

COMMUNICATIONS

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies*

Dear Sir:

I read with great interest Dr. McKim Marriott's review of *A Punjabi Village in Pakistan* by Zekiye Eglar in the August 1961 issue of this journal. In the absence of the author, who is engaged in new field work in Pakistan, I should like to comment on problems raised by this review, writing not as an area specialist but as a cultural anthropologist. Dr. Marriott's discussion illustrates very well some difficulties which arise from a too rapid and cursory reading of a very detailed account of one aspect of a culture and from attempts made to generalize from one local situation to another without a detailed knowledge of both, particularly in so complex an area as that in which both Dr. Eglar and Dr. Marriott have been working.

To take the second, and simpler, point first. Basing his comment on dictionary references, the reviewer calls into question the transliteration and the meaning of terms used in the book, for example, *vartan bhanji*. Dr. Eglar's practise was to use standard English transliterations for terms such as *anna*, *rupee*, etc., which are in current English usage. For all other cases, the system of transliteration (necessarily simplified for purposes of this publication) was worked out on the basis of the pronunciation of Punjabi terms in Mohla itself. The work of transliteration was done by a linguistically trained anthropologist, Dr. Theodore Schwartz, in collaboration with a linguistically sophisticated native of Mohla Village, Chowdhri Fazl Ahmad, who was a principal informant in the village throughout Dr. Eglar's field work and later was available to her as a consultant in this country. Certainly, it was the reviewer's privilege to state a preference for some other system of transliteration; instead, what he has done is to make an inadvertent substitution of terms and then to sug-

gest that the author made a basic error of translation from a dialect of a language of which she is a proficient speaker.

The reviewer suggests that Dr. Eglar relied for her "understanding of the social system" which she describes and analyzes on "the personal perceptions conveyed to her over a period of five years by the leading Jat ladies of the village." As far as it is possible to do so, all working anthropologists rely for their understanding of a culture on "the personal perceptions" of the subjects of their research. However, had the reviewer taken the trouble to read the preface to this book, he would have recognized the great care taken by Dr. Eglar first in selecting a village in which to work and second in setting up her living arrangements in Mohla so that she would have full and free access to every person in the entire village for observation and discussion. As Dr. Eglar explained, the problem was not for a foreign woman scholar to have access to men's activities, but, in the initial stages of the work, to create a situation in which it was possible for her primary informant, a man, to have access to women's activities in this Muslim village setting.

The reviewer's comments about "contradictions" indicate the lack of care with which he read. So, for example, he comments that "the mutual giving among fictional agnates (pp. 119-20), is imposed upon contrary data concerning gifts to daughters." The author, in her initial statement of "the meaning of *vartan bhanji*" (Ch. X, p. 106), writes: "*Vartan bhanji* operates on two bases. The first is the daughter's right in her parents' home. *The second is the relationship established through the exchange of gifts and favors.*"

A daughter's right in her parents' home is constantly validated "through the gifts she receives. . . . *Although what she receives is her right and is not vartan bhanji, yet this very right serves as a pattern for the operation of vartan bhanji.*" (Italics supplied.) What the

reviewer has failed to grasp is the central point that the non-reciprocal giving to a daughter serves, in this culture, as a pattern and (as elsewhere described) a recurrent occasion for the operation of a system of exchange that is strictly reciprocal and, as a continuing process, serves to bind together various groups within and extending beyond the single community. On the pages to which the reviewer refers the reader (pp. 119–20, 123–24), the author illustrates the behavior of two very different women in their manner of handling the problems that actually arise in carrying out the exchanges. Far from being contradictory, the data provide illustrations of the fact that the author works with actual, observed cases and not “ideal formulations,” as the reviewer has suggested.

Similarly, the reviewer suggests contradictions in Dr. Eglar’s handling of structure, referring the reader, for example, to statements on pp. 75, 76 (which he fails to quote). On p. 75, the author defines a *biraderi* as a “patri-lineage”; on p. 76, she states further that “the term *biraderi* may also be used in an extended sense, when it refers to a group of people who are not *kin* (italics supplied); she then goes on to illustrate specific contexts in which this is done. Dr. Marriott may prefer to work with a social system in which extensions of this kind do not occur, but he should not, as a scholar, criticize a factual report of their existence, where in fact they do occur in native practice. Nor, since he is concerned with the discussion of the actual as against an “idealized” version of the culture, should he treat as contradictions the points at which, as the author indicates specifically, exceptions to expected situations may occur. Thus, the reviewer rephrases correctly the statement (pp. 93–94) made that marriages within “artisan ‘subcastes’ are endogamous”; he treats as a contradiction the author’s discussion (p. 19, actually pp. 18–19) of the exceptional situation of an elopement and he takes no cognizance of her comment on the native viewpoint that “although there is no intermarriage between the different castes, carpenter and blacksmith are considered close enough for marriage”—which indicates not a contradiction in the analysis but, by implication, a point in the social system at which there is (but only with difficulty, for the elope-

ment is described as an instance of inter-village quarreling) some possibility of openness in the viewpoint of the people of Mohla in handling the system.

One further comment must be made. The reviewer speaks of “the limitations of the perspective of a woman guest” and implies that the data are distorted in the direction of non-appreciation of male dominance in Punjabi culture by the fact that the field work was done by a woman (“a professionally trained anthropologist,” one might better have said, in the interests of accuracy, than “a woman guest”). The reviewer has virtually omitted from his discussion the first nine (out of a total of seventeen) chapters of this study, the chapters in which the author provides a general background of village life, in which male as well as female activities are described; these provide a frame for the analysis of *vartan bhanji*, one aspect of village life, in which, as it happens, the women of Mohla are the experts. One would assume that a parallel study undertaken by any other competent anthropologist, man or woman, would come to similar conclusions about this particular aspect of the culture—although it would inevitably have been far more difficult for a man to establish the necessary rapport with the individuals most immediately involved. The question should not be whether research is done by a man or a woman, as such, but rather whether the professionally trained research worker has correctly perceived and made use of positions open to him—or her—in the field situation.

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Rejoinder to Métraux

1. *Toward a non-literate Indology.*—One wishes that Dr. Métraux would apply something more like the standards of France rather than those of tribal New Guinea to her judgments of linguistic work in Pakistan. One presumes that she would not approve publication of unsystematic transcriptions from a French dialect which was alleged to distinguish five nasal stops but lacked five of the usual vowels. One may wonder, therefore, at her

technical defense of an irregular transcription of a Punjabi dialect which, *inter alia*, includes an excess of labials, but blends the entire series of long and short vowels. Use of *any* of the several regular systems for Indic transliteration would facilitate understanding of a glossary such as Eglar's. If Punjabi words for "knight," "sister's daughter," etc., can also be supplied in such form, then a number of social mysteries may also be dispelled.

2. *Feminism*.—By her denial of femininity as an issue in anthropological field work in Junjab, Métraux seems to me to deny one great strength of Dr. Eglar's book. The book speaks loudly of its own feminine bias, concentrating as it does upon a quantitatively minor pattern of women's gifts, devoting only four pages to men's roles in any kind of giving, and constantly quoting women informants. The opening general sketch of the village does not conceal or balance out the author's specialization in women's affairs, but is rather perceptibly written from a woman's point of view. A woman anthropologist might indeed take steps, as Métraux suggests, to transcend the roles ascribed to her sex and to avoid the attendant biases. (The reviewer might add his conviction that a woman in a purdah-bound society can do a better job of scientific transvestitism than can a man.) But this is surely not Eglar's main effort. Instead, she presents herself as a woman and makes the most of it. One may more reasonably agree with Margaret Mead, who notes in her foreword that Eglar's uniquely valuable penetration into the circumscribed world of Muslim village women is a penetration which only a woman can achieve.

3. *Hospitality*.—Does the anthropologist's role have no influence on his observations? Métraux's rhetoric puts her close to asserting that it need not. Eglar's role was that of a permanent guest in the women's quarters and guest house of the wealthiest landlord in the village she studied. More than that, she was also a financial dependent of her host during a substantial part of her stay. There are undoubted advantages in being absorbed into a headman's family, but also responsibilities—requirements of conformity, loyalty, deference, and discretion, to say the least. If the resulting book is preoccupied

with the doings of wealthy women and says nothing of intra-familial, or political or economic conflict, a reviewer may plausibly infer some effect of the anthropologist's roles. One cannot have matters both ways at once: deep and restricted participation inevitably limits that "full and free access" to persons and information which is Métraux's ideal.

4. *Lineages*.—There could be no grounds for disputing the existence of the concept "*birādarī*," used in Mohla village as elsewhere in northern India and Pakistan for units of differing composition, varying all the way from the extended family to faction, village, or caste. There is much analytic confusion, however, in Eglar's repeated assertion (pp. 75-77 and *passim*) that a *birādarī* is a localized "patrilineage" of traceable kin. For at once we discover (a) that this ("patrilineage"?) unit contains people who are "not accepted as kin" or relatives (p. 76), and (b) that this unit of "unrelated" persons is nevertheless included within a larger unit whose members are regarded as "relatives" (pp. 82-3), and so on. A statement better in accord with Eglar's facts would be that the term "*birādarī*" refers not to just one concrete structural unit at the village level, but to patrilineal connection, real, putative, or fictional, at any level of segmentation. Persons excluded at a lower level may be included at a higher one.

5. *Endogamy*.—Métraux and the reviewer seem to differ not in thoroughness of reading, but in the degree of consistency which they expect of social analysis. Métraux finds no confusion in the following syllogism: (a) People of different castes and crafts may not properly marry (p. 93) (b) Carpenters and blacksmiths are of different castes and crafts (p. 32) (c) Carpenters and blacksmiths may properly intermarry (p. 19). This to Métraux shows an "openness of viewpoint"; to me it suggests a hole in the structural analysis. At least one of the three general statements is simply wrong.

6. *Reciprocity*.—My complaint is not that Eglar's analysis remains on the ideal level of culture (which it does not), but that some of her own analytic statements do not agree with each other or with the cases and quotations cited to support them; and furthermore, that

the disagreements are not explained. Eglar states and Métraux sanctions only one analytic principle for understanding *varatan bhanji*: the principle of reciprocity. Yet Eglar's cases and case-linked descriptions of actual rules tell us again and again that the scales should always be kept *out* of balance, that no direct or equal gift exchange should ever occur. If there is any instance of true reciprocity in Mohla (other than the ambiguous instances previously cited), the reviewer's troublesome search through all of Eglar's cases has not discovered it.

An alternative analysis seems called for. One might begin by perceiving that giving in the plains of northern India is typically, ideally, and in fact overwhelmingly non-reciprocal. Whether in religious donations, hypergamous marriage, dowry payments, or ritual transactions between castes, presentations of a given kind are conceived as moving properly in one direction only. Eglar tells us that *varatan bhanji* in her Pakistant village is modeled after non-reciprocal gifts to sisters and daughters, gifts which are actually unbalanced in a ratio of about 10 to 1. Gifts of all these kinds must not be reciprocated, for their movements establish and maintain orders of rank between

the participants. The extended giving to fictional daughters and others described by Eglar as *varatan bhanji* is likewise concerned, she says, with establishing a kind of rank—the relative prestige of the donor—and is accordingly non-reciprocal. But the order of prestige is generally in flux, so that *varatan bhanji* becomes a competitive, mutually responding game.

By more refined structural analysis of Eglar's fascinating materials one might show that non-reciprocal giving patterns can generally turn into competitive games at just those points where ranks are equal, undefined, or anomalous—between fellow-agnates, non-relatives, or persons related by marital exchange. Such an hypothesis would seem to receive support on a grand scale from Eglar's evidence as to the importance of competitive giving among former Hindu Jats converted to Islam. Seen in South Asian perspective, Mohla village in Gujrat district lies close to that borderline where Hindu one-way marriages and non-reciprocal giving meet the Muslim preference for lineage endogamy.

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