās to augment the sect’s influence and reputation. Whitney Sanford (2008) has conducted an extensive study on the works of the *aṅṭachāp* Paramānandādās.
By virtue of their integral role in temple liturgy, as well as their “classical” style of performance, the Brajbhāṣā kīrtan repertoires have acquired canonical and an elite status within the tradition. Their preservation and performance over the centuries by a hereditary lineage of male singers and musicians (kīrtāṅga), moreover, accords the kīrtans with liturgical legitimacy and authority over the other category of Puṣṭimārg vernacular performance genres. As we have seen, in the Gujarat context, the most popular of these performance genres include Gujarati dhol-pads and garbās, performed mostly but not exclusively by females in the sect.

Mid to late nineteenth century sources indicate that several bahūjīs and beṭijīs were engaged in producing devotional writings in the vernacular languages of Hindi, Gujarati, as well as Brajbhāṣā. Sundarvantī bahūjī, the wife of the prominent Puṣṭimārg theologian, Harirāy (b.1590), is perhaps the earliest figure whose writings are found today. She composed devotional songs in the languages of Gujarati and Brajbhāṣā using the pen-name “Sundardāsī” or “Dāśīsundar” (Caturvedī 57). However, the majority of writings come from figures who lived towards the mid to late nineteenth century.

120 From the time of Viṭṭhalanātha and his descendants, the sevā of Śrīnāthji in havelī contexts has been structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as jhāṅki (“glimpses”). Each jhāṅki represents a moment in Kṛṣṇa’s līlā, from his waking up (maṅgalā), eating his mid-day feast (rājī-bhog), to wandering in the pasture with cows and his friends (gvāl). In larger havelīs, during each jhāṅki, ritual musicians perform the kīrtanas of the poets, backdrop paintings (picchavāis) are hung, and food offerings (bhoga) are placed before the svarūp to invoke the mood of each respective līlā. Ho explains how the kīrtans in the standard, four-volume compendium in use today in all havelīs (Puṣṭimārgīya Kīrtan Samgrah, 1867) can be divided into the following categories: nitya (daily), utsav (festivals), baddhāī (felicitations for birthday), malhār (rainy season), and dhamār (spring season). The songs are in turn organized according to the chronological order in which they are to be sung in the day and year, their theme or liturgical function (during a particular jhāṅki, for example), and the rāg in which they are sung (2006, 205).

121 Kakko (B.J. Institute, ms. 1088); Pudsamgrah (Oriental Institute. ms. 144.7357).

122 A well known dhol composed by Sundarvantī bahūjī is called “Cintannu Dhol.” It can be found in printed form on its own (Cintannu Dhol, 1977) or included as part of larger dhol compilations such as Puṣṭi Ras (2004), and in volume two of the popular collection, Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Samgrah (Desai 278-288). In his published doctoral thesis, Gosvāmī Harirāyājī aur unkā Brajbhāṣā Sāhitya (1976), Vishnu Caturvedī briefly discusses the literary activities of Sundarvantī bahūjī and provides a few examples of her dhol-pads.
century, including Sobha bahūjī from the Śrī Gopināthjī havelī in Porbandar, Ratnaprabha bahūjī and her daughter Rasikpriya beṭījī, also from Porbandar, and Yasoda beṭījī from Motamandir in Surat.\textsuperscript{123} Their literary compositions – which were likely passed down orally and only written down later – are found in the popular oral poetic genres of dhol-pads and garbās.

Today, a significant source of Puṣṭimārg dhol and garbās written by Ratnaprabha bahūjī and Rasikpriya beṭījī is the large collection entitled “Rasik Kaumudī” (1968). Examples of songs written by Sobha bahūjī and Yasoda beṭījī can be found in several compilations including Paṇḍar Garbā (2004), Śrī Śobhāmājī Kṛt Nav Garbā (nd), and Prācīn Dhol-Pad Saṅgrah (1963, 6\textsuperscript{th} edition). In the latter collection, the Prācīn Dhol-Pad Saṅgrah, edited by Champaklal Chabildas Nayak, one finds several dhols composed by Yasoda beṭījī using the pen-name “Nijjan.” Examples of dhols include “Śrī Yamunā Darśan,” which describes the beauty of the river-goddess Yamunā (28); “Śrīmathuresjī nu dhol,” a dhol describing the adornment of the Mathureśjī svarūp (63); “Śrīmadvallabh Gher Pragatya,” a song celebrating the birth of Viṭṭhalanātha (158); and, “Śrī Sāth Bālako Na Dhol,” a dhol which narrates the birth and life of Viṭṭhalanātha’s seven sons (165-168). Finally, another important text in which one can find dhols and garbās composed by Puṣṭimārg bahūjis is Vrajsudhā (2009, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition). This collection contains songs written by Vrajpriya bahūjī and Kamalpriya bahūjī, the grand-mothers of the contemporary figure, Raja beṭījī. Raja beṭījī is the aunt of Tilak bāvā or Madhusudhan Gosvāmī from the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl havelī (first house) in Ahmedabad. Much like

\textsuperscript{123} Both Sobhamājī and Yasodabehījī, according to Mallison, lived in the nineteenth century and belonged to the family of the Gosvāmī of the sixth gaddī (house) of Surat (1989, 93fn. 23).
other compendiums, *Vrajsudhā* contains *dhols* and *garbās* which describe the qualities of the river-goddess Yamunā, praise the virtues of Vallabha, Viṣṭhalanātha, and members of the Vallabha-κुल, and has songs for festivals such as Kṛṣṇa’s birth (*janamāṣṭmi*), Holī, and hindolā. There are also numerous *dhols* extolling the beauty of the Natvarlājī *svarūp*’s adornment (*śrīgār*), as well as *dhols* meant for singing while performing the *sevā* of Natvarlājī, such as *dhol maṅgalnu, dhol śrīgār, dhol bālīlā, and dhol rājbhog* (33-39).¹²⁴

Puṣṭimārg *dhol-pads* and *garbās* differ in mode and style from *havelī kīrtans* – with *kīrtans* being set to specific *rāgs* – and they can also be distinguished by way of their performance and transmission through gender- and space-specific milieus – for example, *kīrtans* are taught and sung by male *kīrtankārs* in *havelī* contexts while *dhol-pads* and *garbās* circulate predominantly among women in domestic spaces.

Thematically, however, *dhols* and *garbās* have much in common with the Brajbhāṣā *kīrtan* repertoires. Both genres include songs which praise Śrīnāthji and the river-goddess Yamunā, describe the beauty of *śrīgār* decorations of different *svarūps*, narrate the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, and extol the qualities of Vallabha, Viṣṭhalanātha, and their descendants.¹²⁵

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¹²⁴ Kamalpriya’s poems are also found in other collections such as the *Prācin Dhol-Pad Saṅgrah* (1963, 6th edition) and *Dhol Pad Sāgar* (1972, 4th edition).
¹²⁵ For example, in volume one of the large collection, *Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Saṅgrah* (Desai 1913), chapter three contains *dhols* in praise of the river-goddess Yamunā; *dhols* in chapter four describe the adornment (*śrīgār*) and qualities of Śrīnāthji and other *svarūps*; chapter five contains Gujarāti *dhols* and Brajbhāṣā *pads* celebrating the birth of Kṛṣṇa (*janamāṣṭamī*); chapters six to nine contain *dhols* extolling the virtues of Vallabha, Viṣṭhalanātha, and later descendants of the Vallabha-κुल.
An example of a dhol, “Dhol Svarūpvarṇan,” describing the svarūp of Śrīnatvarlāḷī is provided below. It is composed by Kamalpriya bahūjī (translations are my own):

Śrīnatvarlāḷne re ke nirkhū nayanbharī
gun gāū tamārā ke nitprati nem dharī |1|
cho sundar śāṇā re, ke bālkiṣor vaḷī
nand āṅgaṇ tādā re, ke pag nūpur dharī |2|
gale gunj birāje re, ke sahaḷ singār karī
šir pāg gulabī re, ke candrikā ek dharī |3|
Śrījamunājīne ūre re, ke bhaṅkī bhīḍ ghaṇī
gvalnī saṅg khelo re, ke kar genduk dharī |4|
nikunjnā nāyak re, ke ānand kheḷ karī,
Kamalpriyā gun gāy re, ke cit carṇe dharī |5|
(Vrajsudhā, 50)

I fill my eyes with the vision of Śrīnatvarlāḷ
I sing this song in your praise, always |1|
Oh Natvarlāḷ, you are so beautiful
Standing in Nanda’s garden, your feet adorned with ankle bells |2|
A garland around your neck, your natural beauty
Wearing a pink head-dress, adorned with the moon |3|
Near the banks of the Yamunā river, you are surrounded by your devotees
Playing a game of ball with your young friends |4|
Prince of Braj, your lilā delights all
Kamalpriyā sings your praises, in whose heart your lotus feet dwell |5|

Another example of a song, which is meant for singing during the Holī festival is called “Raṅg raṅg re.” It is composed by Ratnaprabhā bahūjī (under the pen-name “Kumudinī”):

Raṅge rame re, raṅge rame re, śyāmā Śrīnāṭhī śū raṅge rame
raṅge bhare re, raṅge bhare re, śyāmā Śrīnāṭhī ne raṅge bhare |1|
sāmsāmī nen bān chhūte pichkārīo,
kinšuk gulāb rase bharī dharī jāriyō,
piec pānc bhāḷ bharyā manaṭun hare re - śyāmā |2|
abīl gulāl taṅṭi bharī vaḷī jāriyō,
āśpās dodhī aṅṛataṅṭi chorīyā
chalbalśū chel tāṅe pūṇṭe phare re - śyāmā |3|
Kumudinī kīṣor tame hāṛyā, hū jithī,
They are playing with colors, they are playing with colors Šrīnāthī and Šyāmā, what are they playing with colors
Fills him with colors, fills him with colors, Šyāmā fills Šrīnāthī with colors |1|
They exchange glances sharp as arrows, and color burst out of the pichkāri (water gun)
Water pots are filled to the brim with the sap of the kiṃsuk and rose trees,
Five types of feeling fill, agitate, and enchant the mind - Šyāmā |2|
Large pots are filled with the perfumed red colors of Holī,
Girls of the ahīr caste run close together,
Why all this deceit and these tricks - Šyāmā |3|
Kumudīni says, Krṣṇa you’ve lost and I’ve won,
In this game, love manifests itself in fairness
You’ve shown this form for the sake of everyone …Šyāmā |4|

Although they are not composed by female authors specifically, there are also other dholīs that summarize the tenets of Puṣṭimārg and which narrate the lives of the devotee-saints from the Brajbhāṣā vārtās. By rendering important Puṣṭimārg themes into a language for all to understand in Gujarat, dhol-pads and, similarly, garbās form “the nucleus” of Puṣṭimārgī literature in the Gujarati language (Mallison 1989, 93).

One of the primary reasons it is difficult to locate authors of garbās – and especially dholīs – is because these genres have circulated and persisted through oral traditions, especially by way of their continual performance by women. Due to their simple form and language, and their embeddedness in women’s cultures, such popular performance genres have generally been over-looked by scholars like the Jhaveris in their historical readings of Gujarati literature. Within the Puṣṭimārg context, moreover, both

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126 In volume one of the Vividh Dhol tatha Pad Samgrah, there is a dhol rendition of one of Vallabha’s well-known Sanskrit treatises, the Siddhāntarāhysa (part of the Śodāṣagrāntha), called Siddhāntaraḥasyanu Dhol (Desai 1913, 105). Dholīs listing and narrating the lives of the eighty-four and two-hundred and fifty-two disciples of Vallabha and Viṣṭhālanātha, respectively, are also found in the same collection: Śrī Caurāśī Vaiṣṇavnu Dhol and Śrī Do Sau Bāvan Vaiṣṇavnu Dhol (Desai 1913, 359-378).
traditional scholars and western academics have not paid much attention to dhol-pads and garbās because they are not sung in havelīs and are not found in the canonical and elitist language of the tradition, Brajbhāṣā.

The prevalence of these genres in a sectarian tradition like Puṣṭimārg has enabled the preservation – and, indeed, the standardization – of these popular oral genres to a large extent, especially with the advent of print technology by the mid-nineteenth century in Gujarat when many of these songs began to appear in printed form.\textsuperscript{127} By the twentieth century, dhol-pads and garbās, along with popular Brajbhāṣā kīrtans, appeared in small booklets or large compendiums, which have been circulating in Puṣṭimārgīs’ private collections. In addition to the collections mentioned above, a very popular compilation which I was continuously advised to turn to is the two-volume Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Saṅgrah, edited by Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai. It was first published in 1913 in Ahmedabad and the collection has been reprinted several times since then.\textsuperscript{128}

Additional collections include the Dholpad Sāgar (1972, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition), and the Prāchīn Dhol-pad Saṅgrah (1962, 6\textsuperscript{th} edition). In many of these texts, Brajbhāṣā kīrtans are interspersed among Gujarati dhols and garbās. Although the rāg for each kīrtan is provided, lay practitioners, with no training in classical music have continued to sing these kīrtans in their own spontaneous mode of devotional singing, choosing a style and

\textsuperscript{127} Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri indicates how Durgaram Mehtaji’s purchase of a lithograph press from Bombay in 1842 was perhaps the first of its kind in all of Gujarat. However, he also makes reference to the Mission Press of Surat, which was founded in 1817, pushing the introduction of print technology in Gujarat to an even earlier date (1924, 12). In Ahmedabad, the first two lithographic printing presses, Bajibhai Amichand’s press and the Pustak-vriddhi-karnar-mandali’s press, were established in 1845. By the 1860’s, twenty-one presses had been set up in Ahmedabad, producing publications in Gujarati, Hindi, Sanskrit, English, and Marathi. As Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Seth note, the publications of this period mostly consisted of books on religious and mythological themes, folktales, medieval poetry, books on “ancient civilizations,” and so on (2011, 129-130).

\textsuperscript{128} See footnote 125 for a chapter breakdown of Desai’s Vividh Dhol tathā Pad Saṅgrah. Another hymnal edited by Desai is the Vaiṣṇavonā Nitya Niyamnā Pāth (1986).
tune they may have learnt from other females, such as elder women in their families or from women during satsaṅg gatherings.

Although both the kīrtan repertoires and dhol-pads and garbās can be characterized as Puṣṭimārg “performance genres,” that is, part of Puṣṭimārg oral traditions, and they certainly share similar themes, they differ in several important ways: (1) language – kīrtans are only in Brajbhāṣā; (2) style of singing – kīrtans are sung in specific rāgs; (3) gendered modes of production and preservation – havelī kīrtans have been composed and performed by men, and transmitted through a hereditary lineage of male artists; and, finally, (4) the spatial and temporal contexts in which they flourish – kīrtans, for the most part, are sung in havelīs and during darśan periods. The standardization and preservation of the Brajbhāṣā kīrtans by way of a written repertoire (the four-volume kīrtan samgrah in use in all havelīs today), classical style of singing, and transmission through a hereditary male lineage together mark the Brajbhāṣā havelī kīrtans as part of Puṣṭimārg’s fixed oral tradition (Doniger 1991). Unlike the elitist, canonical genre of havelī kīrtans, dhols and garbās represent the popular fluid oral tradition of Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism in Gujarat. Less static, these genres have persisted by way of their continual performance by women in the home during sevā, in satsaṅg groups with other women, during auspicious festivals and occasions, and in between darśan periods on havelī grounds. The songs, which can be in Gujarati, Hindi, or Brajbhāṣā, and which do not necessarily have to adhere to a fixed style and mode of singing, have been shared among Puṣṭimārgī women and passed down from mother/-in-law to daughter/-in-law in families, and were either memorized or transcribed by literate women. As Mallison argues, dhols – and by extension, garbās, as performance genres can be
characterized by their function, rather than the author’s name or their form: “The considerations which justify their existence and provide for their classification are when, where, by whom or for which occasion they are sung” (1989, 89fn7).

**Dhols and Garbās as Women’s Song Genres**

On the one hand, it is clear that dhols and garbās serve a similar “function” as the havelī kīrtans in that they are first and foremost devotional songs – sung as offerings to, and in praise of, Śrīnāthji. On the other hand, as fluid genres that have been sung, remembered, transmitted, preserved, and indeed have even been written by women, I suggest that dhols and garbās can also be included as part of the larger repertoire of “women’s song” genres, which are popularly characterized as “folk songs” or lok gūḍ̣. These songs are sung primarily by women during marriage ceremonies, the birth of children, during mourning ceremonies, while performing domestic or land labor, and during seasonal and festive occasions such as Holi (Raheja 1994, 1995; Raheja and Gold 1994; Mukta 1999; Jassal 2012; Narayan 1997; Trawick 1988; Flueckiger 1991; Banerjee 1989b). Although I am using “women’s songs” in its broadest connotation, I am conscious of the caste, class, and communal differences that index the performance of such genres. For example, “songs of labor” such as the kajlī genre are sung by low caste female agricultural laborers in the Jaunpur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Jassal 72). Similarly, Margaret Trawick discusses songs such as ēṭṭappāṭṭu, sung by lower caste and untouchable Paraiyar laborers, and kummipāṭṭu (“hand-clapping” songs) also sung by women from these communities in Tamil Nadu (198). On the other hand, genres such as pakhāṛu are sung by mostly upper-caste women – Brahmin, Rajput, mahājang, or sūds –
in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh in north western India (Narayan 1997, 26). As we will discuss in the next chapter, in my own field work among Puṣṭimārg women from the baniyā or bhātiyā communities, in addition to caste affiliations, class status also informs participants’ claim to specific genres. This is demonstrated by upper-class women’s rising interest in taking havelī kirtan lessons and the desire to sing them in their “proper rāg.”

Much like other women’s song genres, there are Puṣṭimārg dholī{0}s and garbās for weddings, religious festivals, and for seasonal occasions – but which, of course, articulate a Vaiṣṇav ethos. Although, at times, specific authors can be found for Puṣṭimārgī dholīs and garbās, their characterization resonates with Margaret Trawick’s definition of “folk song”: “…a ‘folk song’ is distinguished from other kinds of songs principally by the recognition (on the part of both singers and folklorists) that such a song is not the property of a single author, but is itself as divisible and recombinable – as collectively owned, or as unowned, we might say – as the persons who gave their voices to it” (1988, 212). Their folkloric nature, as well as their transmission among groups of women, mark dholı and garbās as public genres, in contrast to the more “confined” kirtans of Puṣṭimārg havelīs. However, as Kirin Narayan argues, since it is individuals

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129 As Kirin Narayan explains, pakharu are about “married life from a woman’s point of view…They describe an in-marrying bride’s longing for her family of birth; a bride’s mistreatment by in-laws in a joint family; and most centrally, a bride’s relationship with a husband who, more often than not, is absent” (Narayan 1997, 26).

130 So for example, during weddings in north India when the groom’s side (the barāt) are about to depart with the bride, the family of the bride, the “wife-givers,” sing songs of insult, gāliyan, addressed to the family of the groom, the “wife-takers.” In another large compendium of dholı and pads edited by Lallubhai Desai, the Gokulesjīnā dhol tathā padsamgrah (1916), there is a chapter entitled Vivāh utsav or “Wedding Festival” (chapter nine). It is not clear if the songs in this chapter are meant to be sung during weddings. However, the names mentioned in these songs are of members from the Vallabha kul and unlike popular wedding gāliyan songs, these songs are devotional in tone.
who preserve and transform such oral traditions, they can also be viewed as private: “an artifact of an individual’s memory and aesthetic pleasure” (1997, 27).

In addition to the fact that dhols and garbās are sung by women, a reason why I propose to include these genres amongst the larger category of “women’s songs” is because of the subtle social commentary one finds in these devotional pieces with regards to kinship ties, domestic tension, and gender roles. In collections like the Rasik Kaumudī (1968) and Vrajsudhā (2009) one finds a plethora of dhols and garbās where the heroine (nāyikā) exclaims to Śrīnāthji how she cannot stay with him much longer because her mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and/or husband will scold her if she remains away from the house. Other themes involve the heroine inviting Kṛṣṇa at a time when her female elders and husband are not present, asking Kṛṣṇa to wait for her until she is able to sneak out of the house (where she is under the constant surveillance of her elders), or proclaiming that she will be able to withstand the criticism of her female elders and husband if she can have a glimpse of Kṛṣṇa. I present a few examples of such dhols and garbās from these collections below (all translations are my own):

“Madhuvanni Vāṭ”

Madhuvan vāte, yamunā ghāte, rokī vrajnī nār, natvar! jāvā de
Hā albelī, chelchabītī, naval gujar nānī nār chā,
Have karonā āṭli vār – natvar! jāvā de |1|
Kamalnayan aḍšo nā mujne, nājuk mārī bhāy che,
Piyu! Dekhe gopkumār – natvar! jāvā de |2|
Kumudini dāsī, thay udāsī, durijan kero trās che
sāsūṭi deṣe gāl -- natvar! jāvā de |3|
(Vrajsudhā 117; Rasik Kaumudī 158)

At the forest’s edge, on the banks of the Yamunā, you accost the women of Vraj!
let me go,
I’m a beautiful, carefree young woman of the Gujar clan,
Now don’t take so long, Naṭvar! Let me go |1|
Lotus-eyed one, don’t touch me! My arms are delicate
My love! The cowherd men are watching, Naṭvar! Let me go |2|
Kumudinī dāsī is distressed, such is the plight of the poet
My mother-in-law will hurl insults at me, Naṭvar! Let me go |3|

“Mārā Chel Gumānī Śyām”

Mārā chel gumānī śyām re pyārā pālav mūkone,
sāsu amārī khūṣe vēlā, naṇḍal deṣē gāl,
vāṭene ghāṭe roḵī rahā ḍho, māro paraṇyo chadhāvē āl re |1|
khāṭā che goras ājanū vēlā, mūṭhā hū lāviś kāl,
saṅṅī sahelī sarve gāi, pyārā hū chū nānerū bāl re |2|
prīt prakaṭ nā kārīye vēlā, prakaṭ kiye ras ājāy,
Nijjānā ē nāṭh vīnā, mune bījē na āve vēl re |3|
(Vrajsudhā 112)

My proud and beautiful Śyam, let go of the edge of my sarī, my dear
My dear, my mother-in-law will become angry, and my sister-in-law will insult me
You’re blocking my path at the river bank, my husband will be full of rage! |1|
Today’s buttermilk is sour, my love, but tomorrow will bring sweetness
My friends have all gone, my love, I’m only a young girl |2|
Keep our love hidden, my love, once revealed the relish disappears
Nijjan can’t find love with anyone other than that lord of all creatures |3|

“Mārā Chel Chabilā Pyārā”

Mārā chel chabilā pyārā! mare mandir āvone!
Mārā madanmohan laṭkālā! māre mandir āvone!
mārā ghar pacchaḍē dvare, sajanī ek ūbhī rākhśā,
jiṅo sād karī bolāvo, māre mandir āvone! |1|
sāsu-naṇḍandal to nav jaṅe, piyujīthī paṅ chānū rākhśā,
mārā tanū ēp samāvo, māre mandir āvone! |2|
raṅṇī ramśun thālam saṅge, manmā mod ghānerālavśū,
mūṭhī morlaṅḍī saṃbhālāvo, māre mandir āvone! |3|
āvo Kumudinī nā pyārā! phālīyāṅnī sej bhicchāvśū,
komal kar mūjē parsāvo, mare mandir āvone! |4|
(Rasik Kaumadi, 57-58)

My beautiful love! Come to my temple!
Naughty Krṣṇa, beautiful as the god of desire! Come to my temple!
I’ll keep a friend on guard at the backdoor to my house,
Call to me softly, come to my temple! |1|
My mother-in-law and sister-in-law don’t have a clue, and it will be hidden from my husband as well,
Immerse yourself in the fiery desire of my body, come to my temple! |2|
In the night I will play with my love, we will bring much happiness to our hearts
Let me hear the sweet sound of your flute, come to my temple! |3|
Come, beloved of Kumudini! We will lay out a bed of flowers,
Draw your soft hands towards me, come to my temple! |4|

“Śrī Yamunājīne Kāṁṭhade”

Śrī Yamunājīne kāṭhade māre ramvā javā rās, pyārā prītamjīne pās, bānsarī bajavī mārī pūrī mannī āś, pyārā prītamjīne pās, sāsu roke, naṇadī roke, roke sahū sansārī, mohanvarne malvā chālī, vyākuṭh thāī vrājānārī - pyārā |1|
avalā tho ābhāṣan pheryā, avalā ambar odvā, nānakdā balakne melyā pāraṇiyāmā poḍya - pyārā |2|
chāndā kerī chāndnī ne śaṇḍpūṇāmnī rathe, Rasik prīhamśū range ramiyā sahālīne sāthe - pyārā |3|
(Rasik Kaumadi, 61-62)

Near the banks of the Yamuna river, I wish to play rās
with my dear beloved,
The sweet sounds of his flute fulfill my desires,
with my dear beloved,
My mother-in-lows stops me, my sister-in-law stops me, the whole world stops me,
I still go to see my beloved, this woman of Vraj is anxious – beloved |1|
I’ve adorned and draped myself
I’ve placed my child to sleep in a basket-swing – beloved |2|
On the night of the full moon, the moon’s rays fill the sky
Together with her friends, Rasik played with her beloved |3|

Such songs are meant to invoke the paradigmatic devotion of the gopīs or
Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa, as well as serve as a metaphor for all disciples’ relationship with the
divine. However, garbās and dhols such as these, I suggest, like other folk songs, can
also shed light on themes such as marriage, sexuality, patriarchy, and the possibilities of
female agency. Although many of these dhol-pads and garbās are composed by the
bahūjīs and beṭṭījīs of the Gosvāmī household, references to gender roles and expectations
echo and resonate with the domestic realities of female lay practitioners, who are the primary keepers and performers of such songs. The theme of a heroine fearing she may be reprimanded for seeing Kṛṣṇa can be read into the lives of Puṣṭimārg lay practitioners. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the practice of sevā by contemporary females in urban settings, as well as their participation in Puṣṭimārgī-related social activities, can indeed cause tensions to arise in the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws and husbands and wives. This is due either because the newly married daughter-in-law feels obliged to be initiated into Puṣṭimārg and to perform sevā, or as the poems illustrate, women are perceived as investing too much time in their ritual activities at the expense of abandoning their domestic responsibilities, such as attending to their husbands, in-laws, and children. Having said that, looking for “cultural truths” in these songs is not my aim here. As Kirin Narayan reminds us, scholars are always in “the danger of reducing texts to ethnographic artifacts, overlooking the subjectivity and agency of performers. Women’s ‘voice’ refers not just to the spoken word, but also to perspectives on social relations that frequently go against the grain of representations stemming from dominant (male) groups” (Gal 1991, 178 qtd. in Narayan 1997, 46).

In some satsaṅg gatherings I attended where women come together to sing dhols and garbās songs such as the ones provided above, which invoke family tensions between the heroine and other female kin, solicited boisterous laughter from all the women singing and even prompted some to stand up and re-enact the behavior of a dutiful daughter-in-law/wife by drawing the drape of their sārīs over their faces (Figure 2). Devotional songs are not just about the relationship between devotees and the divine; they can also become moments and mediums for articulating women’s shared realities
and emotions, whether it is desire, feelings of loneliness, the stifling pressures of domestic responsibilities, and familial tensions between themselves and their husbands and joint families. Attending Puṣṭimārg satsaṅg is, of course, a mode of religious participation for all Puṣṭimārgī women. However, satsaṅg gatherings are also occasions where women can experience momentary reprieve from male surveillance – as well as from female surveillance in the form of their mother-in-laws and sister-in-laws. 

Ridiculing an over-bearing mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and husband are topics that are normally taboo in most social contexts. However, through singing songs/lyrics in which women’s points of view are given privilege, women are able to voice personal experiences – to “speak bitterness” (Jasall 36) – without having to articulate any private grievances. A.K. Ramanujan, as always, expresses this notion succinctly: “these [songs]…present an alternative way of looking at things. Genders are genres. The world of women is not the world of men” (1991, 53). Indeed, participating in satsaṅg gatherings and singing such garbās and dhols does hold religious value. However, such activities can also carry cathartic significance and can help engender and sustain communal bonds between Puṣṭimārgī lay women.
Figure 2. While singing dhols and garbās some women begin to dance and pull the drape of their sārīs over their faces.

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In this Chapter I have attempted to outline a social history of women’s participation in Puṣṭimārg by turning to the sect’s traditional sources: the hagiographies which narrate the religious lives of female lay disciples, and the devotional poetry composed and sung by bahūjīs, beṭījīs, and lay practitioners. Although, as we will explore in the following chapter, the contemporary practices of Puṣṭimārgī female laity have resonances with the past, I am not suggesting historical continuity or arguing for “an unbroken tradition” of female participation within the sect. Colonial modernity, reform movements, the expansion of global capitalist economies, and the emergence of the urban middle-class/bourgeoisie reconstitute our understandings of the domestic space, women’s roles in the home, and the production of sectarian identity. It is, therefore, useful to think about Puṣṭimārg women’s domestic ritual practices in light of these processes. In fact, the topics covered in this Chapter – the Brajbhāṣā vārtās and Puṣṭimārg women’s devotional
singing – were the subject of vitriolic critique by Bombay Presidency reformers like Karsondas Mulji and Behramji Malabari in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. In an effort to connect our discussion on the vārtās and Puṣṭimārgī women’s song genres with our larger conversation on gender, class production, and the perpetuation of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities today, I provide a brief overview of how the vārtās and women’s performance cultures became implicated in nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements.

Vārtās, Women’s Songs, and Obscenity in Colonial Bombay

Throughout the Mahārāj Libel Case, the Brajbhāṣā vārtās, which we have seen are traditionally held on par with the Sanskrit works of Vallabha and hold canonical status in the sect, were used to delegitimize Puṣṭimārg as an “authentic” Hindu tradition on both historical and literary grounds (since they are not “ancient” like the Vedas and the dharma-śāstras and sūtras, and are not in the Sanskrit language). Some of the narratives from the vārtās were also purposefully invoked during the trial in order to reify the reformist reading of Puṣṭimārg as an immoral and vulgar sect.131 Furthermore, Karsondas Mulji, in his History of the Sect of Maharajas (1865), exclaims how during so-called rās maṇḍalīs (“carnal love meetings”), individuals gather at the home of some “orthodox and rich Vaiṣṇavas” and read the stories from the vārtās (129). “The reading of these books,” Mulji argues, “excites and stimulates the passions, and we may be prepared to expect what must follow” (129). In response, as we saw in the last chapter, Jadunathji Mahārāj did zealously attempt to locate Puṣṭimārg textual authority in the

131 See page 131-132.
sect’s Sanskrit sources, such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Vedas. In his testimonies during the libel case, Jadunathji frequently oscillated between acknowledging the sacred status of the vārtas and dismissing their value altogether.

It is difficult to ascertain how such reformist activities influenced the ways in which lay practitioners approached the vārtas. Reformers from the community, as well as leaders of Puṣṭimārg, did call for a return to the “original” writings of Puṣṭimārg, such as Vallabha’s Sanskrit commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, his *Ṣoḍaṣa-granthah*, or even texts like the Gītā (Sampat 1938 qtd in Simpson, 100). Gosvāmīs and Puṣṭimārg theologians also engaged in a series of lecture tours and drew on Vallabha’s Sanskrit works (Shodhan 2004, 180). Classes and workshops were mobilized to teach Puṣṭimārgīs, especially the young, what constituted “real” Puṣṭimārg theology, and readable commentaries on Sanskrit works were attempted to be made more accessible to the lay community (Saha 2004, 310). However, does this mean that Puṣṭimārgīs, who most likely grew up in a household where elders read the Brajbhāṣā vārtas and where women gathered for *satsaṅg* in which the narratives were discussed and sung, abandoned their engagement with the texts? I do not think this is the case. Institutionally, in the havelī context, during kathās or in other congregational contexts, the vārtas may have receded to the background in favor of an exegesis on Puṣṭimārg Sanskrit works – and even on texts like the Gītā – but it does not seem likely that the same occurred in the every-day context of lay followers’ lives.132

132 To this end, Emilia Bachrach’s forthcoming dissertation entitled “The Living Tradition of Hagiography in the Vallabh Sect of Contemporary Gujarat” will be of significant value for understanding Puṣṭimārgī lay practitioners’ engagement with the vārtā texts.
More so than the vārtās, Puṣṭimārg women’s singing practices during festivals like Holi, hindolā, and in front of Gosvāmīs at the havelī or in the lay practitioner’s home, became the object of vociferous criticism throughout the nineteenth century. In their tirade against Puṣṭimārg, reformers such as Karsondas Mulji cited “indecent singing” by family women in their list of debasing activities performed by members of the baniyā and bhātiyā communities, which also included the practice of consulting astrologers, inviting “prostitutes” for performance of music and dance, wasting money on Vaiṣṇav temples, and so on (Motiwala 179). The erotic gopi bhāv themes of Puṣṭimārgī dholīs and garbās – in which Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as a lover of married women, is asked to sneak into their homes while the heroines’ family is away, or is chastised for not fulfilling their desires – flared the Victorian, upper-caste patriarchal sentiments of male reformers. In the Puṣṭimārg context especially, where the Gosvāmī metonymically “stands-in” for Kṛṣṇa and to whom many of these songs can, therefore, be addressed further reified reformist claims to the immoral nature of both women’s singing practices and the sect as a whole. In his History of the Sect of Maharajs (1865), Mulji provides examples of garbā songs, which he argues excite “the gross passions of these priests, for whose pleasure, and to stimulate whose lusts, they [lay women], upon these visits and also on festive occasions, sing” (109). Furthermore, in the libel case, the testimony by one of Mulji’s supporters, Mathooradas Lowjee, illustrates the general outlook reformers had of women singing during weddings and festivals as well as the singing of devotional songs to Gosvāmīs: “Licentious songs are sung by females on occasions of marriage; but when they are addressed to the Maharajas, the females singing them wish for carnal intercourse with them” (MLC 277-283). Lowjee, in line with the reformist agenda, sees
this as a sign of the general ignorance of women from the community: “If the Bhattias of Bombay were educated at all, such adulteries would not prevail amongst them” (Motiwala 283). Finally, even in his final verdict on the libel case, Judge Joseph Arnould commented on the “adulterous” nature of women singing:

“The hymns sung by the women of the Vallabhacharya sect in honour of the Maharajas and in their presence … are passionate with all the passion of the East…So these hymns sung…by the wives and daughters of the Vallabhacharyans to their Maharajas express the most unbridled desire, the most impatient longing for the enjoyments of adulterine love” (MLC 441)

Attempts to sanitize women’s singing practices was a strategy deployed by most reform movements of the nineteenth century in both the Bombay and Bengal presidencies. Sumanta Banerjee, in his work on women’s popular culture in Bengal (1989a; 1989b) discusses how women folk-performers were gradually being marginalized in late nineteenth-century Calcutta as a result of reformist campaigns and a growing bhadralok elitism. With regards to Krṣṇa-themed songs specifically, Banerjee focuses on itinerant female performers (known as boshtami or nerī) who went from house to house in villages and in Calcutta singing kīrtans. These same women, many of whom came from low-caste and low class families, also sang kīrtans and narrated Vaiṣṇav stories or kathās before household women in the antarmahal (“inner-home”) or zenānā of bhadralok homes (1989b, 150-151). Much like the Bombay presidency reformers, bhadralok Bengali men also found the erotic gopī-bhāv themes of Vaiṣṇav songs as having the potential for morally corrupting family women. As one bhadralok writer exclaimed, “It is not possible for an uneducated young woman to remain unexcited when...

133 The Bengali term “bhadralok” translates as “respectable people,” and as Judith Walsh explains it generally describes “families with a tradition of family literacy, wealthy enough to do no manual labour and possibly able to employ a servant” (2005, 7fn.9).
listening to episodes like Raas [Krishna's dance with the milkmaids]” (151). He suggests that if women were prevented from listening to such kathās and instead had the opportunity to “listen to good instructions, discussions on good books and to train themselves in artistic occupations, their religious sense will improve and their souls will become pure and they will be suitable for domestic work” (151-152).

Charu Gupta (2002) explores similar attempts at denouncing women’s participation in wedding ceremonies and Holi celebrations in Uttar Pradesh (UP) during the colonial period. Respectable women from upper-caste and middle-class families were urged to abandon the singing of obscene songs such as gālis in public during weddings. The Khatri Hitkar Sabha of Agra even published a pamphlet advising “civilized” women to stop singing simple and “ordinary” songs altogether (93). Holi festivals equally drew the criticism of missionary writers, Hindi newspapers, and Hindu reformers. Once again, the singing of vulgar songs, the free mixing of men and women, and “public displays of unseemly behavior” during Holi celebrations disturbed the new moral sensibilities of upper-caste male reformers. Much like claims made to specific song genres, participation in a festival like Holi became a way for reformers to mark the cultured, “civilized” population from the uncultured, and uncivilized (read here as low caste and poor) (98-99).

Back in the Bombay Presidency, both Karsondas Mulji and Behramji Malabari describe how Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs took advantage of the Holi festival to further engage in debaucherous activities (Mulji 1865, 107). Malabari offers the following description of Holi in havelī contexts:
You can in Bombay see Holi in full swing in two places, the Maharaja's Mandir and the Marwari Bazar. In the former could be witnessed, for days together, a promiscuous assemblage of worshippers, without distinction of age, sex, or social position, revelling in orgies such as the western reader could hardly realise. Modest young women are submitted to showers of coloured water and clouds of red paint. They are handled to a degree of indecent familiarity incredible to the outside public. At one exhibition like this hundreds of young women are liable to go astray from the inborn modesty of their nature. It is a wonder how, with such social customs as these, the Vaishnavas lead such happy, contented, and respectable lives. (1884, 381)

Finally, reformist critiques of women’s mourning practices indicate another mode by which women’s participation in public ceremonies came under surveillance and scrutiny in the nineteenth century. In western India, Karsondas Mulji’s greatest supporter, Narmadashankar Lalshankar wrote one of the most extensive critiques of women’s public mourning practices in the form of a prize-winning piece entitled “The Madness of Crying and Beating Breasts” in 1857 (Mukta 1999, 29). Both Narmadashankar and another important social reformer of Ahmedabad, Hargovinddas Kantavada, disapproved of the money spent on funeral arrangements and, especially, the boisterous and disorderly behavoir of family women during funeral ceremonies (30). What also disturbed reformers such as Narmadashankar and Kantavada was how lament practices provided a pubic arena for many women to lobby insults at family members and to voice their own personal grievances. As Parita Mukta explains, “The women lamenters did not simply target the women in the family but male members, caste members or the state, any individual or corporate body held responsible for the death” (35).134 Much like their

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134 Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his Milestones in Gujarati Literature (1914), comments on the dirges, which he calls rājio that are sung by women in Gujarat and Kathiawad during funerals. As he explains, “Women, very shrewdly take this opportunity, under the garb of supplying materials for lament, of trotting out their own grievances. For instance, the mother or sister of the widow of the deceased – supposing he
concerns about respectable family women singing Kṛṣṇa-themed songs and participating in Holī festivals, male reformers were concerned about regulating and civilizing women’s mourning behaviour in public settings. The loud and unruly nature of lament practices proved embarrassing for upper-caste reformers such as Mulji and Narmada: “…The Parsee says [on witnessing this] ‘how junglee these women are?’ and the English people say ‘what stupid gypsies are they’... A household’s prestige is dependent on the woman. The people of Europe take pride in their women” (Narmadashankar 1912[1867] 87, qtd in Mukta 37). For reformers like Narmadashankar, such public behavior by household women threatened family honor because it did not conform to middle-class, patriarchal expectations of how women should conduct themselves (in public). It was, therefore, recommended that women replace customary lament behavior, which included hurling insults, beating one’s chest, and wailing with more sober, religiously-informed practices such as singing and reading religious songs and literature during funerals. Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in his descriptions of Gujarati poets and writers, explains how Bāpu Saheb Gāıkwâr (1779-1843) from Baroda, who upon witnessing the dirges (rājiā) sung by female mourners was “struck by the emptiness of the subject-matter of the song, and also with the ignorance of the reciters” (1914, 180). He composed a new dirge called Rām Rājio, which enumerated the “six great enemies of humanity” such as passion, anger, pride, envy, and so on. According to Jhaveri, in many regions this more religious

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135 Elsewhere, Narmadashankar compares female mourners with professional female performers – who were labeled as prostitutes by both colonial officials and Indian reformers throughout the nineteenth century: “A prostitute dances, sings but that too on some special occasion within the house, and with decorum and respect; but our women should be seen to be more shameless than the prostitute” ([1857] 1912, 78-79 qtd in Mukta 1999, 38).
dirge soon began replacing the lament songs of female mourners. Ultimately, as Mukta argues, the regulation and taming of public mourning by women was driven by a desire to interiorize and make private the experience of grief within the boundaries of the home. Similarly, as we have seen, attempts were also made to relocate Puṣṭimārg women’s religious practices to the home by discouraging lay women from visiting their gurus at the havelī, cease performing lewd songs in public and in front of the Gosvāmī, and prohibiting their participation in Holī celebrations at the havelīs.

The literary outputs of Gujarati poets like Dalpatram Dhayabhai (1820-1898) – the assistant and interpreter for Alexander Forbes (1821-1865) – can help reveal some of the direct implications of nineteenth century reform campaigns which focused on popular literary genres. Forbes, who served as a sessions judge in Surat and Ahmedabad, was instrumental in establishing the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS) in 1848 in Ahmedabad, an association he hoped would help promote education as well as an interest in the Gujarati language and its literature. Through his relationship with Forbes, Dalpatram became involved with the GVS, and in 1855 he became its secretary and the editor of the society’s journal, the Buddhiprakash (“Illuminating Intelligence”). Leading reformers and intellectuals of Gujarat, including Mahipatram Rupram, Bholanath Sarabhai, and Narmadshankar Lalshankar contributed to the Buddhiprakash, which circulated articles on economics, education, science, and social reform. However, it was through the poems and essays written by Dalpatram over the next twenty-five years that the Buddhiprakash acquired its position as one of the most important journals among the intellectual and mercantile elite of Gujarat. According to Svati Joshi, it is through the

136 It was in the Buddhiprakash that Narmadshankar Lalashankar published his essay on women’s mourning practices, for which he received the prize of 135 rupees in 1857 (Mukta 1999, 29).
essays and poems he wrote for the journal that Dalpatram “developed precise definitions of ‘reform,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘education,’ and ‘literature’ as these terms acquired a specific meaning for the dominant mercantile elite of the city” (2004, 332). He also wrote “special” garbās for the Strībodh, a journal which was created for and catered to an upper and middle-class female audience (Shukla 1991, 64). It is doubtful Dalpatram wrote garbās or poems about the adulterine love between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs for reformist publications like the Buddhiprakash and the Strībodh. Dalpatram condemned the singing of “obscene” songs during weddings and festivals which, like most reformers of his time, he interpreted as symptomatic of a lack of education among women. Dalpatram was a supporter of women’s education, an education that would serve to enhance “proper” feminine virtues so that young girls could one day become good, householding women: “The daughter who has studied at school will have good manners of behaving and talking; and she won’t stop in a crowd of wicked women who sing obscene songs… [She] won’t quarrel in the family” (Dalpatram Dhayabhai, Buddhiprakash March 1857 qtd in Joshi, 337).

Journals like the Strībodh and Buddhiprakash, which were only accessible to an elite, educated few, presented an alternative – or at least a new – subject-matter for poems and songs like garbās. Puṣṭimārgī garbās, which were the target of reform campaigns, were reconstituted as a genre suited for illiterate, low-class or “uncultured” women. This may partly explain why, as we discuss in the follow chapter, elite Puṣṭimārg women today have begun taking lessons in havelī kīrtan. By making claims to a more

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137 Vasudha Dalmia, in her discussion on Hariscandra’s contribution to the first women’s journal in Hindi, the Balabodhini (f.1874), notes how Brajbhāṣā verses were censured in the journal since they were considered “too erotic” for a female audience (1997, 247).
“classical” Puṣṭimārg genre, rather than the popular genres of dholīs and garbās, upper-class women are constructing boundaries between themselves and those Puṣṭimārgī women who do conform to such bourgeois aesthetic tastes.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented a social history of female religiosity in Puṣṭimārg through an examination of women in the vārtās and women’s engagement with Puṣṭimārg performance genres. The vārtās reveal what is most valued by the tradition and its practitioners, namely the grace of Srīnāthji and their gurus. The texts are also still used by Puṣṭimārgīs; they are heard in congregational settings, sung in the form of dholīs, and read at home or in groups during satsaṅg. Unlike women’s dhol-pads and garbās, moreover, the vārtās have acquired canonical status within the tradition. This is because they narrate the transformative experience of being initiated by Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha, they have been composed by male Gosvāmīs, and are written in Brajbhāṣā.

The vārtā literature also indexes a quasi-historical image of Puṣṭimārgī women’s day-to-day ritual activities. What comes across from many vārtā narratives is that women were – as they continue to remain today – vital practitioners in the maintenance of domestic sevā. The tales also reveal that sevā takes time, needs space in the home, and its proper performance requires one to have enough financial means to adequately prepare offerings. In the following chapter, we explore theses aspects of women’s ritual lives by returning to our debate on class, domesticity, and the production of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. I demonstrate how socio-religious reform movements,
nationalist discourses, and twentieth-century consumer practices have reconstituted the home as the modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

From our discussion of Puṣṭimārg performance genres, we learned that bahūjīs and beṭijīs as well as female lay practitioners wrote and sang devotional songs. The compositions serve as an historical lens for focusing on the ways women have contributed to Puṣṭimārg’s oral traditions. The performance of such songs, many of which have the erotic love between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs as their prominent theme, also became the subject of vitriolic critique by reformers across western India, UP, and Bengal. However, this does not mean that women stopped singing. In contemporary Gujarat, women continue to sing dhols and garbās in satsaṅg gatherings, while at home performing sevā, and in public settings at havelīs during festivals and also while waiting for the doors to open before darśan. For this reason I agree with Parita Mukta, who argues that the success of a reform campaign should not be measured “by the efficacy and efficiency with which it was immediately able to obliterate the cultural practices it contested” (1999, 33). Instead, we should turn our attention to how upper-caste, middle-class ideologies of the reform era “…provided emerging notions of bourgeois comportment which has had a lasting impact on the self-image of this class” (ibid). These ideologies were in turn mapped onto the bodies and practices of household women, upon whom family ābrū and respectability hinged. As we discuss in the following chapter, such lasting implications of “bourgeois comportment” can be demonstrated today by the increased commodified styles of domestic sevā performed by women, as well as by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women’s growing interest in taking kīrtan lessons in havelī saṅgīt or Puṣṭimārg temple music. There is a desire among elite family women – whom can
spare the time, have the monetary means to pay for such lessons, and who are clearly literate – to learn how to sing the kīrtans of havelī liturgy in their “proper” classical style.
CHAPTER 5

From Havelī to Home:
Women’s Domestic Religious Practices and the Production of Prestige in Contemporary Puṣṭimārg

From the tradition’s beginnings, the home as well as the havelī have been important sites of worship for Puṣṭimārgīs. Chapters one and two provided several historical indications of the practice of domestic sevā, at least from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Our discussion of the vārtās in chapter four also illustrates the importance of domestic sevā in Puṣṭimārg. Furthermore, starting with Vallabha himself, the sect’s disavowal of asceticism and the foregrounding of the grhastra (“householder”) āśrama or tradition demonstrates how the home and family are important aspects of Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and community formation. Finally, Puṣṭimārg ritual praxis is imbued with domestic and familial imagery and emotions (bhāv): The havelī is understood as Nandālaya (“the home of Nanda,” Kṛṣṇa’s foster-father) and Śrīnāthji is devotionally approached and treated as a young child in need of parental care (vātsalya bhāv). Puṣṭimārgī sectarian identities permeate quotidian domestic activities such as waking, bathing, cooking, and eating, and the home is a place where foods, and material objects, consumed are first dedicated to Śrīnāthji, who is regarded as a member of the family.

In contemporary Gujarat, the Puṣṭimārg home continues to be an integral site for performing sevā, hosting satsaṅgs with fellow practitioners, singing dhols and garbās, inviting Gosvāmīs for religious talks (bhāgavata kathā), and for celebrating religious festivals. The home, however, is also the primary site in which other cultural
processes take place. One of the major concerns of the present chapter is to tie together our discussions from chapters three and four – on nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements and domestic reform – with twentieth century nationalist ideologies, consumption practices, and class politics. I suggest that these on-going processes reconstitute the Puṣṭimārg home as a cultural site for both class and sectarian identity formation and production. Changing notions of domesticity and ideal womanhood, moreover, reimagine upper-class household women (wives, daughter-in-laws, mothers) as the primary practitioners, pedagogues, and producers of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity.

On January 2, 2008 I was invited by Rukmini Shukla, a Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav woman, to attend an event that her friend Bhavna Patel was hosting in her home in one of the more upscale neighborhoods of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. After we pulled up in Rukmini’s Mercedes-Benz, we entered one of Bhavna’s three living rooms, where twelve women had already gathered for the occasion. As was evident from their expensive silk sārīs and accessories, as well as their luxury cars with drivers attentively stationed outside, all of the women came from wealthy, upper class families. It soon became apparent that some women in the group were friends, while others were related through marriage. Rukmini began the session by handing out a small booklet on sevā, which the women discussed for a short while. They then moved onto deliberations about different srṅgār (“adornment”) designs for their household svarūps (“image”), and ended with a tentative plan for their upcoming pilgrimage tour to Mathura. While snacks and refreshments were being served by Bhavna’s three housemaids, I asked how often this

138 All of my conversations with women in the Puṣṭimārg community occurred in Hindi or Gujarati, and the translations are my own. All the names of the women I worked with that appear in this chapter are pseudonyms, with the exception of Dini Shodhan.
afternoon gathering occurred and what, exactly, it was. “Once a month,” Rukmini answered, “it’s a Vaiṣṇav kitty party.”

Events like Bhavna’s “Vaiṣṇav kitty party” are regular occurrences among Ahmedabad’s elite Puṣṭimārgī Vaiṣṇav women. They index the ways in which women’s participation in the sect involves the reification of class privilege and status production. A major preoccupation of Puṣṭimārgī women today is the performance of domestic sevā. In this chapter I focus on the contemporary devotional practices of upper-class women in the urban domestic context, primarily in the city of Ahmedabad. I examine how women’s practice of domestic sevā becomes a site of familial negotiation and mediation among females in the Puṣṭimārg household. At the same time, the social networks and social spaces created as a result of their practice of, and interest in, domestic sevā not only reinforce their identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs but also serve to reify their class privilege. In the modern Puṣṭimārg urban home, class and status come to be signified by the characteristic markers of privilege, such as large bungalows, the presence of domestic labor, and signs of available disposable income. However, family status is also demonstrated by the material expressions of their devotional practices, such as increased commodified styles of domestic worship, the consumption and display of expensive religious commodities, the time and space allotted to the practice of domestic sevā, and the ability and preference to pay for havelī kīrtan lessons.

139 A “kitty party” is a kind of tea party or social gathering hosted by urban elite Indian women. Waldrop (2011) draws on the work of Sethi (1995) and notes how, perhaps, the contemporary urban kitty-party phenomenon may have developed from a type of rotating saving association common among women in rural areas of South Asia. The contemporary, urban kitty-party differs from these associations in two significant ways: “First, rather than emphasizing the saving aspect, the kitty-party emphasizes socializing and entertainment, and second, rather than being popular among low-income groups, the kitty-party is patronized by the middle and upper classes” (Sethi qtd. in Waldrop 2011, 164).
Domesticity, Women, and the Nation

In chapter three we discussed how the Mahārāj Libel Case in 1862 represented the culmination of reformist critiques, which targeted the wealthy Puṣṭimārg baniyā and bhātiyā communities and their religious leaders, the Gosvāmīs. The most prominent allegation put forth by reformers, like Karsondas Mulji, against Puṣṭimārg Gosvāmīs was regarding their sexual promiscuity and sexual exploitation of female devotees. The Libel Case was indeed informed by Orientalist and Hindu revivalist preoccupations with constructing “authentic” Hinduism along Sanskritic, upper-caste, and patriarchal lines. However, the Libel Case was also implicated in and indexed larger, over-arching nineteenth century discourses on women’s social, sexual, and religious behavior. More generally, these included debates on widow remarriage, age of consent, and female education. In terms of women’s religious and social practices, reforms focused on women’s “superstitious” beliefs, their behavior during mourning ceremonies, and the singing of “obscene songs” by women during weddings. Finally, Puṣṭimārg women were criticized for their relationship with Gosvāmīs, their movements to and from havelīs, and the singing of erotic-themed garbās and dhols in festivals like Holī and in front of Gosvāmīs. Middle-class women’s bodies and activities needed to be regulated because of the metonymic ties being forged between home, women, and family status (ābrū) and respectability. Karsondas Mulji expresses this view, while tying them to nationalist concerns, in his anxious appeal to the men from the Puṣṭimārg baniyā community: “If you do not respect your own home, then how is it possible for you to increase your honour in the world? Woman constitutes your home and therefore, you ought to treat her
with respect. Without such honour, our country’s status will never be high” (Motiwala, 237).

The proliferation of domestic manuals in the nineteenth century, the introduction of Domestic Science in educational institutions, and the rise in women’s journals (like the *Stribodh*) illustrate the increased importance placed on husband-wife relationships, child-rearing, and managing domestic chores and affairs “hygienically” and efficiently. More importantly, such discourses centered on the wife’s central role in the production of proper domesticity (Walsh 2004, 8). Texts like *Essay on the Promotion of Domestic Reform* (1881), written by Elphinstone graduate Ganpat Lakshman, indicate common concerns middle-class male reformers had regarding women’s activities in the home. In one section, Ganpat Lakshman contrasts the condition and activities of young women who come from upper class homes with those from lower class households in Bombay.¹⁴⁰ He criticizes young ladies from upper-class families – who lack proper education – for spending their days “engaged in unnecessary ceremonies, in useless rivalries... in idle talking”, and in discussing the marriages of their friends and the ornaments and articles of furniture exchanged during these events (83). On a positive note, Lakshman notes that if they can read a few girls from these families might be seen reading some religious books (84). However, Ganpat Lakshman suggests that the “most honorable” activity for women from upper class families is needle-work. He even quotes from what appears to be Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* (1751): “whenever chance brings within my observation a knot of young ladies busy at their needles, I consider myself as in the school of virtue...because I regard them as providing a security against the most

¹⁴⁰ It is important to note that reformers during this time period, including Ganpat Lakshman, used the English terms “upper-class,” “middle-class,” and “lower-class.”
dangerous snares of the soul by enabling themselves to exclude idleness from their solitary moments” (82).

In describing the condition of young women from lower-class families, Ganpat Lakshman notes how they do not have fine cloths to sew, do not participate in ceremonies “for they have no money to discharge the expenses attending them,” and do not practice singing, “for they are so removed from the polish and refinement of the higher classes, as never to have been able to acquire a taste for that art” (90). He is also critical of women from the lower classes who have to find employment outside their home because of the lack of attention their children will receive (75-76). The lower-class female labourer, who appears to spend no time at home with her children, disturbs the patriarchal nuclear family model being promoted by domestic and social reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The wife-mother is expected to be both the “governess of the home” and the moral educator of children, roles which she cannot possibly fulfill if she spends her time outside of the house. Decades later, in the early twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi echoes similar views on women in the home, using, once again, the example of the lower-class female labourer:

“…women also must be gradually weaned from mill labour. If man and woman are partners in life and complementary each of the other, they become good householders only by dividing their labour, and a wise mother finds her time fully occupied in looking after her household and children. But where both husband and wife have to labour for mere maintenance, the nation must become degraded. It is like a bankrupt living on his capital”. (“Advice to Satyagrahis in an Industrial Strike,” in the Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 116)

The rise of cultural nationalism towards the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the influence of Gandhian nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth
century, saw discourses surrounding women and domesticity put into the service of national regeneration. As Mary Hancock points out, the nationalist period saw a sharpening of the social meanings of and distinctions between “private” and “public” spaces and forms of action. “In elite nationalisms,” Hancock attests, “the privatization of domesticity accompanied efforts to frame homes both as (feminine) ‘backstages’ of new (masculine) public realms, and as sites for producing new nationalized and classed subjects” (2001, 876). Furthermore, if during the period of reform women’s roles as companionate wives were emphasized, nationalism heralded childrearing and motherhood as the moral and civic duty of all women.141

With regards to Gandhian nationalism, more generally, Madhu Kishwar (1985) acknowledges that the movement succeeded in mobilizing a large number of women to participate in anti-colonial campaigns. In some respects Gandhi’s views on women mark an important shift from earlier nineteenth century reform constructions of womanhood. The most crucial difference, Kishwar argues, is that Gandhi “does not see women as objects of reform, as helpless creatures deserving charitable concern. Instead, he sees them as active, self-conscious agents of social change” (1757). However, as Sujata Patel (1988) points out, such a simplistic and rather romantic reading of “women’s

141 Ideologies and practices that tied women’s domesticity to national welfare and racial purity were not confined to the colony alone. As Ann Stoler explains, childrearing was hailed as a “national, imperial, and racial duty” in late-nineteenth century Britain, France, Holland, the United States, and Germany (1991, 82). Nationalist discourses across the modern world were also couched in domestic and familial imagery, where the country is imagined as a homeland, its language(s) recast as mother-tongue(s), its citizens constituting a brotherhood and fraternity, and the nation itself is “incarnated as parent – sometimes a father figure but most often than not mother” (Ramaswamy 2010, 74). In India, the image of motherhood as well as the positioning of women as “mothers of the nation” found its culmination or apotheosis in the figure of the goddess, Bhārat Mātā (“Mother India”). As Sumathi Ramaswamy argues, “Like her human surrogate, Bharat Mata is a ‘new woman’…She is the inviolable essence of the nation in the making, and as such she is imagined as the cherished and venerable mother who presides over her home that is deemed the last bastion of autonomy and authenticity in a world that has been made over by the work of empire and colonialism” (74-75).
involvement” in Gandhian politics obfuscates any differences in class, caste, and religion which informed Gandhi’s articulation of ideal womanhood and which characterized the kind of women who did participate in the nationalist movement. Indeed, Gandhi viewed practices like child marriage, sati, and dowry as oppressive and cruel to women. He also supported women’s right to vote and encouraged women’s “political” roles. These roles, however, were embedded and shaped by specific urban middle-class and upper-caste understandings of women’s inherent virtues and values, ideas that resonate with social reform movements of the past. For example, in addition to spinning khādi (“raw cotton”) during the civil disobedience movement or rallying against the purchase of foreign goods, one of the most important “political” roles a woman could have was as a mother: she instilled national consciousness in her children, she spinned khādi at home, and was responsible for clothing her family in Indian-made fabric (378, 380). Furthermore, if a woman were able to reject her sexuality and family life, and instead channeled her energies towards national welfare, she could “achieve a higher moral and spiritual role” (378). A woman’s inherent feminine virtues – those of patience, courage, purity, and the ability to endure suffering – were projected as superior to masculine ones in Gandhian national rhetoric.

In many ways, earlier nineteenth century debates surrounding domesticity and women’s sexual and social practices dovetailed with such nationalist articulations of ideal womanhood. Women’s roles as companionate wives, as producers of domestic order, and

142 Although Gandhi does criticize the practice of sati he nevertheless places the state of widowhood on a spiritual pedestal, which does not help ameliorate the social, emotional, and economic conditions of widowhood per se. According to Gandhi, widowhood presented an opportunity for women to practice spiritual cultivation and to live a life of austerity. For example, in 1924, Gandhi claimed “the Hindu widow’s self control has been carried by Hinduism to its greatest heights…A widow does not even look at suffering as suffering. Renunciation has become a second nature to them, and to renounce it would be painful to them. They find happiness in their self denial” (CWMG, Vol 22, 1924, p 523 qtd in Patel 385).
especially their motherly responsibility as moral educators of (male) children/citizens, were viewed as the backbone of national order and progress. The growing concern with producing a domestic environment where the nation’s future citizens could cultivate their cultural and national identities precluded domestic and gender reform movements from progressing along wholly western lines. This process hinged on middle-class women’s abilities to negotiate modernity. On the one hand, they had to be cautious of not becoming “too western” or “too educated” (that is, “too reformed”). On the other hand, they had to distance themselves from the behavior of “uncultured” women, those who followed superstitious beliefs, wailed and beat their chests in mourning rituals, or in the Puṣṭimārg context, those who continued to regard Gosvāmīs as divine figures, sang lewd gopī-bhāv songs, or “mixed promiscuously” with men at havelīs. At the same time, moreover, it was important, indeed essential, that Puṣṭimārg women continued to uphold their religious practices, especially in the home. It was a critical mechanism by which the modernizing middle-classes could assert their cultural superiority over the West (Chatterjee 1990; 1993). However, women’s ritual practices needed to be regulated so that their actions helped reify rather than undermine emerging notions of family status and female respectability.

By the twentieth century, the ideal urban, middle-class Hindu woman was cast as a repository of inherent spiritual and moral virtues, understood through the upper-caste, patriarchal śāstric language of strī-dharma (“women’s duty”) and the idealized figure of the pativrata (“devoted wife”).143 The degree to which women could engage in

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143 As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, “Converting women into grihalakṣmis (Lakshmi of the household) through the novel means of formal education was the self-appointed task of a civilising nationalism” (1993, 9).
religious practices – without allowing them to disrupt their roles as a mothers and wives – helped produce and maintain family status or ābrū. This process was symptomatic of the larger project of modernity namely, the gendering of home as an inherently spiritual, feminine space and the outside world as inherently rational and masculine (Chatterjee 1989; 1993). The home was imagined as a site of cultural production that hinged on constructing women as practitioners and producers of status, comfort, and respectability, and, more importantly, women were cast as the custodians and embodiments of an “authentic” Hindu identity.

Such reformist negotiations with nationalist modernity and the implications of women’s domestic practices in this process can be illustrated in the pages of later domestic manuals, like Hargovindas Dvarkadas Kantavala’s Gujarati publication, Gṛh Vidyā athvā Ghar Vyavasthā (“Home Science” or “Home Management,” 1927).144 Here, advice to women is indeed disseminated along more “Indian lines.” Kantavala felt the types of clothing, like scarfs, socks, and gloves that young girls were learning to knit in schools seemed more beneficial for a European society. Instead, he wanted young Indian girls to learn Indian styles of embroidery (1-2). He criticized Gujarati women, most likely from upper-class families, who did not know how to cook because they had domestic help in the kitchen. For this reason, Kantavala attempted to initiate cooking classes in places like Baroda; he insisted that pāk-śāstra (“Science of Cooking”) was just as relevant to learn in girls’ schools as the geography of Africa or the river-system of Brazil (6). After providing information on hygienic practices (18-27), Kantavala advises women to become more economically aware and to begin keeping accounts of the materials and

144 I am indebted to Abigail McGowan for sharing her vast collection of Gujarati domestic manuals with me, many of which were published around the turn of the twentieth century.
food-items being purchased for the home (35-36). In his advice for married couples, moreover, Kantavala explains how a woman who does not consider her husband to be her svāmi (“lord”), and instead demeans him (“thuchkare”), cannot expect to be loved by her husband (131). And although he acknowledges that only the highest caliber woman (a sādhvī) can follow all the prescriptions of strī-dharma, Kantavala urges that every woman should uphold her dharma as best as possible in the modern age (132). Finally, in addition to sending children to school, Kantavala called upon parents to impart a moral (“nīt”) or dhārmic education to their children. If they cannot, they should at the very least urge their children to engage in practices that can help instill moral virtues, such as performing worship after bathing, reciting devotional songs (“bhajan, kīrtan”) and listening to dharmic and moral teachings in the form of kathās and vārtās (135-136). Kantavala’s advice envisions parents, and especially mothers, as pedagogues of morality and of dharmic or religious teachings and practices, and the home is effectively reimagined as the primary site of cultural production.

**Gender, Consumption, and the Production of Class**

From our discussion thus far, we can identify some key factors involved in the articulation and production of urban middle-class identities by the early decades of the twentieth century Bombay Presidency. Members of the middle-classes were intimately involved in the projects of modernity, such as acquiring a Western education, entering government service, and engaging with print culture. Using these tools, many propelled themselves into the political sphere by challenging both the aristocratic and mercantile elite and colonial leadership. The rise in urban professional jobs, such as in law and
medicine, allowed many members of the middle-classes to bridge the gap between themselves and the wealthy elite. Economic status, as determined by one’s occupation and income, was – and still is – an important aspect of class identity.\textsuperscript{145} However, the middle-classes were also the primary mobilizers of social and religious reform, which reconstituted women and domesticity as moral indicators of family status and respectability. Sanjay Joshi, in his study on the middle-classes of colonial Lucknow (2001), attributes all of these factors, and not just economic progress, to the ascendency of the middle-class in postcolonial India: “…[it] was a product of a relatively long historical process, and was predicated on the creation of new forms of politics, the restructuring of norms of social conduct, and the construction of new values guiding domestic as well as public life” (1).

The middle-classes were never a homogenous social group. Even today, in a post-liberalization economic context, India’s middle-classes are far from being constitutive of a clearly demarcated economic or social category. As Henrike Donner and Geert De Neve point out, in contemporary India, a growing number of individuals self-identify as “middle-class.”\textsuperscript{146} This poses difficulties for researchers who want to define middle-class status because “even the most cursory glance” at the communities and individuals who self-ascribe as being middle class differ widely, “not only in terms of economic position and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values”

\textsuperscript{145} Traditional, Weberian approaches to class highlight economic factors such as education, occupation and social networks, and a community’s relationship with the market (Donner and De Neve, 6).

\textsuperscript{146} “Middle-class” has become a ubiquitous term in today’s India, and it is used by the government, the media, and by citizens to describe a large and inconsistent portion of India’s population. According to recent studies conducted by the Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research (INCAER), which identifies the middle-class as those earning between $4,000 and $21,000 per year, the Indian middle class constitute 60 million people. While other studies, such as those conducted by CNN-IBN and the Hindustan Times in which middle-class status is based on the ownership of at least one commodity (telephone, washing machine, color television), the figure is estimated as high as 200 million (Ram-Prasad, 2007).
From its very emergence then, to be middle-class was a project of self-fashioning, constantly in the making, rather than a “flat sociological fact” (Joshi, 2001).

In addition to the old, colonial qualifiers of class status – one’s education, occupation, and family background – an important factor in the “self-fashioning” of status, especially in India’s post-liberalization era (1980s-90s and on), is the consumption and acquisition of commodities. Global capitalist economies, new modes of consumption, as well as decreased anxieties over the conspicuous display of wealth, has created a “new consumerist” middle-class in contemporary India (Donner and De Neve, 5). Women’s growing roles as consumers and their ability to dictate what can be purchased for the home has allowed for new and creative material expressions of status, aesthetic tastes, and religious sensibilities in the urban Puṣṭimārg household.

To this end, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has greatly enriched our understandings of class production and display. In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu explains how both cultural and social forms of capital are implicated in the production of status in a given group or community. Cultural capital involves those cultural skills and practices, such as “table manners or the art of conversation, musical culture or the sense of propriety” (70), which “symbolize possession of the material and cultural means of maintaining a bourgeois life-style” (122). Social capital refers to “a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability that is often essential in winning and keeping the confidence of high society” (122). Building on Bourdieu’s theories, I suggest that the maintenance and production of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity are cultural practices which establish and promote both family respectability and a network of social
connections among the Puṣṭimārg mercantile elite of Gujarat.\footnote{Josephine Reynell (1987), in her study on laywomen’s religious practices amongst the Śvetāmbara Jain community in Jaipur, also draws similar conclusions vis-à-vis religious identities and class status. Reynell demonstrates how men’s public donative practices as well as women’s domestic ritual practices, which include the maintenance of daily worship and the performance of weekly, monthly and/or annual fasts, are modes by which family prestige is demonstrated. Since many of the Jain families she worked with are members of the wealthy elite, Reynell argues that “The maintenance of this prestige is an important economic strategy with implications for the future standing of each family within the community” (318).} My discussion of Puṣṭimārg laywomen’s sevā rituals also draw heavily from Mary Hancock’s brilliant study on south Indian smārta women’s religious practices. Hancock argues that the everyday actions in which women’s rituals are embedded – such as washing, cooking, and eating – reproduce caste, gender, and class identities (1999, 21). These domestic rituals, like other cultural practices, have been “transformed by contestatory nationalisms, transnational processes, commodification, and class formation” (25). Drawing upon both Hancock and Bourdieu I demonstrate that, in the Puṣṭimārg context, women’s ritual activities can be understood as sites of cultural consumption and display, where the practice of domestic sevā not only reinforces their identities as Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavs but also serve to reify their class privilege. Increased commodified styles of domestic sevā, the display of expensive religious commodities, as well as the growing desire among elite women to learn how to sing havelī kīrtans are all practices that help reproduce class differences and social hierarchies between members of the Puṣṭimārg community.

In his study on consumption practices and domestic economies in late colonial Bombay, Prashant Kidambi notes how, after the first world war, the rise in available goods, services, and mass entertainments offered urban consumers a plethora of choices.\footnote{An 1893 article published in the Gujarati reformist journal, the Buddhīprakāsha, lists a number of foreign goods that can be found in the homes of Gujarati families: French satin sarīs, pocket-watches, spoons, matchsticks, china tea cups and saucers, children’s toys, et cetera (McGowan 2006, 35; 2010, 157).} As Kidambi argues, “those who claimed to belong to the middle class were
conscious of the fact that consumption had become an essential measure of status in a modernizing urban context where the traditional markers of the caste hierarchy were no longer adequate guarantors of social standing” (2010, 118). However, economic uncertainty through the 1920s and 1930s combined with a growing Gandhian nationalist rhetoric which discouraged conspicuous consumption practices, placed middle-class families in a position of consistently having to “weigh up their quotidian spending choices” (118). Although the years leading up to the second world war can hardly be characterized by a “culture of mass consumption” and “consumerism,” the turn of the century nevertheless marked an important shift in women’s roles as consumers. Urban, elite housewives were not only using new goods, but as Abigail McGowan points out, “they were claiming authority over goods in new ways” (2006, 35). Changing domestic ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged traditional models of the domestic economy in which elders of the home managed finances and purchases for the joint family and only senior women monitored and controlled expenditures on foodstuffs and servants (35). Publications catered to urban elite housewives, like Pandita Ramabai’s Stri Dharma Niti (“Morals for Women”), vernacular translations of Flora Annie Steel’s The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, journals like Stribodh, and domestic manuals in general, emphasized and indexed the important roles of women as managers of domestic order, comfort - - and now, consumption (36-37).

This is to not say that housewives, all of a sudden, became consuming agents in charge of the family’s financial resources. Other than the valuables and money women would bring with them at the time of marriage, upper-class women in late colonial India
most likely did not work outside of the home; they have been, and many continue to remain, wholly dependent on their husbands and the men of the family for access to money. For the most part, moreover, women from elite families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not travel to bazaars to purchase goods. Instead they sent servants or kinsmen from their families and relied on their consumer choices. As Douglas Haynes and Abigail McGowan acknowledge, “Consumption behaviours played a central role in the shaping of power relations. They were essential in the creation and maintenance of patterns of economic dominance, social status, and patriarchy” (2010, 4).

Having said that, economic capital is not the only means by which class and family status is maintained and reproduced. Although the men of a household may make the final decision on important family expenditures, in the Puṣṭimārg context, women’s aesthetic choices and their active engagement in religious activities, from the daily maintenance of domestic sevā (which includes the use of various ritual accoutrements and food offerings), going on pilgrimage, organizing satsang gatherings, purchasing – or even influencing the decision to purchase – expensive religious commodities to display in the home, allow women to “transmute wealth into moral worth” (Hancock 1999, 86). Just as patterns of religious giving have, historically, allowed wealthy baniyā men to “safely” demonstrate and produce family prestige, Puṣṭimārg women’s religious activities mitigate anxieties over the frivolous spending habits of urban housewives. Their maintenance and perpetuation of an elite Puṣṭimārg identity, moreover, provides the cultural and social capital needed to reproduce family class status and respectability, and signals the extension of consumer culture to ritual praxis.
Bonds of Grace: Kinship Ties, Social Networks, and the Practice of Domestic Sevā

I begin our discussion of contemporary Puṣṭimārg domestic sevā by demonstrating how the practice was introduced to many women as a result of their marriage into Puṣṭimārgī families. At times, the rite of initiation and the practice of domestic sevā becomes a source of tension between kinswomen and husbands and wives. Moreover, marriage, and the various social ties between women that emerge as a result of it, signals an association between the practice of sevā, class privilege, and family status production.

The prominent bhakti-bhāv (devotional sentiment) evoked in Puṣṭimārg is vātsalya-bhāv (“parental-love”), performing the sevā of Śrīnāthji with all the care, attentiveness, and love that a mother has for her child. Most of the women I interviewed in Ahmedabad spend an average of one and a half to two hours a day performing sevā, which includes preparing ritual food offerings (bhog), adorning the image of Krṣṇa (śṛṅgār), offering the mid-day meal (rājbhog), and finally ending in the evening with placing Krṣṇa to sleep until the next morning (śayan), when he is awakened.

149 It is perhaps in the bhakti context, particularly in the Vaiṣṇav bhakti context, that we can truly appreciate the congruence of religious and aesthetic experience. In Vaiṣṇav bhakti, emotional sentiments or bhāv becomes the primary mode of approaching and experiencing the divine. Medieval Vaiṣṇav theologians and rhetoricians, such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, Rūpa Gosvāmī and Jīva Gosvāmī, substantiated the role of emotion in bhakti by invoking and reinterpreting Sanskrit aesthetic theory and reducing the eight (sthāyi-) bhāvs to five: dāśya-bhāv (servitude); sākhyā-bhāv (friendship); vātsalya-bhāv (parental love); madhura-bhāv (erotic love); and, śānta-bhāv (peace and reverence) (Haberman 1988; McDaniel 1989; Wulff 1984). Each bhāv (except, perhaps the fifth) is modeled after human relationships and, therefore, each devotional relationship or bhakti-bhāv becomes a particular mode by which devotees approach and experience their love for Krṣṇa. The earliest reference to this taxonomy of bhakti-bhāvs can be found in the tenth century text, the Nāradabhaktisūtra (v.82). Nārada also explains how a devotee should completely surrender themselves to Krṣṇa, where the dynamic experience of the pain of separation (viraha) and joy in union (samyog) with Krṣṇa becomes the highest emotional state.
for the morning ārtī (waving of the camphor flame or maṅgal ārtī).\textsuperscript{150} Since Puṣṭimārg follows orthodox purity-pollution prescriptions, most women observe menstrual restrictions and delegate the the performance of sevā to their family members during times of menses. Furthermore, many, if not all, the women I worked with learned how to perform sevā from their own mothers, grand-mothers or grand-fathers, aunts, mother-in-laws, and female friends – and not from printed sevā manuals.\textsuperscript{151} Printed sevā guides are kept on hand for festivals and for remembering which kūrtans or dhols to sing during each darśan. Several women also have re-written their grandparents or in-laws’ sevā guides or have had them dictated from memory by their elders, thus committing them to writing for the first time. Although many women have begun to attend sevā śivīrs or “retreats” and are turning to published sevā manuals or paddhatis – which leads to a more standardized practice of sevā – descriptions of sevā practices have thus varied throughout my study.

Bhavna Patel, whom we were introduced to in the opening narrative (see page 216) and Ganga Patel are sister-in-laws (married to two brothers) in an affluent business class family in Ahmedabad.\textsuperscript{152} Their mother-in-law (sās), Kajol Patel (b.1909), was an ardent Puṣṭimārg devotee who followed strict purity rules in her preparations and

\begin{itemize}
  \item[] 150 In \textit{havelī} contexts the sevā of Śrīnāthji is structured according to the following liturgical cycle: \textit{Maṅgal} (Kṛṣṇa is awakened); śrṅgār (the svarūp is adorned); ṣvāl (Kṛṣṇa is displayed as walking in the pasture with cows, and playing with his friends); rājbhog (the most ornate of them, when Kṛṣṇa is presented with his mid-day meal); utthāpan (after an afternoon nap, Kṛṣṇa has wandered off in the pastures with his friends and is called to return); sandhyā (Kṛṣṇa is offered a light meal); śayan (Kṛṣṇa has gone to bed for the night). Although many lay practitioners attempt to follow this routine, for the most part, they conflate maṅgal and śrṅgār, and sometimes rājbhog as well, or the mid-day is meal offered several hours later. Some perform utthāpan, and again conflate sandhyā and śayan in the evening if they have time. However, many women simply stop after offering rājbhog and do not perform the evening sevā. The primary reason given for this is that, by the evening, their husbands and children come home from work or school (if the children are young).
  \item[] 151 As Bhavna expressed to me, “meri sās hi meri guru hain,” “my mother-in-law is my teacher.”
  \item[] 152 With Bhavna and Ganga, the Patel family has now been Puṣṭimārgī for at least three generations. Financially, Bhavna states how her in-laws were not always a very wealthy family, with their construction business only prospering in the last few decades.
\end{itemize}
performance of sevā (apras sevā). One of the primary domestic duties of daughter-in-laws (bahū) is the preparation of meals, and since all the food cooked in the house was first ritually offered to Kṛṣṇa, Bhavna and Ganga were expected to obtain initiation before marrying into the family. Without being initiated, Bhavna and Ganga would not be able to perform one of their primary household obligations, namely enter the kitchen and cook all meals for the entire family.

The two women were also expected to assist their mother-in-law in her daily performance of sevā. Bhavna recalled an incident that occurred in the first few years of marriage when her mother-in-law asked her to place the tray of food-offerings in the sevā room before guests arrived. Sensing her irritability, Bhavna’s mother-in-law felt that the food-offerings had been “tainted” and so she did not offer the food to Śrīnāthji, and she and her husband fasted for the rest of the day. As Bhavna remembers, “It was very difficult in the beginning. I was not attached at all, there were too many rules, and they all felt so unnecessary.” When I met them many years after this incident, Bhavna and Ganga perform daily sevā in their respective homes and both acknowledge how sevā has become an integral and even fulfilling part of their lives; without it their day would not feel complete. When I asked Bhavna about her daughter-in-law – who happens to come from a Jain family – Bhavna noted with enthusiasm that she has also received Puṣṭimārg dikṣā and occasionally helps her in performing daily sevā.154

153 In addition to the maintenance of ritual purity, most Puṣṭimārgī followers do not allow food-offerings to be touched or seen by non-Puṣṭimārgī individuals in order to protect the food-offerings from the “evil-eye” or drṣṭi.

154 In my own work, I came across several households in which the wife’s/daughter-in-law’s natal family were Jain, and who were nevertheless expected to obtain dikṣā at the time of marriage. There were also examples of young women from Puṣṭimārg families marrying into Jain families. This does not resonate with Josephine Reynell’s study of Jain women, in which she argues “…marriages with other Jain castes or
Similar experiences of being obliged to obtain dīkṣā before marriage are common to many of the women I worked with who married into Puṣṭimārgī families. In addition to being a method for perpetuating Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities, the rite of initiation and the daily practice of sevā became one of the many means by which the authority of a groom’s family, especially that of the mother-in-law, is deployed, maintained, and even resisted. Gita Lakhani, who is in her early seventies and is at the social center of a large Puṣṭimārg community in Ahmedabad, comments on how a mother-in-law’s daily sevā practice – particularly her strict enforcement of purity rules – can have far lasting and detrimental effects on relationships between kinswomen. When a mother-in-law is too strict, Gita explains, and she keeps saying to her daughter-in-law “don’t come into the kitchen!,” “wash yourself!,” “don’t touch me!,” it is bound to create tensions. “And now, when the sās is old,” Lakhani quips, “her bahū does not want to take care of her.”

On several occasions the conversation became uncomfortable when I asked some older women if their daughter-in-laws assist them in doing sevā. Sudha Shah, who also received initiation at the time of her wedding forty-six years ago, shares her disappointment at the lack of interest her bahūs express when performing sevā. With time, she says, her daughter-in-laws have stopped participating in and assisting her with daily sevā altogether, unless there is a large festival approaching. This is a concern for Sudha as she is not sure whether the practice of sevā, which has been maintained by her

with non Jain castes are strictly censured” (1987, 332). Douglas Haynes, on the other hand, does acknowledge how sectarian affiliations at times failed to preserve rigid endogamous and communal boundaries between Brahmin-baniyā merchants: “Intermarriage was possible [between Jains and Vaishnavas] in some cases, especially since some jnatis [sub-castes] included both Jain and Hindu families” (Govindbhai Desai, Hindu Families in Gujarat, qtd in Haynes 1991, 55). It would seem that among the baniyā communities, caste and class status at times trumped sectarian or religious differences.
husband’s family for at least the last two generations, will continue with her
grandchildren. These anxieties signal the important roles and pressures women, as
mothers, face to preserve and perpetuate a family’s sectarian identity by ensuring that
they and their children continue the practice of domestic sevā.

There are, however, exceptional cases in which a daughter-in-law who is not a
follower of Puṣṭimārg maintains the family’s domestic sevā. This is the case with Dini
Shodhan, the great-grand-daughter-in-law of Puṣṭimārg ṣēṭh, Balabhai Damordas, who
founded the well-known Sarangpur Mills in Ahmedabad (see page 81). I visited Dini
Shodhan in the family’s large estate where there is a small temple built on the grounds
next to her home, the “Villa Shodhan,” designed by the French architect, Le Corbusier.
Dini, who comes from a Jain family, continued to have a Jain shrine in her home after her
marriage. She notes how her husband’s family, especially her mother-in-law, were
staunch (‘pakkā’) Puṣṭimārgīs; her sās would not even come to her home to eat meals.
When her in-laws passed away, their svarūp became the inheritance of their son, Dini’s
husband. The svarūp, which is close to one hundred years old, was placed in the temple
built on the Villa’s grounds. Puṣṭimārg ritual specialists (mukhiyās) have been hired to
maintain the daily domestic sevā practices which used to take place at her in-laws home.
The women who would come for satsaṅg and observed darśan at her mother-in-law’s
residence have followed the svarūp and congregate at Dini’s house fairly often. Dini,
who has a PhD in Chemistry, fondly acknowledges how her mother-in-law was a
“different kind of person, above this world.” Not only has Dini preserved the century-
long worship of her in-law’s svarūp, she explains how there is a trust in place, which will
guarantee the continued maintenance of sevā after they pass away.
Lay practitioners, like Sapna Amin, say they will never impose the rite of initiation on their new daughter-in-laws. They are also not expecting their own children or bahūs to continue performing sevā after they have passed away. Sapna, who comes from a Svāminārāyaṇ Vaisṇav family, was asked to receive dikṣā by her Puṣṭimārgī mother-in-law who made it clear that no one would eat any food cooked by Sapna unless she received initiation before the wedding. Like Bhavana and Ganga, Sapna initially did not feel emotionally involved in her daily performance of sevā. Although she now admits that sevā has become an important aspect of her day, Sapna says she will not “force” her new daughter-in-laws to do the same. She understands how demanding the daily practice of sevā – with its purity and dietary rules – can be for a daughter-in-law who was not raised in a Puṣṭimārgī family, especially if she does not have support from her husband.

Sapna’s experience also demonstrates how the practice of sevā can become a site of tension between women and their husbands. As our conversation progressed Sapna explained how her husband, a wealthy business man, is out of the house for most of the day but requires her unequivocal attention when he is at home. At times, she says, her husband becomes upset if she spends too much time doing sevā at the expense of fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother and wife. Therefore, Sapna performs sevā for a relative short amount of time every day (about forty-five minutes) and only performs sevā once her husband has left for work. However, this is not to suggest that only the men in a Puṣṭimārg family are drawing the boundaries between women’s religious activities and household duties or dictating the degree to which their wives can be involved in the performance of domestic sevā. Several women expressed that taking care of their family is indeed the primary responsibility of a mother and wife, a responsibility that cannot be
abandoned or neglected at the expense of their sevā practices. After all, Puṣṭimārg is a householder tradition that does not place a high value on renunciation or ascetic withdrawal from family life. As one woman told me, “where does it say that we should stop taking care of our family to do sevā?”

Although the custom of married women adopting the religious practices of their in-laws is expected and usually accepted by incoming bahūs, I have encountered several examples of women who decided to obtain Puṣṭimārg dīkṣā later in life, or who have continued to perform sevā in their new homes, even if their in-laws are not Puṣṭimārgī. Neelima Patel, who married when she was twenty years old, decided to receive initiation a dozen years after her marriage. Her mother-in-law was an orthodox Svāmīnārāyaṇ follower, and so Neelima kept both her initiation and her sevā practices a secret for many years. She also still continued visiting Svāmīnārāyaṇ temples as well as Puṣṭimārg havelīs. Now, many years later, her son and daughter both received dīkṣā and her daughter-in-law is also Puṣṭimārgī. Neelima admits that if there was ever any point of contention between her and her sās it was because she was Puṣṭimārgī and her mother-in-law was Svāmīnārāyaṇ.

Payal Patel presents an example of how some women have continued with their Puṣṭimārg practices in their in-laws homes. Payal received dīkṣā when she was eight years old and learnt all aspects of Puṣṭimārg sevā from her grandmother. Sometime after she married into a wealthy non-Puṣṭimārgī Gujarati family, her mother passed away leaving Payal with her personal svarūp.¹⁵⁵ Payal decided to continue performing sevā to

¹⁵⁵ Normally after a practitioner passes away, their personal svarūp needs to undergo a re-consecration ceremony in order to be worshiped again. During the consecration ceremony the svarūp is touched by a
the svarup in her in-laws’ home and eventually even Payal’s husband, Chetanbhai, obtained dīkṣā and has since been participating by performing the morning maṅgal ārti with her. Her children and daughter-in-law have also received dīkṣā and assist her occasionally in performing daily sevā. For a brief period of time even Payal’s mother-in-law performed daily sevā with them, and recently her sister-in-law (Chetanbhai’s sister), Rukmini Shukla, has also obtained initiation.

Rukmini Shukla, who comes from a wealthy upper-class family, is the woman who first invited me to the Vaiṣṇav “kitty-party” at Bhavna’s home (see page 216). Rukmini became exposed to sevā practices and Puṣṭimārg religious culture in general through her kinship ties with Payal (her brother’s wife). Like most women I worked with in Ahmedabad, Rukmini did not learn all aspects of sevā from a “sevā manual” or paddhati. Instead she learned how to perform sevā from Payal, her Puṣṭimārg friends, and she says she also draws inspiration for śrīngār (adornment) ideas from her occasional visits to the havelī during festivals. It was only after visiting the pilgrimage town of Nathdwara in 2000 that Rukmini says she was inspired to finally obtain dīkṣā and purchase a Śrīnāthji svarūp. Rukmini received dīkṣā without telling her husband, and while laughing softly, she recalls the moment she called him and said “I’m Vaiṣṇav!”.

Her husband asked if she will start doing sevā at home; he was concerned that she would become too involved and invest too much time in it.

Rukmini’s husband’s family is Śākta, and worship to Devī still continues in the home. Her sās did not mind when Rukmini obtained initiation in Puṣṭimārg, and she has

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Gosvāmī. He bathes the image with five sacred substances (pañcāṁṛt: milk, curd, honey, clarified butter, and sugar), and offers it prasād from a previously established svarūp.
accepted the change in Rukmini’s daily mode of living as a result of her new religious affiliations, such as only eating meals after they are offered to her Ṭhākurjī. Rukmini has Brahmin cooks, and her maids have also received initiation, so she is not worried about breaching any purity rules if they assist her in making preparations for her performance of daily sevā and during festivals. I asked her about her children; her two sons have undergone the first stage of initiation. Rukmini also insists that she will not force initiation upon any future daughter-in-laws: “If they do my sevā [in the sense of ‘taking care’ of her],” Rukmini explains, “so that I can continue doing my sevā [to Śrīnāthjī], then it is as though they are doing sevā indirectly.” She uses this same logic to explain how, even though her husband performs minimal sevā, he nevertheless “does the most sevā since, after all, he gives me the money to do it!” This notion was echoed by several women, that is, without their husband’s support, in the form of their general acceptance as well as their explicit financial support, many women would not be able to continue performing sevā.

It is in the context of these ever-expanding and overlapping circles of women who are connected through marriage and other social-networks that I became interested in exploring the points of intersection between domestic sevā, women’s participation, and the production of class among Puṣṭimārg families. This chapter began with a short description of my visit to Bhavna Patel’s home, where she was hosting the afternoon kitty party. In her bungalow twelve women – some of whom we have already encountered, such Ganga, Payal, Sapna, and Neelima – were gathered for the occasion, which they variously referred to as a “Vaiṣṇav Kitty Party”, “Gopī Maṇḍal” (circle of gopīs), or satsaṅg. Some women in this group are friends, while others are related through
marriage, such as Bhavna and Ganga, and Payal and Rukmini. The afternoon Vaiṣṇav satsaṅg, which has been going on for at least seven years, is hosted by one member of the group once a month. They said that the gathering not only provided an opportunity for socializing, but also served as a venue for discussing various topics related to Puṣṭimārg theology and ritual praxis. Here they discuss topics from a Puṣṭimārg text (such as a vārtā, or a text on sevā), plan pilgrimage tours, and also exchange recipes for food-offering preparations and designs for śrīgār decorations to be used in daily sevā.

In speaking to the women I discovered that Ganga’s in-law, Nina Patel, was also present at the gathering. Both of Ganga’s daughters married Nina’s sons. Nina acknowledges how her interest in performing sevā was definitely promoted, if not entirely prompted by, her social and family connections with Ganga. Not only did both of Nina’s daughter-in-laws come from a Puṣṭimārgī family, but Nina would also be invited by their mother, Ganga, to the monthly kitty party or satsaṅg gatherings where she had the opportunity to meet other women from the Puṣṭimārg community. When I met with Nina individually, I learnt that she decided to undergo initiation five years ago and has since practiced sevā everyday. When I asked how her husband felt about her new religious interests and practices she explained that he was entirely indifferent, providing neither protest nor overt support. Pointing to the ten-foot high Śrīnāthjī statue in her lobby, Nina acknowledges how it was in fact her husband’s idea to purchase and install the large image ten years ago. Curiously enough, this image was purchased well before her initiation into the tradition. Both Nina’s desire to become an active member of the Puṣṭimārg community (which includes many women from her own social network) and her husband’s purchase of a Śrīnāthjī image – only to be displayed as a religious
commodity in their foyer – demonstrate how sectarian affiliations and styles of domestic rituals are informed by class and community associations. It was clear that even before Nina decided to receive initiation, her social network consisted of many members from the Puṣṭimārg community, so much so that both their sons married young women from a Puṣṭimārg family. Nina and her husband also felt it was natural to purchase and display a Puṣṭimārg image in their home. Large, opulent Puṣṭimārg images can, therefore, serve dual functions: as religious commodities they can mark one’s elite status as Puṣṭimārgī, however, as mere commodities (often displayed in the homes of non-Puṣṭimārgīs) they can symbolize the necessary cultural and symbolic capital needed to reproduce class status and maintain social respectability.

All the women who come together for their monthly Vaiṣṇav satsaṅg are college or university educated and come from wealthy Gujarati families. They also married into families of similar economic class and social status, and were either already performing domestic sevā beforehand (like Payal, for example) or became interested in doing so through their associations with each other after they were married (as with Rukmini, Nina, and Neelima). Indeed, the practice of domestic sevā is one of the ways through which these women manage their social ties with each other. Moreover, the specific social spaces or settings created as result of their practice of, and interest in, domestic sevā are both informed by and help reproduce and perpetuate sectarian identities and class hierarchies.
Class, Kīrtans, and Classical Genres: Singing Songs of the Havelī in the Home

In addition to their monthly satsaṅg gatherings, another occasion on which many of the women come together is during their weekly kīrtan lessons. For the last three years, Nina Patel has been organizing two and half hour kīrtan tutorials, twice a week in her home. The women made sure to point out that their instructor, Krishnakumar Nayak, is the son of a kīrtankār trained in the “classical style of havelī saṅgīt,” or Puṣṭimārg temple music. By paying a nominal fee to a trained Puṣṭimārg singer-musician, the women are learning how to sing the songs of the famous Puṣṭimārg poets in the manner that they have been sung in havelīs for centuries. The question of when and how these Brajbhāṣā poetic compositions began to circulate outside the temple context and in the homes of lay practitioners is difficult to ascertain. Hand-written compilations of havelī kīrtans have been passed down from the seventeenth and eighteenth century. While published versions, such as the standard four-volume kīrtan collection, the Puṣṭimārg Kīrtan Samgrah, which is in use in all havelīs today, was published towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ho 2013, 214). Zealous lay practitioners can find and purchase this four-volume collection, containing over ten-thousand kīrtans, at large havelīs in

156 Krishnakumar Nayak, who is also known as Krishnakumar, received his musical training from Gosvāmī Natvargpālījī beginning in 1994 at the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl havelī (belonging to the first house), Dosiwadni pole, Ahmedabad. Krishnakumar explains how his great grandfather, Chabildas Nayak, grandfather, Campaklal Nayak, and father, Ghanshyamdas Nayak, all sang in Puṣṭimārg havelīs, as well as on television and radio shows. Krishnakumar also performs in havelīs when invited, especially during special occasions and festivals. He accompanies Gosvāmīs who tour internationally to places like the UK, Singapore, Australia, and east Africa. He has also been giving lessons to women like Nina and her friends for more than a decade, and sees it as a legitimate mode for continuing the tradition of temple singing: “during sevā what is sung is pure havelī saṅgīt.” Krishnakumar explains how only a limited number of havelīs have full-time kīrtankārs. “We have to do our own marketing now,” he admits. He also acknowledges how important the financial contribution of wealthy Vaiṣṇavas is to maintaining havelī liturgical traditions. He sees laypeople’s interest in taking havelī kīrtan lessons as a form of devotional commitment, on the one hand, and a continuation of Vaiṣṇav patronage practices, on the other hand (Personal communication, February 1st 2010).
Nathdwara and Kankroli. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter four, printed collections of Puṣṭimārg songs, such as Lallubhai Chaganlal Desai’s *Vividh dhol tathā padanāgrah* (1913) and *Kīrtansaṅgrah* (1936), which include Brajbhāṣā kīrtans as well as Gujarati *dhols* and *garbās*, can be found in the private collections of many Puṣṭimārg households. Most of the women I visited use these collections or have memorized many well-known kīrtans and sing them while performing sevā. They do so by simply reciting the lyrics without a formal melody or sing them in a tune of their own choosing. However, as many of the women who had gathered for this kīrtan lesson expressed to me, these lessons presented an opportunity for them to learn how to sing the compositions of the famous Puṣṭimārg poets “properly,” in their temple style.

I accompanied Krishnakumar one day to another kīrtan session, hosted at the home of Lataben Shah, and which was overseen by Vrajlata (Raja) beṭīḷī (Figure 3). There were about fifteen middle-aged women seated on the floor in Lataben’s large living room, in which several images of Śrīnāthjī were displayed. Some of the women gathered there, such as Neelima and Ganga, were already known to me. After singing a few dhols composed by Raja beṭīḷī’s grandmothers, Vrajpriya and Kamalpriya, Raja beṭīḷī asked some of the women to sing a few kīrtans, which they were apparently supposed to have practiced at home. After Krishnakumar sang the first refrain while playing the harmonium, some women nervously repeated after him. Soon, though, Raja beṭīḷī clucked her tongue and shook her head disapprovingly. She then demonstrated how the songs should be sung – with the help of Krishnakumar – of course. Clearly, the women had not

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157 Raja beṭīḷī is the aunt of Tilak bāvā or Madhusudhan Gosvāmī from the Natvarlāl Shyāmlāl havelī (first house) in Ahmedabad. Raja beṭīḷī is married and has children. She hosts weekly satsaṅg gatherings in her home and also supervises kīrtan lessons at the home of Puṣṭimārg female patrons.
practiced enough. This continued for another forty-five minutes to an hour. At the end of
the session, Krishnakumar asked the women to try and practice more at home for there
might be “surprise exams” given at any moment. Before the group dispersed, Lataben’s
housemaids served everyone snacks and chāī and the women had an opportunity to
socialize.

Figure 3. Krishnakumar Nayak giving a kīrtan lesson to Puṣṭimārg women in the home of
Lataben Shah.

Another woman, Pujaben Shah, who is not socially connected to any of the
upper-class Puṣṭimārg women discussed above, graciously invited me to her home one
evening. I happened to come to her house when she was nearing the end of her daily
sevā. In a spontaneous gesture, she asked if I wanted to watch her perform the last few
moments of her practice, which included śayan, when she closes the doors to her
household shrine and places Śrīnāthjī to sleep.158 As she was about to sing a few kīrtans

158 Generally, Puṣṭimārgīs do not allow non-initiated individuals to touch any of their sevā offerings,
especially before they have performed sevā, or observe their sevā practices.
from her copy of the *havelī Kīrtan Saṅgrah* collection, she paused and in a somewhat apologetic tone said that she cannot sing these *kīrtans* in the manner of women who have taken *kīrtan* classes. When we spoke later she explained how she knows some women who go for *kīrtan* lessons, in the evenings, between 8pm-9pm once a week. When I asked if she has attended classes such as these or would like to do so, she responded by saying “How can I? I would like to learn how to sing these *kīrtans* properly but I can’t go. My husband comes home at that time. I also don’t have a scooter or a car in which I can travel at that late hour.” What stood out from this conversation and other similar conversations with women who did not have the time or means needed for attending *kīrtan* lessons was that they, too, were referring to a “proper” or “correct” way of singing *kīrtans*, that is, in their traditional *rāg* or melody.

At this time, it is important to point out that the same *rāg* performed in Puṣṭimārg contexts sounds different from its Hindustani classical rendition (Ho 2013, 225). Hindustani classical vocal music is characterized by three prominent styles and genres: *dhrupad*, *khyāl*, and *thumrī*. The elitist re-making of these traditions as simultaneously “classical” and national in the early twentieth century was embedded in larger cultural nationalist projects, which sought to construct an authentic, pure Hindu culture and tradition. Meilu Ho has painstakingly attempted to demonstrate the historical influence of the Puṣṭimārg *kīrtan* repertoires on the development of Hindustani vocal traditions (2006; 2013). Although some contemporary performers of classical Hindustani music do acknowledge these connections, *havelī saṅgīt* is not generally

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159 With regards to Hindustani classical vocal music, Dard Neuman traces the general trajectory of this process in his doctoral work, *A House of Music* (2004), while Janaki Bhakle focuses this discussion on two men, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, and their roles as the “key orchestrators of music’s modernization” (2005, 5).
counted among north Indian “classical” musical genres. So what does it mean when havelī saṅgīt practitioners – such as Puṣṭimārg hereditary musicians and their students – say they are singing in a “classical” style? For Puṣṭimārgīs, havelī saṅgīt is elevated as a classical genre due to its centuries long preservation in a “closed system,” that of the havelī and via a lineage of hereditary kīrtankārs. The performance of temple kīrtans also relies on rāgs, traditional melodies associated with courtly music in north India. Although this system of rāgs is the same as that used by classical musicians, it is not considered constitutive of Hindu classical music art as it was reinvented in the twentieth century. Finally, the composition of the kīrtan repertoires in the canonical language of Brajbhāṣā further reifies the genre’s elite status over and above other performance genres such as Gujarati garbās and dhols.

Learning to sing the songs of the Puṣṭimārg havelīs in their “authentic” style is not the only mode by which the havelī kīrtans have begun to circulate out of their traditional milieu and into the homes of lay practitioners. It marks yet another shift in performance contexts that the Puṣṭimārg temple repertoires have endured over the past decades. As noted above, published kīrtan compilations have been available since the turn of the century. In terms of their performance, Meilu Ho demonstrates how Puṣṭimārg singers have recorded and performed their music at public venues such as the government owned All India Radio and at national institutions like the Indian National Theatre for the last thirty to forty years (2006, 196). In fact, All India Radio played a key role in

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160 Classical Hindustani vocal artists such Aminuddin Dagar of the Dagar family, Pandit Jasraj, and Naina Devi have commented on the associations between havelī saṅgīt and north Indian classical music traditions (Ho 2013, 225).
popularizing the term “havelī saṅgīt” when it began using the phrase in the 1970s (2013, 232fn10).

Puṣṭimārg temples and wealthy patrons have also helped sponsor recordings of songs by both hereditary kīrtankārs and non-hereditary performers since the 1970s and 80s. Since this time, moreover, Hindustani classical vocalists have been recording albums of Puṣṭimārg liturgical songs that both lay practitioners and the general public can purchase and listen to in their homes. This has indeed shaped the representation of havelī saṅgīt as “classical music” in the popular imagination and has reified this understanding for Puṣṭimārgīs. CDs and mp3s, such as Mangal Swara, Krishna Seva Haveli Sangeet, or Soor Padavali by singers like Subha Mudgal, Sajan Mishra, and Ravindra Sathe effectively reproduce a liturgical day of havelī kīrtans (228). Our very own Krishnakumar has several CDs out as well, such as Giriraj ki sharan, Shrinathji Pyara, and Aao Kirtan Sikhe – the last title literally means, “Come, Let’s Learn Kirtan.” Finally, the temple repertoires have also been performed on the modern concert stage by Puṣṭimārg kīrtankārs and by well-known Hindustani classical vocal artists such as Pundit Jasraj and Shruti Sadolikar Katkar.

The decline in traditional forms of temple patronage, colonial modernity, and nationalist reinventions of classical music have all enabled the democratization of hereditary musical forms. Hereditary musicians, adapting to this milieu, are forced to reconsider their pedagogical styles to meet new types of demands. As Janaki Bakhle argues, by the twentieth century, music became a “classical” or “traditional” art form that “occupied pride of place in the national imagination. While its upper-level pedagogy
remained dominated by hereditary musicians, it became possible even for respectable middle-class Hindu housewives to imagine themselves as performers” (4).

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic ideologies also promoted the notion that, in addition to cleaning and arranging the home, keeping accounts, and taking care of their children, another way housewives could transform the home into a blissful sanctuary for their working husbands was to sing “pleasant songs” or play a musical instrument. Journals like the *Strībodh* suggested to their female readers to “Sing or play a musical instrument to help your husband relax when he returns home” (Shukla 1991, 65). Indeed, as Amada Weidman argues – with reference to south Indian Karnāṭak music – “for many Brahmin elites, the sign of the successful classicization of music and dance from the 1920s to 1940s was the transformation of these forms into ‘arts’ fit for upper-caste, middle-class ‘family women’” (2006, 115). Much like needle-work, classical music – through either listening to it or playing it – ensured the production of proper domesticity by occupying the leisure time of upper-class housewives, who did not have to work outside the home and whose time was made free with the help of housemaids and cooks.161

The domestication and “spiritualization” of classical music, through its embodiment by upper-caste respectable housewives went hand in hand with its rise as a national art form. This process also involved the marginalization of professional female performers, such as *tawaifs* and *devādāsīs*, who sang and danced in public from the late

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161 Amanda Weidman describes an advertisement for the South India Music Emporium from the 1930s, which appeared in the concert program of the Madras Music Academy. The ad “counselled male concertgoers on how to connect the bourgeois public sphere of the classical concert hall with its domestic equivalent” (2006, 138). The ad read as follows: “A modern wife has tons of unemployed leisure and a wise husband must provide hobbies for her leisure being usefully employed. What better and more soul-satisfying hobby can there be than violin playing. Give your wife a violin today and ensure eternal happiness at home” (138).
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{162} For example, \textit{thumrī}, a genre that was traditionally associated with the \textit{tawaif} courtesan-performer has survived to this day and even became reconstituted as a form of Hindustani classical music art because it was cleansed of erotic lyrics and dissociated from its early dance associations namely, with the bodies of \textit{tawaifs} (Du Perron 54-56; see footnote 162). Classical singing and dancing became suitable art forms for middle-class housewives to engage with only when professional female performers like \textit{tawaifs} and \textit{devādāsīs} were replaced by upper-caste, respectable married women.\textsuperscript{163}

I understand that \textit{havelī saṅgīt} was not part of this nationalization project, which also then excluded it from being “reinvented” as a form of Hindustani vocal music art. Moreover, \textit{havelī saṅgīt} is still the preserve of hereditary Puṣṭimārg male \textit{kirtāṅkārs},

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Tawaif} singer-dancers (also known as \textit{bājījī}), represented a north Indian courtesan performance tradition, which was an important social, economic, and artistic fixture in both \textit{navābī} courtly life and in salon contexts from the early 1800s. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, eugenics, British occupations with national physical and moral health, and the growing concern over the rise in venereal disease rates among British soldiers in colonial cantonments, led to the legislation of the Cantonment Act (1864) and the Contagious Diseases Act (1868) in India (Levine 2003). These acts specifically targeted women whose sexuality and sexual practices seemed ambivalent and, thus, threatening – namely, those women who did not conform to emerging Victorian and Indian upper-caste, middle class notions of respectable womanhood. The most explicit example of such a woman was the Indian prostitute, however, other women were rapidly subsumed under this identity, such as courtesans and professional female performers. In south India, these reforms took the form of the “anti-nautch” movement, launched by the upper-caste reformer, Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919) in the 1890s (Soneji 2012). The anti-nautch movement (nautch > \textit{nāc}, “to dance”) focused on the lifestyles of a community of hereditary female courtesan performers known as \textit{devadāsīs}. This movement culminated into significant legal interventions, catalyzed by the efforts of Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy (1866-1968). The Madras (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947, which was eventually passed by the government of independent India, successfully outlawed the artistic and social practices of \textit{devadāsī} women. According to Amelia Maciszewski (2006), the discourses surrounding the anti-nautch movement as well as subsequent legal interventions promoted by upper-caste reformers, made their way up to north India, leading to the social and artistic displacement of \textit{tawaifs} as well. Just like the male members of the \textit{devadāsī} community, who escaped the social and aesthetic stigmatization brought on by reform efforts, the hereditary male singer-musician of north Indian classical traditions, the \textit{ustād}, remained safe from such displacement. Indeed, the \textit{ustād} continues to hold a prominent position on the concert stage, if he is not entirely revered as a national celebrity (Neuman 33). On the other hand, the \textit{tawaif}’s relationship “to Indian music became marginalized from history as she became severed from a practice that was ultimately to be performed, respectably, by middle-class women” (33).

\textsuperscript{163} As Janaki Bakhle notes, “A whole generation of courtesans (\textit{bājījī}) has been replaced by upper-caste women performers”(5). See also Morcom (2013).
as it has been for centuries, and did not have to be “sanitized” the way the performance cultures of tawaifs and devadāsīs were. However, its construction as an unadulterated “source” of classical Hindustani music traditions by both scholars like Meilu Ho (2006, 2013) and by contemporary Hindustani classical musicians – who have been performing havelī saṅgī on the modern concert stage for decades – has changed the pedagogy and performance styles of havelī saṅgī. The contemporary phenomenon of elite Puṣṭimārg women taking kīrtan lessons can be understood through these larger discourses of middle-class modernities, which successfully forged connections between the performing arts, Hindu religion or “spirituality,” and ideal womanhood.

_Havelī kīrtans_ as well as the “erotic-themed” _garbās_ and _dhols_ of Puṣṭimārg were religious songs to begin with. They did not need to be further imbued with devotional connotations to be made more acceptable. However, the process of sanitizing Puṣṭimārgī women’s religious performance practices involved the labeling and replacement of “uncultured” performance genres with more respectable and elitist ones. Participating in _havelī saṅgī_ classes is not only considered an appropriate leisurely and devotional activity for upper-class Puṣṭimārg women to engage in today but it is constitutive of the many novel ways lay practitioners are continuing to reproduce and perpetuate an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. By making claims to a “classical” genre, as opposed to the popular genres of _garbās_ and _dhols_, upper-class Puṣṭimārg women are distinguishing themselves from Puṣṭimārg women who do not conform to the bourgeois aesthetics of _havelī saṅgī_ namely, those women who do not and cannot pay for _kīrtan_ lessons.
As we discussed in chapter four, from at least the early nineteenth century female laity (though not to the exclusion of men) have been singing garbā and dhol compositions in both domestic and public settings such as during sevā, in Puṣṭimārg women’s bhajan manḍalīs (“singing circle”) and satsaṅg groups, as well as in havelīs during festivals and in between darṣans. Nineteenth century reform movements targeted the singing of erotic-themed dhols garbās before Gosvāmīs and on havelī grounds. This, combined with the “in-between” status of Puṣṭimārg dhols and garbās, where they are not part of temple liturgy, has excluded them from nationalist processes of classicization and kept them outside the purview of Puṣṭimārg scholarship.

Raja beṭījī, with whom Krishnakumar conducted the kīrtan lesson at Lataben’s home, also hosts satsaṅg sessions at her household, where twenty to thirty women gather every week. Satsaṅg gatherings normally involve Raja beṭījī leading a discussion around a vārtā narrative, a Puṣṭimārg theological concept, or answering any religious or personal questions women may have. However, before commencing and at the concluding of such satsaṅg sessions, the women who gather sing from a texts like Vrajsudhā, which contains Gujarati dhols and garbās composed by Raja beṭījī’s grandmothers, Vrajpriya bahūjī and Kamalpriya bahūjī (see page 189). The atmosphere at Raja beṭījī’s house during one such satsaṅg gathering was strikingly different from Lataben’s home, where I had attended the kīrtan classes. Here, as time passed, the singing and clapping became louder, more energetic, and some women even begin to dance. Raja beṭījī explained how many more women attend these types of satsaṅg sessions than kīrtan classes since the kīrtan lessons sometimes take up more time (two hours, twice a week) and there is also a nominal fee attached. Upper and upper-middle class women, like Neelima, Ganga, and Nina, who
have hired help at home and personal drivers with cars, can afford to expend the time for such lessons. Their elite status is further demonstrated by both their claims to a “classical” genre and their ability to pay for ĥavelī ṣaṅgīṭ classes.

**Consuming Kṛṣṇa: Women, Class, and the Ritual Economies of Domestic Sevā**

In addition to taking lessons in ĥavelī ṣaṅgīṭ, another mode through which women participate in the production of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities is through forms of material culture. In many of the upper-class Puṣṭimārgī homes I visited, opulent religious commodities, such as statues and embossed paintings of Śrīnāthji, were inevitably displayed in living rooms and foyers. Such paintings can range anywhere from 7,000 to 30,000 rupees ($150–$750). Moreover, the construction of sevā rooms, separate “temples” on an estate, separate kitchen areas for preparing ritual offerings, and a vast array of purchased ritual accessories attest to an elevated economic status and indicate the existence of disposable income. For instance, in her large bungalow, Rukmini Shukla has a separate room for performing sevā made entirely out of white marble, and the shrine in which she places her svarūp is crafted in silver. During specific festivals, such as hiṅḍolā (“swing festival”) Rukmini decorates the room with ritual accoutrements, flowers, and even props to represent scenes from Kṛṣṇa’s līlās. She explained how these decorations can sometimes take many days to prepare, but noted that the result is always worth it. In fact, Rukmini mentioned that it was after seeing one of her festival decorations that her devrāṇī (her husband’s younger brother’s wife) became interested in performing sevā and underwent initiation. When I asked if she makes any of the śṛṅgār clothes herself, Rukmini said that she does so occasionally and although “women with little money
perhaps have to stitch them from their own clothes, others can make Śrīnāthji’s clothes with the latest fabric designs available in the market.” Another woman I met at the kitty party, Parul Patel, has most of the jewelry and clothes required for sevā custom-made by her family jeweler and tailor. When I asked Rukmini whether she prefers performing sevā at home or going to the havelī for darśan, she said that she only goes to the havelī on occasion, to visit the Mahārāj, her guru. As she explains, “only those individuals who perhaps don’t have an active social life, or can’t do sevā at home, go to the havelī to learn and be inspired.” The performance of sevā in domestic contexts are actions by which women, like Rukmini and Parul, negotiate and assert their privileged socio-economic status. Separate rooms constructed for domestic shrines and food preparation, and the sheer array of purchased ritual accessories undoubtedly assert class privilege.

Most of the women I worked with who belong to upper-class Puṣṭīmārg families only visit havelīs a few times a month or during festivals and special occasions. Many also purchase the ritual accoutrements for use in sevā from stalls and bazaars located on havelī grounds or through custom-made orders. They certainly do not go to the havelī for darśan daily, as other women do, nor do they volunteer for the daily preparation of flower garlands (used for adornment during sevā) at havelīs. Rukmini’s explanation as to why women go to the havelī often – because “they can’t do sevā at home” – demonstrates how the practice of domestic sevā becomes implicated in the production of an elite Puṣṭīmārg identity, at least for and among women like Rukmini. As chapter one and two illustrated, wealthy Puṣṭīmārg families have publically patronized the sect for several centuries now. Families have hosted ritual celebrations such as manoraths (“votive observance”) at the havelī, sponsored food-offerings like rāj-bhog,
subsidized the construction of havelīs or their renovations, built rest-houses (dharmaśālās), and donated gifts to Gosvāmīs or bahūjīs. Historically, such donative activities have been key sites for the production and articulation of an elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and mercantile prestige (Haynes 1991, 38). Even today, Puṣṭimārg families continue to participate in such havelī-centered acts of patronage.164

However, as I demonstrate in this project, domestic sevā has also been an integral part of Puṣṭimārgī lay practitioners’ lives. Narratives from the vārtās, historical references, as well as a plethora of sevā guides indicate that a variety of food items and ritual accoutrements are required for the performance of sevā. It is not entirely possible to date how early ritual items, meant for use in domestic ritual, became available to purchase in market contexts. In the Mahārāja Libel Case, for example, Jadunathji Gosvāmī describes that religious images “...are sold in the bazaar for purposes of worship by the Vaishnavas” (348). Drawing from an historical reference such as this, one can hypothesize that bazaars in and around Puṣṭimārg havelīs have been selling ritual items for lay practitioners to purchase since the early-mid nineteenth century, if not earlier. As Kajri Jain argues, by the nineteenth century, bazaars came to characterize “the imbrication of commerce and religion” (2012, 188). Indeed, pilgrimage traffic to large havelīs in towns like Nathdwara, where lay Puṣṭimārgīs made donations to the havelī as well as purchased religious paraphernalia and sevā items in the temple bazaars,

164 Today one can easily find the cost of sponsoring religious activities at the Nathdwara havelī on the havelī’s website: www.nathdwaratemple.org. The cost of sponsoring a full-day manorath is Rs. 17,300 ($290 USD); full rāj-bhog is Rs. 10,350 ($173 USD); half rāj-bhog is Rs. 6,700 ($112 USD); donating pistachios to the havelī kitchen costs Rs. 11,000 ($184), and so on. I also attended several manoraths at havelīs, including one where the family was celebrating the graduation of their son, who had just returned from the US after having completed a degree in Engineering. In addition to being an act of devotion, hosting such celebratins provide occasions for elite Puṣṭimārgīs to display and reproduce family status.
contributed to the overall revenue of havelīs and their custodians.\textsuperscript{165} Furthermore, in a place like Nathdwara, Puṣṭimārg’s cultic centre, hereditary communities of artists have for centuries been responsible for producing miniature paintings, picchvāīs (backdrop paintings for the temple image), manuscript illustrations, and portraits commissioned by the havelī and its Gosvāmīs (Ambalal 1987; Lyons 2004; Jain 2012, 195). These same artists also produced “souvenir” paintings as well as images for Puṣṭimārg lay practitioners to purchase.

Over time, global capitalist economies have encouraged the large-scale production and circulation of ritual and religious items in market cultures (Sinha 2010). Increased commodified styles of domestic sevā by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women are now marked by the purchase of expensive ritual accoutrements, the construction of custom-made domestic shrines, and the use of “the latest fabric designs” for the svarūp’s clothing. Material expressions of one’s sectarian identity and devotion are continuing to evolve as consumer cultures extend their influence to areas of domestic ritual praxis. Furthermore, the imbrication of domesticity, ideal womanhood, and class in early reformist and nationalist rhetoric have enabled domestic ritual contexts to become arenas for cultural consumption and display. Together, all of these processes cast the home as a modern site for Puṣṭimārg patronage.

The display of Puṣṭimārg religious commodities in living rooms, entrance ways, or foyers also represents another mode by which the home becomes a locus of elite sectarian identity production. In this discussion, it is useful to understand commodities as objects that “at a certain phase in their careers and in a particular context, meet the

\textsuperscript{165} As Norbert Peabody reminds us, “the dynamics of a healthy pilgrimage economy bound the mutual interests of king, temple, and merchants” (1991, 751).
requirements of commodity candidacy” (Appadurai 1986, 16). That is to say, the placement of a Puṣṭimārg religious item, whether it is displayed in the “commodity context” of a living room and entrance way, or in the domestic shrine, can alter its significance and meaning. Furthermore, one of the primary differences between a ritual item (such as a Kṛṣṇa svarūp or picture) bought for worship versus one consumed for display is that the former needs to be “made puṣṭi” – be imbued with “grace” and “nourishment.”

This ritual is performed by a Gosvāmī who bathes the image in pancāmrīta (the five “nectars” of curds, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar) and offers the svarūp prasād (consecrated food offering) from a previously consecrated svarūp. This transformation from commodity to an enlivened Kṛṣṇa svarūp marks the occasion when one can begin performing sevā to the image. Religious commodities bought for display, however, are not made puṣṭi for that would necessitate their constant care and performance of sevā by family members.

While the practice of domestic sevā by Puṣṭimārg women is not novel, we should appreciate the novel ways in which women’s religious activities have become implicated in the production of elite Puṣṭimārg sectarian identities. This occurs through increased commodified styles of domestic sevā, the construction of separate spaces for the performance of sevā, as well as the aesthetic choices made in the purchase of both ritual accoutrements used in worship and religious commodities consumed for display. Although the men of such households have traditionally controlled the follow of economic capital, women’s nuanced and imbricating roles as practitioners and consumers

166 Normally, outside the Puṣṭimārg context, images meant for worship are “brought to life” (prānapratisthā) through the recitation of certain Sanskrit mantras.
transform this into the cultural and symbolic capital needed to maintain Puṣṭimārg family status and respectability.

Women’s roles as consumers – and even suppliers – in this evolving “ritual economy” are informed by, and contribute to the reproduction of, class hierarchies. For example, Jinal Shah, a woman who comes from a low income family, does not have a separate ritual space or kitchen for preparing her food offerings, and she makes all the accouterments at home, including the image of Śrīnāthji she has displayed in her small living room. In fact, she makes a substantial contribution to the family’s income by making and selling śṛṅgār accessories to women from upper-class Puṣṭimārg families; among her customers are the women who get together for the monthly kitty party. I met other women like Jinal who make and sell śṛṅgār accoutrements through Deepaben Seth, who founded a Puṣṭimārg mahilā maṇḍal (“women’s group”) approximately fourteen years ago in Ahmedabad. Deepaben comes from a lower middle-class Puṣṭimārgī family and makes all her śṛṅgār accessories herself. She said that she does sevā with whatever means are available to her: “If I don’t have money to buy almonds to make sāmaṅgrī [food-offerings], then I don’t – it doesn’t matter, you offer whatever you can.” Deepaben said that she originally started the mahilā maṇḍal as a way to gather women together from her neighborhood. Together they sing Puṣṭimārgī songs at homes of people whom were either hosting a Puṣṭimārgī festival or celebrating an auspicious event such as like the birth of a child, a wedding, or even the purchase of a new home.

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167 I was put in touch with Jinal through the help of Rukmini Shukla. Rukmini told me that she, and other women from her social network, purchase custom-made accoutrements from Jinal fairly often.
One Saturday afternoon I was invited to such an event at the flat of Meena Shah. Approximately twenty women were gathered there and many of them were from Deepaben’s manḍal group. For about an hour several women sang Gujarati dhols from printed and even hand-written texts, while other women joined in during the refrain. They even danced to garbās to which they all sang to together as a group (Figure 4).

![Puṣṭimārg women dancing and singing garbā.](image)

At the end of the session food was served and the women soon began talking about personal matters, their family lives, or upcoming weekend plans. At the commencement or conclusion of these sessions the hosting family usually offers a donation that Deepaben collects and uses for other activities and services, such as pilgrimage tours, buying supplies, and providing money to any member of the manḍal who may need financial assistance. With these donations Deepaben was also able to open a small workshop near her home, where some of the women from the mahilā manḍal come to make and package śṛṅgār accessories. These accessories are then sold through orders received by word of mouth or sometimes at stalls that Deepaben and other women from the manḍal set up at local havelīs. Deepaben acknowledges the economic benefits
that such an organization offers to women coming from low-income families, but she also insists that the activities they organize allow them to get together and socialize. Ultimately, she emphasizes the community-based bonds she and the other women share: “These women will take care of me. They will be there when something is wrong.” She also adds jokingly, “and of course our daughters-in-law are probably happy that their mothers-in-law are out of the house for a few hours!” These occurrences provide us with a counterpoint to the kinds of elite cultural practices, such as attending havelī saṅgīt classes and organizing Vaiṣṇav kitty parties that we have already observed among upper-class Puṣṭimārgī women. Such shifts in performance contexts and practices inform and are informed by evolving Puṣṭimārg class politics, which women, through their religious practices and aesthetic choices, continue to mold and reproduce.

Returning to Deepaben Seth’s mahilā maṇḍal, I once accompanied the ladies from the group to the Vallabhsadan havelī. At the havelī, Deepaben had a stall selling all the ritual accoutrements made by the women from her maṇḍal. Next to them, another woman, Kiran Jhaveri, also had seva items on display, such as svarūp clothes, jewelry, and she was even selling small porcelain statues of Vallabha and Yamunā. When I began talking to her, and especially after she handed me her business card – which described her as a “śṛṅgār specialist” – I soon realized that Kiran ran a “one-woman business” ordering, making, and selling sevā accessories. I later came to visit her at her home in Baroda, which she has set up as a makeshift workshop. There, her brother and nephew were working on making artificial and gold plated jewelry pieces for svarūps. The family

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168 The Vallabhsadan havelī is a trust havelī that opened in Ahmedabad in 1976.
also operates a jewelry business, known as “Lālan Jewelers.” However, Kiran, who never married, is responsible for managing all requests and sales associated with sevā accessories and religious commodities, such as gold embossed images of Śrīnāthjī (which cost around Rs. 5,000 or $85 USD). As Kiran explains, “these more expensive images are very popular among Mahārājs and even NRIs [Non-Resident Indians].”

Kiran makes Śrīnāthjī clothes and jewelry for the Puṣṭimārgī laity and also for use in havelīs. For over a decade now, she has also been organizing sevā śivīrs (“retreats”) two to three times a month during which she teaches women how to make their own Śrīnāthjī accessories and explains how to use them. Anywhere between thirty to eighty women (and occasionally a few retired men) attend these sessions, for which they have to pay an entrance fee. This entrance fee provides them with the supplies they need to make Śrīnāthjī jewelry and clothes. When I asked Kiran if she thinks lay practitioners’ tastes have changed over time, she said yes. She nuanced this point by adding how, “in the past,” individuals were more concerned about things like the “quality of fabric” or “simplicity”; now, however, “it’s about being fancy and different. Originality has decreased and dikhāvā [“showiness”] has increased.”

In addition to local havelīs, one of the important sites where Puṣṭimārgī women can purchase Śrīnāthjī accoutrements include large pilgrimage towns, like Nathdwara. In Nathdwara one finds hundreds of stalls selling both ritual items for use in domestic sevā and also images of Śrīnāthjī bought for displaying in one’s home (Figure 5a and b).
Figures 5a and b. Stalls in Nathdwara where Puṣṭimārgīs can purchase ritual accoutrements for domestic sevā.

For several centuries, Nathdwara has been the site of the production of traditional backdrop paintings (*picchvāīs*) and miniature paintings that have been used in Puṣṭimārg ritual. Most hereditary artists I interviewed, including Bansi Lal Sharma, who is now 76 years old, nostalgically admits that Nathdwara is no longer the place where one can find *picchvāīs* or miniature paintings. As another artist, Sanjay Sharma, explains, “Gujarati women, my main clientele, don’t want paintings like that. They want flashy colors, two-dimensional embossed images, contrast colors, gold, diamonds!” (Figure 6). For those who can keep up with such consumer demands, the profession can be profitable. Rajesh Purohit is a self-proclaimed businessman, and *not* a hereditary artist. His family owns theatres, restaurants, perfume, and jewelry stores in Gujarat and Mumbai. However, he recently decided to open up shop in Nathdwara as well, where he sells pieces made by hired workers that are priced anywhere from 10,000 – 60,000 rupees.

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169 Elsewhere, scholars have examined the hereditary communities of artists in Nathdwara that produce these items (Ambalal 1987; Lyons, 2004). In an earlier essay, Lyons also discusses the tradition of hereditary female painters from Nathdwara (1997).
($170-$1,000 USD). Women from upper middle-class Puṣṭimārg families are the primary consumers of these kinds of religious commodities, and Rajesh says his business is doing extremely well (Figure 7).

Figure 6. An example of a two-dimensional embossed image of Śrīnāthji

Figure 7. Hired workers making pieces in the shop of Rajesh Purohit.

Although my conversations with Nathdwara hereditary artists were by no means exhaustive, it is clear that upper-class Puṣṭimārgī women’s increasing purchasing power and aesthetic tastes are both dictating modes of artistic production in Nathdwara and elsewhere, and are effecting the standardization of decoration styles and techniques used in domestic sevā. Such exercise of aesthetic tastes or stances, Bourdieu argues, “are opportunities to experience or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept…for the working classes, perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves, by successive negations” (1984, 57).
Conclusion

Contemporary Puṣṭimārg domestic sevā, as we have seen, dramatizes gender roles, intra-and extra-family dynamics, and class formation. By organizing events such as monthly Vaiṣṇav kitty parties, practicing increased commodified styles of domestic sevā, functioning as the primary consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, and arranging for private kīrtan lessons, elite Puṣṭimārgī women are engaged in innovative, class-based mechanisms of sectarian identity formation. Together, such religious activities by elite Puṣṭimārg women have cast the home as a modern site of Puṣṭimārg patronage.

In addition to demarcating an elite sectarian identity, upper-class Puṣṭimārg women who have the desire and means to learn how to sing a “classical” genre like havelī saṅgīt are legitimizing the canonicity of the temple kīrtan repertoire. More importantly, they are making specific moral claims by asserting that the performance of kīrtans in the havelī style is a more “authentic” or “proper” mode of singing devotional songs while performing sevā. There are numerous ways Puṣṭimārg lay followers can position their domestic practices as “morally superior” to others, such as by strictly following apras (ritual purity) rules, performing all eight darśans, offering adequate food items (such as almonds, cashews, pistachios, which can prove expensive), and never abandoning sevā, which can involve some women taking their svarūps with them if they leave the house for a prolonged period of time. However, in our discussion, we see how aesthetic and elitist claims made to the havelī saṅgīt genre are allowing upper-class Puṣṭimārg women to position their domestic practices – and, by extension, their sectarian identities – as more authentic than others. Moreover, as the primary consumers of both
ritual accoutrements for use in sevā and religious commodities for displaying in the home, the aesthetics of Puṣṭimārg domestic practices – couched in the language of “authenticity” – are being cultivated, perpetuated, and standardized by upper-class Puṣṭimārg women.
**Conclusion**

One of the questions that animated this project is why Puṣṭimārg attracted (and continues to attract) patronage from the wealthy mercantile and business elites of western India. In chapter one I engaged with the historical dimension of this query and argued that the adoption of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity became a key mechanism for mercantile families to continue demonstrating their prestigious status and moral worth. Puṣṭimārg provided a fixed and stable sectarian identity around a deity, Kṛṣṇa, who was already popular in Gujarat. Furthermore, as a popular Vaiṣṇav sectarian tradition, Puṣṭimārg is unique for not placing importance on renunciation and ascetic practices. Unlike other Vaiṣṇav sampradāyas, such as the Gauḍīya, Vārkaṇḍī, Śrīvaiṣṇava, and Svāmīnārāyaṇ traditions, religious leaders and well-known theologians of Puṣṭimārg never became saṃnyāsīs (“renouncers”) or spiritual heads of ascetic lineages. Instead the tradition has proved attractive for baniyā and bhāṭiyā communities because it grounds itself in a “this-worldly” theology and ritual culture, a ritual culture that models itself on familial relationships (vātsalya bhāv or “parental love”) and domestic activities (waking Kṛṣṇa in the morning, feeding him lunch, placing him to sleep). This emphasis on the family setting and domesticity in Puṣṭimārg, moreover, moves beyond the realm of rhetoric and allegory. As this thesis has demonstrated, in addition to temple sevā (in which the temple is itself envisioned as a home or havelī), the practice of domestic sevā is integral to the maintenance of a Puṣṭimārg sectarian identity and its performance permeates the quotidian activities of its practitioners.
In this project, I have presented domestic sevā as a heuristic lens through which we come to understand and map women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg’s past and its contemporary manifestations. In our discussion of women’s sevā rituals within the home – practices that are not circumscribed by normative pativratā (“pious wife”) ideologies of auspiciousness, for example – we are confronted with an alternative perspective on women’s devotional practices and religious lives. However, it is important not to overly romanticize Puṣṭimārg’s bhakti ethos as a mode for subverting or “resisting” Brahmanic orthodoxy and patriarchy. Both domestic and havelī Puṣṭimārg liturgies are informed by ritual purity and pollution prescriptions, while caste and gender rules have prevented women from the Gosvāmī household from entering the main sanctum of havelīs and performing sevā to the primary svarūp.

In the domestic context, as we have seen, the practice of sevā by women is informed by – and helps reproduce – caste hierarchies, gender expectations, and class formation. The rite of initiation and the performance of sevā are mechanisms by which a husband’s family, especially the mother-in-law, exert their authority on incoming daughter-in-laws. While investing too much time on sevā practices has also presented instances where the relationship between husbands and wives become strained. Furthermore, as I illustrated in chapter three, the gender and class discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reconstituted the home and women’s domestic activities as sites for status production and family respectability. Today, with the proliferation of consumer cultures, increased commodified styles of ritual praxis as well as shifts in aesthetic tastes have also come to inform domestic sevā practices and the
ways in which one perpetuates an elite Puṣṭimārg identity. All these processes, together, cast the modern home as a site of Puṣṭimārg patronage. To some degree, however, they also enable the practice of domestic sevā to become embedded in the morally laden language of “authenticity.” Claims to authenticity, we have seen, are being made by elite Puṣṭimārg women who have the preference and means for taking havelī kīrtan lessons, so that they may sing kīrtans in the home in their “proper” temple styles. Indeed, the claim that domestic sevā is the “original” and, thus, “authentic” form of Puṣṭimārg sevā is among the many contentious issues in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. Many women from upper-class families, who only visit the havelī on occasion see other women’s daily attendance at havelīs as an indication of such women’s inability to perform sevā in their homes or of not having any social and family responsibilities.

Read through the prism of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century reform, especially the discourses surrounding the libel case and women’s roles in Puṣṭimārg, today’s Puṣṭimārg, as it is practiced by the more “respectable” families of Gujarat, can help demonstrate some of the residual effects of these reform campaigns. For example, several recommendations were made by Mulji and other reformers to regulate the activities of women in havelī contexts as well as their movement to and from the havelī.170 According to Mulji, it was in the afternoons that female devotees would come visit the havelī in large numbers and female and male Puṣṭimārgīs “intermixed promiscuously” during the darśan periods (1865, 104). Ultimately, such suggestions

170 Before the Libel Case began, in 1861, the author of an article in the Rāst Gofṭār tatha Satya Prakāś made the following suggestions concerning the movement of lay women in the havelīs: “they should have darśan only from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., they should enter the zenana only to meet the Maharaj’s wife and daughters…, they should not be allowed to visit in the afternoon, and they should not be allowed to visit the Maharaj to offer him fruit in private” (Shodhan 1997, 133).
were made to limit contact between female practitioners and Gosvāmīs, as well as between female lay practitioners and male practitioners. Among the many solutions proposed included the allotment of specific hours when females could visit the havelī, demarcating the spaces where women could move freely while in the havelī, and finally introducing female Gosvāmīs to better supervise and manage the activities of lay women in the havelī (Sampat 1938, 408-416 qtd in Simpson 2008, 100). One cannot be sure if the limited number of visits made to the havelī by many elite Puṣṭimārgī women today represents the culmination of such reform efforts, which intended to regulate the religious activities of women from “respectable” families. The last call to reform (to introduce female Gosvāmīs), moreover, appears to have materialized in the contemporary figure of Indira beṭījī Gosvāmī (b. 1939), the second daughter of Madhusudhan Gosvāmī belonging to the sixth house in Surat. Today, Indira beṭījī presides over her own havelī and is a guru figure to thousands of male and female practitioners. By way of drawing this thesis to an end, I briefly discuss the life and religious activities of Indira beṭījī – the only living female religious leader of Puṣṭimārg.

Indira beṭījī is an extraordinary figure and her life and status as a Gosvāmī marks a significant shift in the traditional roles ascribed to women in the Gosvāmī household. As we discussed in chapter four, historically, as Brahmin women bahūjīs and beṭījīs observed pardā remaining in the women’s quarters (zenānā) of their homes and havelīs most of the time. In Indira beṭījī’s family, both male and female students were home schooled and no female from the Gosvāmī household attended a public educational institute until Indira beṭījī decided to do so in 1962 when she attended the Women’s College of Baroda (Gandhi 11-12). After living with her older brother, Śrī Mathureshji
Mahārāj, in Baroda for most of her life Indira beṭījī opened her Vrajdham havelī on her
sixtieth birthday in 1999. Today, she manages all the bureaucratic affairs associated with
the temple, which includes operating a rest-house or dharmśālā of thirty rooms for
Puṣṭimārgīs who come to visit Vrajdham, offering vocational classes for women twice a
year on havelī grounds, and organizing mahilā mandals (“women’s groups”).
Through the establishment of the Vallabha Memorial Trust in Ahmedabad, she oversees the
publication of Puṣṭimārg texts and provides funding for building rest-houses in
pilgrimage centers. Through the Ananda Mangal Trust, also in Ahmedabad, her
administration engages in charitable activities such as building and subsidizing hospitals
and eye clinics and providing aid during droughts and natural disasters. Finally, in
Baroda, her Anugraha Trust redistributes all the funds received through donations to
constructing libraries, building more rest-houses, and organizing śivirs or religious
retreats (Gandhi 14-17).

With regards to her ritual and religious activities, Indira beṭījī’s actions
resonate with the historical Yamunā beṭījī (1669-1730, see pages 175-176), with whom
Indira beṭījī herself draws parallels. At her Vrajdham havelī Indira beṭījī performs ārtī at
each of the eight darśans during the day and on occasion she also performs the śrīṅgār or
the adornment of the Bālkṛṣṇalāljī svarūp. She has both male and female mukhiyās
(“temple officiants”) who assist her during the performance of sevā, and they also replace
her when she is not in town or is feeling ill. Although her female assistants observe
menstrual restrictions while performing havelī sevā, since Indira beṭījī is clearly at a post-
menopausal age this is a non-issue for her. With the permission of her grandfather, in

171 Personal communication, December 1st 2008.
1971 she also began conducting *kathās* or public discourses and lectures on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and is the first and only woman in the Puṣṭimārg tradition to have ever done so (11). To the disapproval of many male Gosvāmīs and even some female members of the *sampradāy*, Indira *beṭījī* is also perhaps the only contemporary and publicly recognized *beṭījī* to grant *dīkṣā* or initiation to Puṣṭimārgīs. Finally, starting in July 1980, Indira *beṭījī* made her first trips to London and to the United States, and is currently the co-chair of trust *havelīs* in the UK, and across the US, such as in New York, Houston, Chicago, and San Francisco.\(^{172}\) Indira *beṭījī* has thus successfully contributed to the globalization of Puṣṭimārg in the twentieth century in a significant way.\(^ {173}\)

In every respect Indira *beṭījī* is a charismatic, powerful figure of authority in contemporary Puṣṭimārg. Although a majority of male Gosvāmīs state that before marriage, as a member of the Vallabha *kul*, *beṭījīs* can participate in temple worship and even under certain circumstances give *dīkṣā*, what appears to be the most controversial aspect of Indira *beṭījī*’s actions is her practice of initiating individuals and, therefore, her role as a guru is considered problematic for many Puṣṭimārg leaders. The following description of Indira *beṭījī* offered by one of her closest disciples can provide some indication as to why male Gosvāmīs, and even their *bahūjīs*, become uncomfortable when questioned about Indira *beṭījī*. Maya Desai, a woman who moved from the United States to permanently live with Indira *beṭījī* in Baroda, says: “Yes, there are many female figures within the Mahārāj household, but Indira *beṭījī* goes out, gives lectures, travels to other countries, she does what she wants. She acts like a man; she functions and behaves

\(^{172}\) Personal communication, December 1\(^{st}\) 2008.

\(^{173}\) Indira *beṭījī*’s travels outside of India can be understood as part of what Karen Pechilis characterizes as the “third-wave” movement of gurus – particularly by prominent female Hindu gurus – to the United States through the 1970s and 80s (113, 2012 ;10, 2004)
like a Mahārāj.”

Indira beṭī is not a female who acts under the purview of a male Mahārāj. Instead, she is a Gosvāmī who presides over her own havelī and she is a guru who initiates. After questioning a male Gosvāmī (who did not want his identity to be disclosed) several times about the apparent contradictions surrounding the role of other beṭīs vis-à-vis the figure of Indira beṭī, he said: “Look, Goswāmīs don’t want their women, be it their bahūjis or their beṭīs, to go out of the havelī, get educated, have followers, and have power – because then they will be out of our grasp, out of our control.” However, he did go on to acknowledge that since more women than men visit havelīs for darśan, more women participate in bhajan maṇḍalīs, and they are the primary performers of domestic sevā, it is a “good and important thing that a woman such as Indira beṭi has a leadership role within the community. She is opening doors for future generations, and women from the Puṣṭimārg sampradāy need to follow her.” Indeed, there are women from Gosvāmī households following her lead who, not surprisingly, come from Indira beṭī’s own extended family.

Brajlata bahūji is Indira beṭī’s sister-in-law, married to Indira beṭī’s younger brother, Chandragopalji Mahārāj, who also lives in Baroda but maintains no haveli of his own. Brajlata bahūji remembers some of the difficulties she had in adjusting to the Goswāmī lifestyle after she married Chandragopal Mahārāj, including her disappointment at having to abandon her interest in the Sciences. She did her BSc in Zoology, but after marrying Chandragopal Gosvāmī she felt that she needed to shift the focus of her academic interests to a subject that would help her participate in Puṣṭimārgī

\[174\] Personal communication, December 1st 2008.
\[175\] Personal communication, February 2nd, 2009.
religious culture. In her own words she said that she was inspired by Indira beṭījī and decided to obtain an MA in Sanskrit.\(^{176}\) A few years later, she even started her PhD in Philosophy focusing on Upaniṣadic texts. However, after falling ill for an extended period of time she discontinued her PhD and has never gone back to academic study.

Regarding the roles of bahūjīs within the tradition, Brajlata bahūjī idealizes the past and claims that bahūjīs used to organize satsaṅg groups for women, read and taught the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and also discussed Vallabha’s Sanskrit works.

Now, Brajlata bahūjī admits, no female from the Gosvāmī household seems to have the capacity to teach others about Puṣṭimārg theology and philosophy. “Whether a guru is a woman or man is irrelevant,” Brajlata asserts, “only that person who has the “yogyitā” – who is qualified, or worthy of – becoming a guru should initiate individuals.” Indira beṭīji, Brajlata says, is an exemplary individual and, therefore, it is fitting for her to be a guru. Not only did Indira beṭījī influence her decision to pursue a Masters and PhD, Brajlata admits that it is also because of Indira beṭījī’s progressive and at times even rebellious attitude towards male Mahārāj authority that made it possible for Brajlata to “step-outside” the Mahārāj household and offer public lectures on various texts ranging from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the vārtās, and Vallabha’s philosophical treatises (Figure 8).\(^{177}\)

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\(^{176}\) Personal communication, February 2\(^{nd}\) 2009.

\(^{177}\) Brajlata bahūjī has also written several short books on the life and teachings of Vallabhācārya, including Tasmai Śrī Gurave Namah (2007), Jagadgurū Śrīmadvallabhācāryajī Śrīmahāprabhuṭi Caritra, Updeśsar ane Grantho (2000), and Śrīmad Jagadgurū Śrīmadvallabhācārtyajīkī Drṣṭime Daśamskandha Vicār (2005).
It is clear that the wives and daughters of Gosvāmīs have found multiple ways to negotiate and even appropriate religious roles and authority for themselves. As noted in chapter four, from at least the nineteenth century, bahūjis and beṭijīs have participated in the tradition by producing literary works that form a prominent aspect of lived Pustimārgī culture. In the contemporary context, bahūjis and beṭijīs are continuing to compose devotional poetry; Indira beṭijī, for example, has composed hundreds of pads using the pen-name “Śrāvanī.” However, what is innovative is the ways in which contemporary bahūjis and beṭijīs are breaching the boundaries of the Gosvāmī household and participating in Puṣṭimārg religious culture in a very public way. Brajlata bahūji appropriates male Brahmanic authority by engaging in public discourses on Puṣṭimārg philosophy and by discussing Vallabha’s Sanskrit treaties. While Indira beṭijī has carved out a new role for women from the Mahārāj household: that of a religious leader and of a guru who initiates.
In the time I spent with Indira bețiği, it became clear to me that her gender as a woman has radically altered the nature of guru-disciple relationship in Puṣtimārg. Both female devotees who have received initiation from Indira bețiği as well as those who have not appreciate having a guru/Gosvāmī with whom they can share both emotional and physical proximity. As one female follower said: “I could not imagine being this close to a male Gosvāmī; with Indira bețiği we can stay up till two in the morning, singing, laughing, joking together.”

Women who visit Indira bețiği not only come for darśan but many stay and speak to her about their personal problems, such as any issues they may be having with their families as well as difficulties in finding a suitable husband, finding a good job, and so on. In Indira bețiği’s own words: “my female devotees do everything with me, they sleep near me, they eat with me…A man can never have this relationship with me.”

The figure of Indira bețiği also complicates our understanding of how popular female gurus are approached by their followers and how they demonstrate and legitimize their charismatic status as religious leaders. Unlike other well-known female gurus, such as the late Anandamayi Mā (1896-1982) or the living Mata Amritanandamayi (b. 1953), for example, Indira bețiği is part of an orthodox sectarian tradition or sampradāy. She can also be differentiated from figures like the historical Sitā Devī (fl. sixteenth century) – the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇav figure who assumed a leadership position after her husband, Advaita Ācārya, passed away – and Svāmī Chidvilasananda, popularly known as Gurumayi (b.1955), of the Siddha Yoga movement by not being understood as an embodiment of a

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178 Personal communication, December 3rd 2008.
179 Personal communication, February 10th, 2009.
goddess or as a channel for śakti ("divine feminine energy"). She serves as a counterpoint to the claims made by Karen Pechilis regarding female gurus: “the more relevant concept for understanding female gurus is Shakti…Female Hindu gurus are [thus] distinguished from female Hindu saints through the distinction between Shakti and bhakti” (8-9, 2004).

Indira beṭījī is part of a bhakti tradition, is not perceived as a goddess nor as a medium for bestowing/invoking śakti, and yet initiates disciples and serves as a guru figure to thousands of practitioners. Furthermore, Indira beṭījī does not see herself as a saṃnyāsīnī or an ascetic – even though she never married. By never marrying Indira beṭījī maintains her position as a member of the Vallabha kul or lineage and she lives in her own havelī/home, surrounded by an entourage of assistants and followers. This allows her to occupy a position of liminality as a “householder-ascetic,” which is in keeping with Vallabha’s stance against renunciation, while her sexuality is deflected by the honorific title of Beṭījī or “respected daughter” (instead of “Mā” or “mother” as other female gurus are often referred to).

When Indira beṭījī was questioned by the author of her biography as to how, as a woman, she is able to bestow initiation and give kathās on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, she responded by saying that she does not see her identity as fixed by her female gender (Gandhi 37-38). Meanwhile she acknowledges how Vallabha himself regarded the gopīs as his own gurus, therefore, Indira beṭījī asks: why cannot women be gurus today? As a descendent of Vallabha and as a Gosvāmī figure, Indira beṭījī admits that her followers perceive of her as a form, or living representative, of Vallabha. She, however, does not

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180 Indira beṭījī is normally seen wearing a white or off-white sārī, a color traditionally associated with asceticism/widowhood. When I asked her about this, she responded by saying she wears white because she likes the color, and as she pointed out “look, it’s not all white! My sārī today has a green border” (Personal communication, February 10th 2009).
see herself in that image (38). In her Vrajdham havelī, life-sized statues of Vallabha and Viṣṭhalanātha are placed in the same room where she greets her followers, and whenever she delivers a kathā on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa Indira beṭī is places the image of Vallabha by her side (Figure 9). Indira beṭī simultaneously deflects her authority to Vallabha and Viṣṭhalanātha and draws legitimacy for her status and charismatic role as the only living female Gosvāmī of Puṣṭimārg by appealing to this inherited authority.

Figure 8. Indira beṭī giving a Bhāgavata kathā in Gandhinagar. In this image, Indira beṭī is on the right and the larger-than-life sized statue of Vallabha is on the left.

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As the first project to examine the intersections between class formation, women’s religious activities, and domestic sevā in Puṣṭimārg, my work offers a counter-point to current academic literature on Puṣṭimārg, which have portrayed the tradition as wholly temple-based. By grounding women’s domestic religious practices in a discussion on elite Puṣṭimārgī sectarian identity production and colonial modernity, this dissertation
also complements and nuances the work of scholars who have discussed the roles and activities of women in Puṣṭimārg. In contemporary Gujarat, by organizing events such as monthly Vaiṣṇav kitty parties, arranging for private kīrtan lessons, and functioning as the primary consumers and displayers of religious commodities in the home, elite Puṣṭimārgī women are engaged in innovative, class-based mechanisms of sectarian identity formation. Their religious activities are also continuing to perpetuate Puṣṭimārg as a lived tradition. Finally, the contemporary figures of Indira beṭījī and Brajlata bahūjī briefly discussed above indicate the radical transformations taking place in the Gosvāmī household vis-à-vis the traditional roles of women from these families.

Indira beṭījī is today at the center of a global community of Puṣṭimārgī followers. In my work with her at her Vrajdham havelī in Baroda, I met many “NRI” (Non Resident Indian) Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavas who accept Indira beṭījī as their guru. These individuals, who live in the UK, the United States, and Canada frequently visit the Vrajdham havelī and sometimes stay there for weeks and months at a time. Indira beṭījī has established a large network of havelīs in many cities around the world, and the number of diasporic havelīs and their surrounding Puṣṭimārg communities continue to grow. Her status and activities as a Gosvāmī open up possibilities for future research on Puṣṭimārg in transnational contexts and address the complex issues that arise in diasporic contexts around the maintenance of sectarian (sampradāyic) identity. A focus on Indira beṭījī would also complement this dissertation; given our discussion on reform and women’s roles in Puṣṭimarg it is remarkable that today Indira beṭījī, a woman from the Gosvāmī household, is, in many ways, the face Puṣṭimārg’s globalized community.


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