Hill, S.C. (1901), *The Life of Claude Martin, Major-General in the Army of the Honourable East India Company*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink and Co.
Hiriart, Augustin, (1916), 'Four Letters of Austin de Bordeaux', *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, vol. 4, pp. 3–17.
Lafont, Jean-Marie (1991a), 'The Quest for Indian Manuscripts by the French in 18th Century', *Indo-French Relations: History and Perspectives*, Delhi, Embassy of France.
——— (1991b), 'Les Indes des Lumières. Regards Français sur l'Inde de 1610 'à 1849', *Passeurs d'Orient: Encounters between India and France*, Paris, Ministere des Affaires Etrangères.
——— (1993), *La Présence française dans le royaume Sikh du Punjab, 1822–1849*, Paris, EFFO.
——— (1995), 'Company Paintings' ou 'Faringhi Paintings'? Contribution française à la formation d'une école de peinture indienne au XVIII ème siècle, *Revue du Musée de la Compagnie des Indes*, Port-Louis, Lorient.
——— (1997), 'Politics and Architecture in the French Settlements', *Reminiscences: The French in India*, New Delhi, INTACH, pp. 15–49, 49 illustrations.
Llewellyn-Jones, Rosie (1992), *A Very Ingenious Man: Claude Martin in Early Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.
Madec, René (1983), *Mémoire de René Madec, Nabab dans l'Empire Mogol, Commandant d'un parti français au Service de l'Empereur 1736–1784*, Pondichery, Alliance Française.
Mansingh, Gurbir, Gen. (Rtd) (1997), 'French Military Influence in India', *Reminiscences: The French in India*, pp. 51–87, 35 illustrations.
Martin, Claude (1800), *Testament*, Suivi de comptes divers pour les années 1795–99, Texte bilingue, anglais avec traduction francaise, publié à Lyon en 1803.
Modave, Louis-Laurent de Federbe, Comte de (1971), *Voyage en Inde du Comte de Modave* 1773–76, J. Deloche (ed.), Paris, EFEO.
Polier, Antoine-Louis (1809), *La Mythologie des Indous travaillée par Mme la Chanoinesse de Polier Sur des manuscrits authentiques apportés de l'Inde par feu M.Le Colonel de Polier*, 2 vols, Paris, F. Schoell.
——— (1947), *Shah Alam II and his Court*, Pratul C. Gupta (ed), Calcutta.
Ray, Indrani (1974), 'Dupleix's Private Trade in Chandernagor', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 1, no. 1–2, pp. 279–94.
INTACH (1997), *Reminiscences: The French in India*, New Delhi, INTACH.
Roe, Sir Thomas (1990), *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India*, W. Foster (ed.), Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal.
Sharar, Abdul Halim (1975), *Lucknow: Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (eds. and trans.), London, Paul Elek.
Srivastava, A.L. (1945), *Shuja-ud-Daula*, 2 vols, Lahore, Minerva Bookshop.
Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste (1977), *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne*, W. Crooke (ed.), V. Bali (trans.), 2 vols, Delhi, Oriental Reprint.

5

Shi'ite Noblewomen and Religious Innovation in Awadh

JUAN R.I. COLE

That women might have had any role in the evolution of so patriarchal a tradition as Shia Islam once struck historians as highly unlikely. The development of women's studies as a sub-field in Middle Eastern and South Asian studies since the late 1960s, however, has refigured the way we see everyday discursive practice in Muslim communities, and given back women a place in their history. In this study I will examine what part noblewomen in the Shia-ruled state of Awadh might have played in the evolution of ritual practice. I have several questions in mind. Was there anything distinctive about the Shia beliefs and practices of noblewomen, as opposed to those of elite males? Were women able to influence the terms of discourse or ritual life? Shi'ism was, after all, a scriptural, patriarchal religion, with a powerful corps of clergy who claimed a monopoly on spiritual authority.

Farah Azari (1983), among others, has argued that Iranian Shi'ism serves as a mechanism for the suppression of female sexuality. I am not concerned here directly with the issue of suppression, and prefer a more phenomenological approach to the study of religion to Reich's reductionism. Yet, from a Reichian perspective and others, women, as the subordinate gender, often illiterate, could easily be supposed to have contributed little of importance to Shi'ite devotions, and to have been dependent on the tutelage of their men for religious instruction. For the majority who were illiterate, would it not have even been impossible to understand the abstract Arabic philosophical terminology which male believers embedded in their Urdu god-talk? Yet in Iran, Shi'ite feminists such as Zahra Rahnavard have managed to inscribe their own concerns on Khomeinist discourse, and this should make us suspicious of a

patriarchal essentialism when studying historical Muslim communities (see Yeganeh and Keddie, 1986).

There was of course no question of any sort of feminism in nineteenth century Lucknow. But it is reasonable to ask whether its Shi'ite women succeeded in elaborating a religious discursive practice that had feminine elements.

The post-Mughal successor state of Awadh, between Delhi and Bengal, and ruled by the Iranian Nishapuri dynasty, is a promising venue for such a study, since a number of relevant documents about women there survive. As I said above, I want here to offer a thematic focus on the contribution of elite women to the rich religious life of Awadh (see Cole, 1988) in the nineteenth century. The Begums, the wives and mothers of the rulers of Awadh, often played important political roles. Some involved themselves in anti-colonial struggles as well, appearing in the chronicles and even in the British consular reports as 'warrior-queens'.

The Begums were in a position to influence Shi'ite devotion in Awadh because of their vast wealth and their visible political roles. Often literate, they knew a great deal about Shi'ite law and ritual. They also had the leisure to pursue those devotions. Shi'ites were a minority in Awadh, a majority-Hindu region where Sunnism predominated even among the thirteen per cent of the population that adhered to Islam. In this context, the Shi'ite nobility, both male and female, displayed their religious practices and devotions ostentatiously, which had the effect of accentuating their elite status. The Begums' ability to leave religious endowments and bequests of large property, and their influence on the public commemoration of Shi'ite holy days, made them an important religious influence in the kingdom.

The extent of property and control over resources that some of the noblewomen exercised can hardly be exaggerated. Bahu Begum, from an Iranian family close to the Mughal court, employed her own private fortune to help her husband, the Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula, pay off his war debt after the British defeated him in 1864. In return, he decided to give into her hands all the cash offerings and surplus treasury receipts he would receive thereafter. With a fortune estimated at 2 million pounds, Bahu Begum could play power broker (Barnett, 1980: 76; Santha, 1980: 63). She left much of the fortune that remained to her in her old age to the British East India Company, but stipulated that Rs 90,000 be granted to Shi'ite clergy at the holy city of Karbala in Iraq (see Cole, 1986), and she named the specific clergymen among whom it should be divided (Resident to Sec., Govt. of India, For. Dept. Pol.

Cons., 9 Nov. 1816, no. 17, National Archives of India; see Barnett, 1980: 237–8, for the political significance of the will). These were leaders of the Usuli school, and such large gifts helped reinforce their leadership in Karbala, making substantial patronage available to them.

The nawabs and kings themselves donated even vaster sums, of course, but the religious gifts from Awadh's noblewomen made a difference to some clerical careers. An unexpected, substantial bequest from Vilayati Begum, widow of the Shia nawab of Farrukhabad near Awadh, helped make a rich man of Sayyid Muhammad Nasirabadi, the chief *mujtahid* or Shi'ite jurisprudent in Lucknow from 1820 to 1867 (Ali, 1917: 360–3). The begums of the royal family ran household establishments that included positions for Shi'ite clergy as chaplains, another manner in which noblewomen could have an influence on the clergy and on religious culture.[1] Some princesses also maintained *imambaras*, buildings on their residential grounds (Ali, 1917: 23). The structures were commemorations of the lives of the Imams, especially the martyrdom of Imam Husain.

Some women stand out for the influence they exerted over religious practices. In particular, Badshah Begum, a wife of Ghazi-ud-din Haydar Shah and daughter of the royal astronomer, introduced many new usages into Awadh Shi'ism. In Awadh custom, on the sixth day after the birth of a child, both mother and child took a bath and the family threw a feast for relatives and friends. The celebration was called the *Chhati*, 'the sixth'. Badshah Begum began celebrating the Chhati of the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, six days after the anniversary of his birth, spending great sums of money on meticulously-planned festivities every year in the month of Sha'ban (For this and the following paragraphs, see Rabit, 1977).

Badshah Begum also brought eleven pretty Sayyid girls to the palace and kept them there as symbolic brides of all the Imams save Ali, paying their families handsomely for their custody. Each bore the name of one of the historical wives of the Imams, and was called *achhuti*, that is, too pure to be touched. Fatima was considered too holy a personage to be personified in this manner, so only eleven of the imams' wives were represented. They had female attendants, and Badshah Begum attempted to arrange for one of their faces to be the first thing she saw each morning. She tried to keep the achhutis from marrying, though one got out of this bind by saying she had a dream in which the imam divorced her.

On the birthday of each of the Imams, Badshah Begum richly decorated and illumined a special room at the palace in his honour. She gave

expensive clothing and jewellery to his achhuti wife. Later she distributed the furnishings of the room to the maidservants in charity. She also built an imitation tomb for each of the imams, with a small mosque attached, on the palace grounds. These were known as the *Rawzih-'i davazdah imam*, the graveyard of the twelve Imams. The Begum spent much of each day in prayer and participated in the mourning ceremonies at the death anniversies of each of the Imams. She believed that, occasionally, she was possessed by the king of the jinn. At such times she dressed up in finery and sat on her throne, listening as female musicians played for her, and moving her head in a trance. 'While in such a mood, she would give answers to the queries about the past and the future made by those who were present there' (Rabit,1977: 9–10).

In 1827, when her son (some say adopted son) Nasir-ud-din Haydar became Shah of Awadh, Badshah Begum arranged for a proclamation that mourning rites for the Imam Husain would continue until the fortieth day (*chihilum*) after his death. Only then would the replicas of the Imam's tomb that Awadh Shi'is annually set up in homes or paraded in the streets, be buried or thrown into the river (previously, the cenotaphs had been buried on the anniversary of Imam Hussain's death itself). No marriages or amusement were allowed during this extended mourning period. Hindu and Sunni pressure led the British Resident to intervene against this imposition of prolonged sobriety, and the Shah finally revoked this decree, but pledged to observe the forty-day mourning period in his own royal household.

The feminine religious imagination demonstrated by Badshah Begum greatly influenced her son, Nasir-ud-din Haydar Shah (r. 1827–37). On his accession he continued the custom of keeping achhutis as symbolic wives of the Imams, and even added some further innovations. Interestingly enough, it seemed necessary for him to adopt a female gender model in order to continue the process of inventing new rituals in imitation of his mother.

One the day of the birth of the Imams he would behave like a woman in childbed and pretended that he was suffering from the pains of childbirth. A doll studded with jewels was kept lying in the King's lap to represent the false child. The selected attendants prepared dishes used by women in childbed and served them to the king (Rabit, 1977: 11).

Other men followed the king in acting out female roles so as to make the present look like sacred time, especially those from families where Shi'ite women began claiming to be achhutis. These men 'had given up

manly habits, talked and behaved like women and had adopted female costumes' (Rabit, 1977: 12). The elaboration of new rituals by Badshah Begum had involved the application of ordinary female life-cycle rituals in India to the commemoration of the lives and deaths of the twelve Shi'ite Imams. Nasir-ud-din Haydar and many other Awadh men, in order to appropriate this discourse of charismatic religious innovation, found it necessary also to resort to transvestitism and other adoptions of a female gender role.

Aristocratic women in the harem constituted throughout Awadh history one pole of potential power, through their influence on male rulers and nobles. Women's greater knowledge of the full range of folk religious discourse, both Hindu and Shi'ite, allowed them sometimes to manipulate supersitious males. In September 1850, Wajid Ali Shah, the newly installed ruler of the kingdom, fell in love with one of his mother's handmaidens. His mother, however, was attached to the girl, and was reluctant to let her go. She found a pretext in a birthmark on the nape of the girl's neck, which she interpreted as a *sampan* or snake-mark, and gravely informed her royal son that it was a sign of very bad luck. The Begum kept possession of her handmaiden by this device, but it had further, unforeseen, repercussions. Wajid Ali Shah began to worry that his huge harem, filled with temporary wives and concubines, might contain other bearers of bad luck. He had his eunuchs examine them all, and the latter found eight who appeared to be marked with the *sampan*. The Shah called his chief *mujtahid*, Sayyid Muhammad Nasirabadi, and had him preside over the divorce of all eight. Someone with the king's ear, however, then suggested that Brahmins knew more, on the whole, about snake-marks than did Shi'ite clergymen, and that a solution to the problem less drastic than divorce might be found. The Brahmins, when called, concluded that the sampans could be safely burned off, and two of the wives agreed to undergo the procedure so as to remain in the monarch's harem (Sleeman, 1850, I: 107–8).

This rich little anecdote illustrates the manner in which religious authority remained profoundly contested even at the most triumphalist period of Shi'ite ascendancy. In focusing on the manner in which the Brahmins were able to overturn a decision of the Shi'ite chief mujtahid, however, we would be forgetting that the initiator of the crisis was the Shah's mother. She first hit upon the conventions of Hindu folk culture in order to keep a favourite servant in her own household. Wajid Ali Shah could have dismissed this objection as nonsense, but the Begum was able to lend her construction of the supernatural significance of the birthmark

such authority that it threw the entire harem into turmoil, led to a symbolic contest between mujtahid and Brahmin, and finally to several divorces and brandings of royal wives. Ironically, an attempt at feminine solidarity in the Beguam's mansion rebounded with unpleasant consequences for the palace harem. Women could initiate religious and supernatural discourse with a powerful effect on men, but could not control the manner in which men then appropriated it to their purposes.

The way in which men feared the power of the harem is further illustrated in the story of Mubarak Mahal's attempt to learn the Shi'ite principles of jurisprudence. One of Wajid Ali Shah's more important wives was literate and wished to study Shi'ite law. She had her physician hire Maulvi Ali Hasan Bilgrami, with whom she pursued these studies. Her co-wife, Sultan-Aliyah Begum, also began taking lessons from him from behind a veil. Bilgrami grew wealthy, and, one chronicler sniffed, 'superficially eminent' by virtue of the gifts and honours these queens bestowed on him. He also apparently employed his warm relations with several noblewomen in the harem to begin exercising political influence, not only among the king's wives, but indirectly on Wajid Ali Shah himself. The Shah's minister, Mumtazu'd Daula, grew to profoundly resent Bilgrami's increasing influence, but had to proceed cautiously against this new rival. He intrigued with the Shah and the British Resident, and on 1 June 1851 at the time of afternoon prayers, Bilgrami was banished and walked out of town in public view with an escort of royal troops, and his property confiscated. Apparently the Shah's men isolated him when he was in public, away from the palace, so that the queens could not intervene. The case, according to the chronicler, went all the way to Governor-General Dalhousie, who disapproved of his Resident's involvement. Later Mubarak Mahal managed to compensate Bilgrami for some of his losses, and the tutor to the queens retired to Simla (Mashhadi, 1896: 87–8).

The literacy and legitimate quest for religious knowledge of the women enmeshed them in a set of male intrigues, as the male chronicler tells the story. Shi'ite clergy in Awadh had a great deal of influence on politics, and were often very close to secular rulers. The Shah's first minister would have favourite clergymen, who could act through the minister to influence the Shah on religious and legal policy. By inserting themselves into the midst of this political network linking secular nobles and the Shi'ite clergy, the queens offered Bilgrami a new avenue to court influence. The anecdote illustrates that study of Shia law was, by virtue of the position of the hierocracy in Awadh, an intrinsically political act, and one available to upper-class women as well as to male nobles and notables. The teller of the tale probably underestimated the positive contribution made to policy by the queens, who may, after all, have often simply buttressed the authority of their views by taking Bilgrami's name in order to bestow on themselves a mujtahid's cachet. (In this canny reading of the story, removing Bilgrami was an attempt to deny the Begums the ability to increase the authority of their ideas by taking the name of a male religious leader, rather than simply to banish a pernicious male influence on the harem and thence the king). Even our chronicler admits, however, that Mumtazu'd Daula was for long stymied in his desire to remove Bilgrami and the rising harem influence over the Shah. It is clear that he was able to act against the queens' favourite only by achieving unanimity among the male power elite in Lucknow. Moreover, he was able to do so only in the public, male, sphere, outside the spatial reach of the queens' own authority and power.

These noblewomen made a gender-specific contribution to ritual change in Awadh Shi'ism. Badshah Begum's championing of a forty-day mourning period for commemorating the Imam Husain's martyrdom may have reflected the greater leisure available to aristocratic feminine networks for concentration on ritual activities and meetings. Certainly, the manner in which she blended elements of the local Indian female and family life-cycle rites with her celebration of events related to the lives of the Imams showed a peculiarly feminine imagination at work. Women may also have been more willing to innovate in the area of ritual than men, because they were often illiterate or in any case not bound by a strict seminary-type reading of key texts. Some men, who for one reason or another had also escaped the influence of the clergy, also took an interest in the devotions introduced by women like Badshah Begum. Just as male poets attempted to appropriate female discourse in the *rekhti* style of Urdu poetry, cast in a feminine voice, so male religious virtuosi attempted to imitate Badshah Begum's religious style by dressing in female clothing and symbolically acting out female life-cycle rituals on the plane of Shi'ite sacred history. The authority of aristocratic feminine constructions of the supernatural is further demonstrated by the stories of Wajid Ali's mother and the snake-mark, and of Mubarak Mahal's mujtahid. Women, then, mattered religiously. The embededness of the feminine in the aristocratic ritual inventiveness of the 1820s and 1830s attests, not only to the religious genius of Badshah Begum as an individual, but to that of Shi'ite women in general.

Note

1. For instance, Sayyid Hasan Riza Zangipuri, a mujtahid from Awadh who spent some time in Iran, gained employment on his return to Lucknow in the establishment of Mubarak Mahal, a wife of Ghazi al-Din Haydar Shah (r. 1814–27) (Nauganavi, n.d., 129–31).

References

Ali, Mrs. Meer Hasan (1917), *Observations on the Mussalamans of India*, London, Oxford University Press.

Azari, Farah (1983), *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*, London, Ithaca Press.

Barnett, Richard B. (1980), *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British, 1720–1801*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Cole, Juan R.I. (1986), 'Indian Money and the Shi'i Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786–1850', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 461–80.

——— (1988), *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Mashhadi, Kamalu'Din Haydar Husayni, (1896), *Qaysar at. tawarikh* (Urdu), Lucknow, Naval Kishore.

Nauganavi, Muhammad Husayn (n.d.), *Tazkirah-i be baha'fi Tarikh al'ulama (Urdu)*, Delhi, Jayyid Barqi Press.

Rabit, Abdu'l-Ahad (1977), *Tarikh Badshah Begum* (Urdu), Muhammad Taqi Ahmad (trans.), Delhi, Idarah-i-Adbiyat.

Santha, K.S. (1980), *Begums of Awadh*, Benares, Bharati Prakashan.

Sleeman, W.H. (1850), *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oudh in 1849–1850*, 2 vols, London, Pelhan Richardson.

Yaganeh, Nahid and Nikkie R. Keddie (1986), 'Sexuality and Shi'i Social Protest in Iran', in Juan R.I. Cole and Nikkie R. Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

6

Lucknow Besieged (1857): Feminine Records of the Event and the Victorian Mind on India

JACQUES POUCHEPADASS

What is an event? For whom does a given historical occurrence or succession of occurrences constitute an historical event? We are accustomed to view the gradation of importance of the events of history given in standard history books as a sort of objective scale of priority or significance. Such gradations, of course, are not arbitrary. But what we miss in accepting them uncritically is the realisation that the reading of a particular occurrence as an historical event is a matter of consensus, and that consensuses are based on social values. All occurrences are not events for all men or social groups, and all recognised events do not mean the same thing to everybody. The chronologies in our history books are human discourses on history.

From this it follows that there are at least two fruitful ways to study an historical event. One is to investigate the details of the occurrences, as historians usually do. The other is to bring out what the event reveals of the dominant values and imagination of the social groups which have given it prominence, as historians also do, but rarely. The significance of an event does not lie only in its objective content and impact. An event also functions as a mirror of the social group which has given it its historical status, and a place in its collective memory.

The 'siege of Lucknow', or more properly the siege of the Residency at Lucknow in 1857, lends itself particularly well to the second type of analysis, as the constant celebration of this event in the vast literature of the 'Indian Mutiny' is clearly loaded with symbolic connotations. The Rebellion struck at the foundations of British national identity. It