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# From Goswami rajas to Goswami caste in Hyderabad

Karen Leonard

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*Much has been written about Goswamis or Gosains as ascetics, but little has been written about their evolution into a caste, an endogamous marriage network with women and children. Coming from northern India to Hyderabad as sanyasis, male ascetics tracing lines of spiritual succession from guru to chela, Goswamis lived in maths, ostensibly without women or biological heirs. Goswami lineages established themselves as banking houses in Begum Bazar and leading Goswamis were termed Rajas because of their participation in the Nizam's Mughlai administration and court culture. As modern educational and legal systems developed in Hyderabad and north Indian Goswami practices in British India began to influence Hyderabad's Goswamis, they moved from Goswami law governing guru-chela successions and inheritances to Hindu family law governing marriage and inheritance. The nominally ascetic bankers and their dependents became householders following new occupations, developing an endogamous marriage network and self-identifying as a caste. Evidence about Gosains in Mirzapur and Varanasi strengthens the argument that educational and legal alternatives helped empower the women and children associated with the maths and develop a Goswami caste in Hyderabad.*

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**Keywords:** Goswami, Gosain, ascetics, bankers, caste, marriage, inheritance

## I *Introduction*

Goswamis are a striking illustration of the rich variety of social arrangements to be found in India's past. Found chiefly in northern, central and western India, they have different histories by place and time. Even

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the name Goswami has been variously interpreted as ‘master of cows’, ‘master of intellect or mind’ or ‘master of senses or emotions’.<sup>1</sup> Those in northern and central India are associated with lineages of Shaivite ascetics, said to originate with Shankaracharya (c. 800) and they have been studied as long distance traders and warrior ascetics (Cohn 1964; Kolff 1971; Pinch 2006). In Gujarat, Goswamis are the *gurus* (teachers) of the Vaishnavite Pushti Marg sect, while Gosais (Gosain and Gosai are derived from Goswami) are Shaivite temple priests (Shah 2006).<sup>2</sup> Much has been written about Goswamis or Gosains as ascetics (Ghurye 1964; Sadananda Giri 1976), but little has been written about them as a caste, an endogamous marriage network with women and children. Yet, court cases and other British colonial records refer to ‘wives’, prostitutes, concubines, slaves and children connected to Gosains (Kasturi 2009; Pinch 2006). My long-term research in the Nizam’s princely state of Hyderabad, combined with recent interviews in Mirzapur and Varanasi, shows the evolution of a Goswami caste.

Goswami Rajas had a special place in Hyderabad, bridging financial, military and religious arenas. As the Nizam, Mughal governor of the Deccan, consolidated his rule there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Goswami lineages from northern India established themselves as trading and banking houses in Hyderabad city’s Begum Bazar locality.<sup>3</sup> Leading Goswamis were termed Rajas because they were men of the world, participants in the Nizam’s Mughlai administration and court as major bankers (Leonard 1981). They kept records in Hindi account books and supplied the Nizam and noblemen with large loans; other Goswamis were their dependents or petty moneylenders.

Ideally, the *sanyasi* world was a celibate one, without women and therefore without caste. Boys lived as *chelas* (disciples) of older gurus in walled compounds called *maths* (monasteries). The Goswami gurus recruited their followers and successors in several ways. Hindu boys came as orphans, were brought by impoverished parents, or were recruited by agents of the maths. The boys were shaved as a sign of adoption and educated, and the more promising among them were initiated as *chelas* of particular gurus. Goswamis followed their own customary law and

<sup>1</sup> Email exchange with A.M. Shah, 20 November 2011.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> For marriage, adoption and inheritance patterns of the leading banking communities in Hyderabad, see Leonard (2011b).

upon the death of a guru, one designated chela became the successor and *mathdhari* (head of a math).

The wealthier Goswamis had ‘wives’, women whom they had garlanded in what were termed *gandharva* or *mandir* (temple) marriages and with whom they had children.<sup>4</sup> The women and children lived in separate quarters in the maths, but a guru’s biological sons could not (in Hyderabad)<sup>5</sup> become his chelas and successors. Each mathdhari designated one chela as successor and often two gurus would agree to appoint each other’s real sons as their successors. Sometimes, one’s real son could become the mathdhari after an intervening chela and mathdhari. Whatever the practices elsewhere, numerous interviewees illustrated such complicated rotations by delineating biological and spiritual lineages. Once initiated as a chela, a boy moved to his guru’s math.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, family circumstances were changing dramatically for Goswamis. In northern and central India, many were becoming householders, marrying according to Hindu law and forming an endogamous or in-marrying group. They were called *grihastha* or *gharbari* Gosains.<sup>6</sup> In Hyderabad, Goswami Rajas remained mathdharis or sanyasis, continuing to prosper as part of the Indo-Muslim elite (Leonard 2011a, 2012). The Police Action of 1948 that ended the Nizam’s rule and brought Hyderabad State into newly-independent India had a decisive impact on the Goswamis. They have become householders, follow modern occupations and refer to themselves as a caste.

Historical materials from Hyderabad show that Goswami law governing guru-chela successions in maths changed to Hindu law governing marriage and inheritance in families. Malavika Kasturi (2009) suggested that Anglo-Hindu law was used among north Indian Gosains to disempower women and children associated with Gosain maths. However, I present evidence about Gosains in Mirzapur and Varanasi as well as Hyderabad

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Kamal Giri (interviews, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi; email exchange in September 2011) of Varanasi maintained that women were simply kept, not garlanded; she attributed the practices of keeping women, eating non-vegetarian food and drinking to Hyderabad’s Indo-Muslim culture (but Pinch [2006] and Kasturi [2009] below show some of these practices in north India too).

<sup>5</sup> Kasturi (2009) shows great variance in Gosain or Goswami customary inheritance practices.

<sup>6</sup> Steele (1868: 435) comments: ‘Gosawees’ have their own laws that ‘are said to be most correctly expounded at Benares, Jhansee and Hyderabad’ and that ‘married Gosawees are called Ghurbaree Gosawees’.

that the use of Hindu law actually empowered women and children. Even though Hyderabad's elite Goswami Rajas were conspicuous non-participants in the move to endogamous marriages, they too moved away from the guru-chela system and constituted families. The endogamous marriages of the non-elite Goswamis drew upon the growing group of Goswami-fathered children and all Goswamis in Hyderabad now refer to their community as a caste.

## II

### *Historical patterns in Hyderabad*

All of the Goswamis in Hyderabad were Girs (one of the 10 'dasnami' or '10 name' sanyasi lineages) and a few of them played key roles in Hyderabad's history. An 1845 map of the city names only a few important people or localities, including 'Gosai Mhall [*mahal* or palace]' in Begum Bazar,<sup>7</sup> where the most notable Goswami, Umrao Gir, resided.<sup>8</sup> Stories about him abound. In 1855, a writer for the *Englishman* termed Umrao Gir 'a person well known to newspaper history' (Anonymous, 14 February 1855, in Ali 1883–89, vol. V: 767). The Hyderabad correspondent for the *Madras Spectator* wrote (17 February 1855, in Ali 1883–89, vol. V: 767–68):

Oomraogeer has been repeatedly before the public. He has been a great actor on this stage of ours....He is a Gosaeen, a class of men notorious for their opulence and their usurious dealings, amongst whom he is noted both as a large capitalist and for undertaking adventures of the utmost hazard, upon the chance of obtaining exorbitant gains. As the hazard was great in his money dealings in a country where there was no law to secure the rights of the creditor and equally no law to protect the debtor, Oomraogeer provided for the security of

<sup>7</sup> The estimated date for the map (torn from an unidentified book), *Plan of the City and Environs of Hyderabad*, is based on the presence of one bridge built in 1839 and the absence of one built in 1856.

<sup>8</sup> Another leading Goswami, Lachman Gir, was banker to the rulers of Shorapur *samasthan* (Hindu feudatory) in the 1840s (Taylor 1920 [1877]: 183–84, 236; reprinted in Ali 1883–89, vol. V: 409, 430).

his dealings by enlisting and paying at his own charge a body of two or three hundred Arabs under the command of one Bafana. To these, his large dealings with Suraj-ool-Moolk [the Prime Minister or Diwan from 1852–53] having ostensibly procured him favour, he was permitted to add a body of about three hundred more Arabs at the charge of the Government.

The 1855 stories concerned Umrao Gir's betrayal by his Arab commander, Bafana, who was apparently in league with the young *Diwan* (Prime Minister) Salar Jung. The Diwan's uncle Siraj-ul Mulk, Diwan from 1851 to 1853, had borrowed large sums from Umrao Gir and was unable to repay him. Bafana imprisoned and delivered Umrao Gir to the Diwan, who cancelled Siraj-ul Mulk's debts and demanded that those who owed debts to the Goswami should repay them to himself, the Minister. Once released, the Goswami Raja employed a thousand Arabs and Rohillas to coerce the Minister, but he was arrested in the Residency Bazar and imprisoned in the city (*Madras Spectator*, 17 February 1855, in Ali 1883–89, vol. V: 768). Another Arab commander, Belasood, posted his troops opposite the Nizam's palace and demanded his debtor Umrao Gir's release so that he could press him for payment, or, he said, the government could pay him the ₹400,000 owed. Other Arab troops were sent to eject Belasood and lives were lost. Finally, the Minister's bodyguard under the Arab commander Ghalib Jung ejected Belasood, who then dispatched 200 of his men to Begum Bazar to occupy Umrao Gir's house. To get the Arabs out of Begum Bazar, the Minister accepted the Goswami's submission and released him (*Madras Spectator*, 12 and 24 August 1855, in Ali 1883–89, vol. V: 773–75). In 1857, Umrao Gir was murdered while imprisoned in Diwan Salar Jung's own residence, possibly for allying with the Rohilla rebel Toora Baz Khan who attacked the Residency and possibly with the connivance of other bankers (*Englishman*, 1 August 1857, in Ali 1883–89, vol. III: 215; Mudiraj 1934: 433).

While in some ways Umrao Gir seems to come from the world of 'soldier monks', more characteristic of earlier times in northern India (Pinch 1996, 2006), he and other Goswamis in Hyderabad were bankers and moneylenders, employers of soldiers to protect themselves and their property. Nobles at the Hyderabad court often obtained loans by depositing valuable jewellery as security, so bankers kept both jewellery and cash

in closely guarded chests in their maths. The wealthier maths employed Arab, Rajput, Jat, Sikh or Lodha military men as guards, in units of at least eight or 10. All of the maths had swords and other weapons, and some chelas were tutored in martial arts and wrestling. Some maths had underground *akharas* (wrestling pits).<sup>9</sup> The outer walls of the Lachman Gir/Bansi Girji math, one metre thick, had holes for firing out; the math had carbines, revolvers and a cannon as well as swords. A large painting in this math by Bansi Girji showed Lachman Gir, Joginder Gir (smoking a *hookah*) and Chandrabhan Gir (their names in Hindi), with clerks at work in the background.<sup>10</sup>

The Goswamis in Hyderabad were linked to maths in Jwalamukhi (Punjab), Mirzapur and Benares (UP), Poona and Sholapur (Maharashtra), Kalyani (Karnataka) and elsewhere, tracing their origins to particular gurus and maths. Their Hyderabad establishments housed and employed diverse people. Guard units were Muslim and Hindu ‘martial’ castes or communities and these men lived together nearby. If a math did not employ guards, chelas could be armed. The office with its bank vault and storerooms for grains, dry fruits and other foods were on the first floor. The kitchen area and cooking utensils were also downstairs, with cooks and their helpers, often eight to 10 Brahmans and Goswamis, living there or nearby. Some maths were non-vegetarian, some were vegetarian; in one math, the guru and his wife drank Johnny Walker Black Label.<sup>11</sup> Living quarters were on the second floor, with the women usually living in separate quarters in the compound. The men could have more than one

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad.

<sup>10</sup> *Puja* was offered to this big gun, which was turned over to the government during the Razakar period (interview with Visheshvar Gir, 28 August 1983, Hyderabad). I saw the painting in 1983. V. Gir said that Lachman Gir built his math in about 1830; he has the Persian property deed dated 1245 Hijri (1829). Lachman Gir loaned the government about ₹90,000,000 to pay the Hyderabad Contingent for three years but was never repaid. The later disciple Raghunath Gir won a court case but was unable to collect; Salar Jang II tried to negotiate with him and sent police to bring him in, but the chelas (stated to be about 2000) fought back. The mathdhari was made a *mansabdar* and got ₹500 a month until after Police Action in 1948. Another version (interview with Ramakant Gir, 15 November 2003, Hyderabad) stated that Lachman Gir loaned ₹98,000,000 to the government and, unable to repay it, the government awarded *maweze-karza* or *mansabs*, which were stopped after 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad.

garlanded wife, in sequence because of mortality<sup>12</sup> or at once because of their wealth. Women were Marathi-, Rajasthani- or Hindi-speakers; a few were Gujarati-speakers. Coming at ages four or five, the boys were tutored by Brahmans and some were chosen at ages 10 or 12; those not chosen became clerks or cook's helpers. Pandas, Hindi-speaking clerks often from Benares, kept the books and lived outside the maths. Women singers, Muslim and Hindu, sometimes performed at drinking parties hosted by Hyderabad Goswamis.<sup>13</sup>

The maths were banking establishments closely tied to the state's Mughlai administration rather than sites of Hindu piety, although a few included temples or *dharmshalas*. These Goswamis 'gave up the propagation of religion, accumulated property and the maths became private property'.<sup>14</sup> Most maths had high compound walls and some degree of fortification. The men, often with sweeping moustaches, dressed in either *angarakha* and *pagri* (Maharashtrian style) or *sherwani* and *dastar* (Hyderabad style). Photos show both plain and richly embroidered sherwanis. Women in one early photo wear Maharashtrian styles. Rajasthani Srimali Brahmans performed *pujas* for the above-ground *samadhis*.<sup>15</sup>

Traditionally, Goswamis were buried in a sitting position in *samadhis* enclosed within the compounds. Each *samadhi* was marked with the footprints of the guru. The mathdharis observed certain Hindu life cycle rituals and despite the traditional attribution of their origin to Shankaracharya and Shaivite orders, most in Hyderabad worshipped forms of Vishnu.<sup>16</sup> The customary greeting and farewell salutation was *nam o narayan* (in the name of Narayan).<sup>17</sup> The maths participated in Holi and Dassera processions, their Rajput *chowkidars* and guard units spraying colours from

<sup>12</sup> Bansi Girji had four wives: the first from Bombay, the second and third from Hyderabad and the fourth a Rajput woman who came with her children (interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad).

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Visheshvar Gir, 28 August 1983, Hyderabad. Kasturi (2009: 1043) also mentions that in north India too, the Anglo-British legal system treated maths as private, not public institutions.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Chandrabhan Gir, 3 August 1983, Hyderabad.

<sup>16</sup> Pinch (2006: ch. 6) discusses the movement from Shaivite to Vaishnavite affiliation among north Indian Gosains (see also Burghart 1983: 649).

<sup>17</sup> Raja Dhanraj Gir and his daughter Indira reportedly used the greeting 'Khuda hafeez' (interview with Lalitha Gir, 28 July 1983, Hyderabad).



brass and silver syringes for Holi. These processions were led by the Arab guards of the leading math, that of Narsing Girji/Dhanraj Girji. Leading mathdharis received visits from Muslim nobles on Dassera and Diwali, and in turn visited them on the two Islamic Ids.<sup>18</sup>

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Goswami guru-chela lineages in Hyderabad were divided into two *dhadas* (lineage-based factions). One was led by the Narsing Girji/Dhanraj Girji lineage (of Umrao Gir) and another by the Lal Girji/Birbhan Girji lineage (the two names are usually those of the guru and his successor or, in the latter case, of competing lines of succession to a single guru). The Lal Girji/Birbhan Girji math stemmed from the Punjab and it had property, a garden in Amritsar and part of the old Juna Akhara property in Benares (now donated to a Sanskrit school).<sup>19</sup> These two leading maths dominated Begum Bazar, just as earlier Gujarati banking houses had dominated Karwan, the bankers' locality from Qutb Shahi days. Six maths clustered on the banks of the Musi river. These *nadi ke math* (river maths), part of the Narsing Girji/Dhanraj Girji dhada, were those of Bansi Girji (from the reputedly oldest line of Lachman Gir),<sup>20</sup> Bhola Girji, Shanker Girji/Kanval Girji, Birbal Girji, Balram Girji and Sidh Girji/Bhagwan Girji. The Lal Girji/Birbhan Girji maths led a cluster of smaller maths in Begum Bazar and Shah Inayat Ganj, those of Ramcharan Girji, Benkat Girji, Shivdat Girji, Binod Girji, Baldev Girji, Kishen Girji and Shiv Girji. The map shows the maths in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Munn 1911–13).<sup>21</sup>

The Goswami maths were ranked and engaged in reciprocal relationships with each other. When a mathdhari died, his heir distributed sugar on the 12<sup>th</sup> day to the other Goswami maths in the city—100, 50, 40 or

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad. In another interview with him (23 January 1997, Hyderabad), he mentioned that his mathdhari, Raja Birbhan Gir, frequently visited Nawab Akheel Jung and Daud Jung, and when such leading Muslim nobles mortgaged their jewellery, the Goswamis sometimes took nominal interest or waived repayment. Thus, when Fakhr-ul Mulk died without repaying Raja Dhanraj Gir, the latter said to the former's sons, 'Forget it, I gave the money to your father.'

<sup>19</sup> Srimali Marwari Brahmans performed pujas in this math, Lal Girji being a Brahman from Rajasthan (interview with Gansham Gir, 14 November 2003, Hyderabad).

<sup>20</sup> Lachman Gir (1810–64) was a disciple of Joginder Girji, a disciple of Bhagwan Girji, mahant at Kalyani (interview with Bansi Gir, 11 November 2003, Hyderabad). Visiting Goswami Gully in Basavakalyan (Kalyani's new name in Karnataka) in January 2012, I saw the samadhis of Joginder Gir and Bhagwan Gir.

<sup>21</sup> The Goswami properties were mixed in with those of other Hindus and Muslims, including many mosques, temples, graveyards and gardens.

Map  
Goswami maths in 1913



Source: Adapted from Munn (1911–13).

30 bags, according to their status. Lachman Girji/Bansi Girji's math got the most and then Kanval Girji's math by Muslim Jung's bridge, the latter distinguished not only by its age but its adjacent Shanker mandir. The bags were sorted into piles on the terraces of the distributing math and then sent to the others. On the 13<sup>th</sup> day<sup>22</sup> after a mathdhari's death, representatives of all the maths came to confirm the new heir ceremonially. At that time, problems could arise because of dissatisfaction with the quota of sugar sent or because two chelas were contending for the mathdhari

<sup>22</sup> This was done on the 10<sup>th</sup> day after a death in the north and on the 13<sup>th</sup> day in Hyderabad.

position. Other mathdharis were needed to present *shawls* and *motiya har* (garland of flowers) to the successor. The Nizam of Hyderabad reportedly sent a shawl to the successor on the 13<sup>th</sup> day,<sup>23</sup> demonstrating the Nizam's participation in the affairs of his courtiers.

### III

#### *Twentieth century social reforms and community formation*

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Goswami way of life in Hyderabad began to change. Young men initiated 'reforms', persuading the mathdharis to abandon the dhada rivalries and the customs that maintained them, and tried to change marriage and inheritance customs. Their efforts brought the double genealogies, spiritual and biological, into play, serving both to unify and divide members of the Goswami maths in the city.

The river math of Bansi Girji, part of the Narsingh Girji/Dhanraj Girji dhada, was a major source of changes. A leading young reformer, Anup Gir, was brought up in Bansi Girji's math as his chela (Anup Gir's real father Ramsaran Gir was a chela of Birbal Girji and lived in that math). Bansi Girji believed in education and selected Anup and several other young men to be educated in the late 1920s. Led by Anup, a graduate and a social worker who knew English and Hindi well, these students formed the Dasnami Goswami Club in 1931. They held gatherings every evening, playing cards, singing *bhajans* and listening to religious, social and even political talks.<sup>24</sup> Reading newspapers had been 'a sin', Anup's son Ramakant said, but the Goswami young men began subscribing to a leading Urdu paper, *Mushir-i Deccan*. Initial meetings were held outdoors under a tree near a Hanuman temple, but Raja Dhanraj Gir provided a building for the renamed Dasnam Goswami Mandal in 1933.<sup>25</sup> In Bansi

<sup>23</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad.

<sup>24</sup> According to Ramakant Gir (interview, 15 November 2003), Mahatma Gandhi visited Begum Bazar in 1932 and Hyderabad Goswamis funded Swami Vivekananda's 1893 trip to the US. Gandhi did visit Hyderabad in 1929 and spoke at the Vivek Vardhani Theatre (Ra'o 1909–32, vol. VI: 338).

<sup>25</sup> Sham Giri (interview, 11 November 2003, Hyderabad) named Anup Gir, Dilram Girji, Shanker Girji, Shamshir Girji, Lachman Gir, Balram Gir, Bhagwan Gir and Chandraban Gir as association members and said that these men were all legally married already (another interviewee said that marriage reforms came later).

Gir's math, Bansi Girji's real daughter, Indira Bai, and Anup Gir were brought up as sister and brother. She married Dilram Gir, a member of the other dhada, and Anup Gir recruited Dilram Gir to work with the new organisation; he also sought the help of Raja Dhanraj Gir, the powerful young dhada leader.<sup>26</sup>

One of the first reforms was discontinuing the distribution of sugar, the cause of so much conflict. At the death of Lal Girji on November 7 in 1938, with his chela Mahesh Girji set to assume the *gaddi* (throne) and become the mathdhari, a meeting was called and the mathdharis were persuaded to discontinue the sugar distribution.<sup>27</sup> They presented shawls and garlands to the new mathdhari on the 13<sup>th</sup> day, after a lunch of vegetarian food cooked by Goswami cooks (Brahman cooks supplied the sweets).<sup>28</sup> This was the last mathdhari installation conducted in the old style (save for the sugar distribution). It took place in Raja Birbhan Girji's ancestral math (linked to Lal Girji) and Birbhan Girji and the young reformers made everyone come, although the river maths did not want to come because of the traditional rift between the two dhadas.

A historic photo of this 1938 installation shows Birbhan Girji, Dhanraj Girji, Pratap Girji, Mahesh Girji, Dilram Girji and the latter's two oldest sons Suryakant and Chandrakant Gir. The leaders of both dhadas were thus represented at this installation.<sup>29</sup>

Other reforms centred on marriage and inheritance law. The trend began in northern India with the acceptance of married Goswamis and Hindu law. An influential Hindi journal *Goswami Patrika*, published from Allahabad, surveyed Goswami communities in India and circulated in Hyderabad.<sup>30</sup> Northern 'Goswami' grooms and brides began to be brought to Hyderabad

<sup>26</sup> Chandrabhan Gir (interview, 3 August 1983, Hyderabad) from Dhanraj Gir's dhada and one of the reformers was secretary of the Dasnam Goswami Mandal in Shah Inayat Ganj for eight years and reported that in 1983, the Lal Girji/Mahesh Girji Vidyalaya (high school) enrolled 2000 students.

<sup>27</sup> An agreement written by Anup Gir was signed by all mathdharis. Sham Giri (interview, 11 November 2003, Hyderabad), whose father's elder brother in Varanasi was adopted into Hyderabad and who himself came to Hyderabad only in 1966 (note the Giri instead of Gir), has a copy of it.

<sup>28</sup> The vegetarian dishes increased in number daily, up to 12 dishes on the 12<sup>th</sup> day and 13 dishes on the last day.

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Panna Lal Pitti, the wealthiest Marwari banker in Begum Bazar, is in the photo.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Gansham Gir, 14 November 2003, Hyderabad.

to make marriages there, seeking to strengthen the historical networks and gain access to Hyderabad's riches. In the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Goswamis in Hyderabad began to marry legally the women they kept, with Brahmans and/or other Goswamis as witnesses. They also began to recognise their own sons as their heirs, adopting Hindu law and treating the maths as joint properties. Being at variance with customary law and inheritance practices, these new practices caused conflicts. Some young men married, but, if other Goswamis were not witnesses, they still might claim inheritance rights. Anup Gir and his peers advocated marrying openly but most did not do so.<sup>31</sup> Several—Pratap Gir, Chatur Gir, Dilram Gir—were claimed to have been the first to marry legally, in the second or third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since a simple garlanding ceremony had sufficed previously, wedding customs were innovative. Maharashtrian Brahmans performed most marriages, some of them Arya Samaj ceremonies. The men wore sherwanis and the women chose wedding fashions currently popular in Hindi films.<sup>32</sup> The sons and daughters of Goswamis, regardless of the origin of their mothers or grandmothers, began to marry and term themselves Goswamis.

#### IV

#### *From chelas to wives and sons*

Goswami Raja cases presented in some detail show the clash of past and present practices. The first two cases involve the most prominent Goswami maths of recent times: only two Goswami Rajas, Dhanraj Girji and Chandrakant Gir, were invited to the 1967 coronation of Mukarram Jah, heir of the seventh and last Nizam.<sup>33</sup> These two banking firms not only loaned money to the Nizam and other nobles in Hyderabad but helped to finance the Nizam's State Railway from the 1870s (when they were

<sup>31</sup> Anup Gir died at age 30 and his son Ramakant Gir, educated in Vivek Vardhani High School, married and in government service, was never a chela (interview with Ramakant Gir, 15 November 2003, Hyderabad).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Sham Giri, 11 November 2003, Hyderabad.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad.

The maps (Munn 1911–13) show lanes named for only these two Goswamis: Narsingh Mat Lane and Bir Bhan Mat Lane. Both lineages had gardens, the former had a stable and the latter a carriage house.

officially awarded the title of Raja).<sup>34</sup> Certainly, the wealthiest Goswami dhada in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hyderabad was led by Narsing Girji and then Dhanraj Girji, the math headed by Umrao Gir in the 1840s and 1850s and linked to maths in Sholapur and Poona. The competing dhada was led by Raja Birbhan Gir and these two dhadas competed with each other not only in Begum Bazar but in the wider public or civic arenas of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hyderabad. Thus, in late 1926, Raja Pratap Gir built a sports pavilion near the Chaderghat Bridge in memory of Raja Narsing Gir and it was declared open by the British Resident, with the Prime Minister Maharaja Kishen Pershad and other high officials in attendance. In early 1927, Raja Birbhan Gir donated a house of his at Residency Bazar to the Marwari Hindi Pathshala and about the same time, Raja Dhanraj Gir granted ₹8000 for the construction of a public library at the Reddy Boarding House (Ra'o 1909–32, vol. VI: 332–33).<sup>35</sup>

Born in 1890, Raja Dhanraj Girji succeeded Narsing Girji as mathdhari in place of his elder brother, Pratap Gir, explicitly because Pratap Gir publicly acknowledged his marriage. As the brothers were reputed to be the real sons of Narsing Gir by Radha Bai, his Maharashtrian 'wife', this succession was itself a reform of previous practice.<sup>36</sup> When Narsing Girji died, Pratap Gir received ₹50,000,000 cash, while Dhanraj Girji inherited the math.<sup>37</sup> Raja Dhanraj Girji died at age 98 in his grand Bombay residence, Dhanraj Mahal, in 1988. He had not married openly, but he provided for his children by two women, a Hindu and a Muslim. He created a trust for the

<sup>34</sup> Only certain bankers, Narsingh Girji (Dhanraj Girji), Birbhan Girji, the Marwari Panna Lal Pittie and Gujarati Bhagwan Das, supplied funds for this (interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad).

<sup>35</sup> Raja Dhanraj Gir donated money to Benares Hindu University (interviews with Dr. Kamal Giri, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi); he also gave buildings and funds to Hyderabad Goswami organisations and schools (interviews with Ramakant Gir, 15 November 2003, Hyderabad; and Gansham Gir, 14 November 2003, Hyderabad).

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983, Hyderabad.

Photos of Raja Narsingh Girji are in Dhanraj Girji's daughter's book (Giriji 2008: 16, 18). Her earlier publication (ibid. 1998) includes a splendid photo of Raja Dhanrajgir in formal court dress.

<sup>37</sup> The math, mills and investments went to Dhanraj Girji, while 100 cartloads of property reportedly went to Pratap Girji (interview with Lalitha Gir, 28 July 1983, Hyderabad). Gyan Bagh, Raja Dhanraj Girji's magnificent palace in Begum Bazar, is still maintained and his daughter recalls her life at the highest levels of Hyderabad society (Giriji 2008).

four Hindu children, two sons and two daughters, while his Muslim wife (Zubaida, the first heroine in Bombay talkies) provided good education for her two children. The status and wealth of this Goswami Raja enabled his children to marry a range of high status spouses, including Telugu and Tamil Brahmans and a Parsi. One of his sons married the granddaughter of Maharajah Kishen Pershad (Kishen Pershad, like his grandfather Raja Chandu Lal, served as Diwan of Hyderabad state).<sup>38</sup>

The case of the other leading math, that of Bisheshwar Girji/Birbhan Girji, is more complicated. The lineage chart covers 15 generations of guru-chela relationships and begins in Jwalamukhi in present-day Haryana. The lineage split several times, resulting in nine lines of succession (only half have survivors today, none of them presently mathdharis). Eleven generations back, this lineage of Ilaichi Girji split into two, those of Lal Girji/Mahesh Girji and Bisheshwar Girji/Birbhan Girji (see Figure 1).

The split in 1894 stemmed from two rival chelas of Narpat Girji. The dominant chela, Prabhat Girji, gave ₹50,000 (and promised some gold) to the other chela, Mukhraj Girji, who used the money to start a trading and moneylending business that grew as big or bigger than that of Prabhat Girji's successors.<sup>39</sup> These two linked maths of Lal Girji and Birbhan Girji led the second of the two dhadas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 2).

Bisheshwar Girji's real brother, Jagdish Girji, had been Rameshwar Girji's designated successor but had pre-deceased his guru, who then made Bisheshwar Girji his successor (see Photo 1).

These brothers had garlanded sisters, Maharashtrians named Putlabai and Kamlabai. Jagdish Girji and Kamlabai had two children, Dilram Girji and Tulja Bai, but Jagdish Girji died young. Raja Bisheshwar Girji and Putlabai having no children, the Raja adopted a young Rajput, Birbhan Girji, as his chela and successor. Raja Birbhan Girji in turn adopted two unrelated Rajput boys as his chelas, Mukund Girji and Hanuman Girji.<sup>40</sup>

Raja Birbhan Girji recognised that his adopted chelas had no biological connection to Bisheshwar Girji, whereas Dilram Girji, the son of Bisheshwar

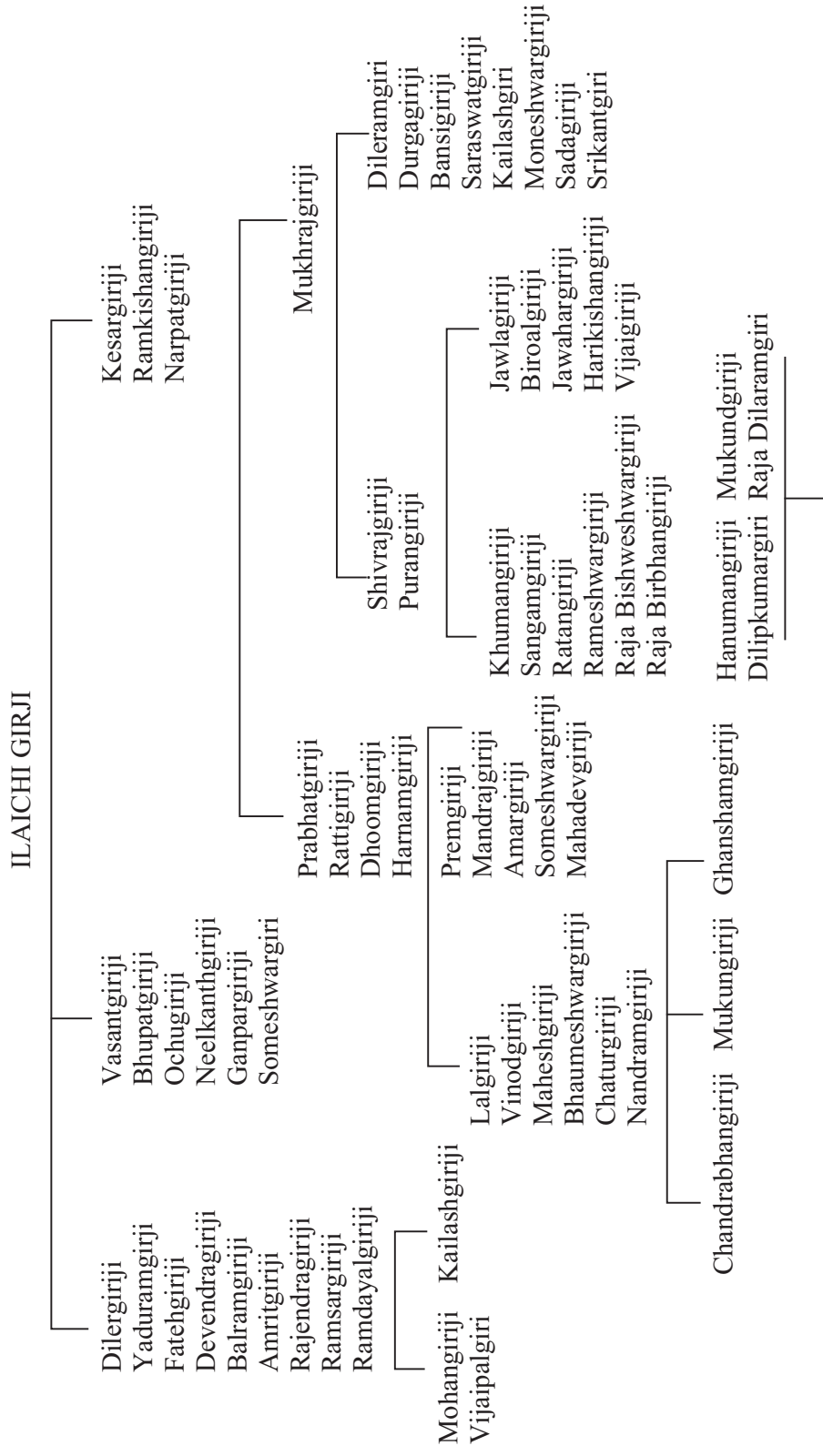
<sup>38</sup> Their photo appears in Girji (2008: 108).

<sup>39</sup> The samadhi of Mukhraj Girji, Narpat Girji's disciple, is dated 1904 (observed August 1983).

<sup>40</sup> Raja Birbhan Girji was reportedly the first Hyderabadi to own a motorcar (a 1929 LaSalle) and he also started Excelsior Theatre or Sagar Talkies at Abid's Circle, the city's first movie theatre (interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 6 and 27 August 1983; and Lalitha Gir, 28 July 1983, Hyderabad).

Figure 1

*Gurus and chelas: Lines from Ilaichi Girji/Narpat Girji*

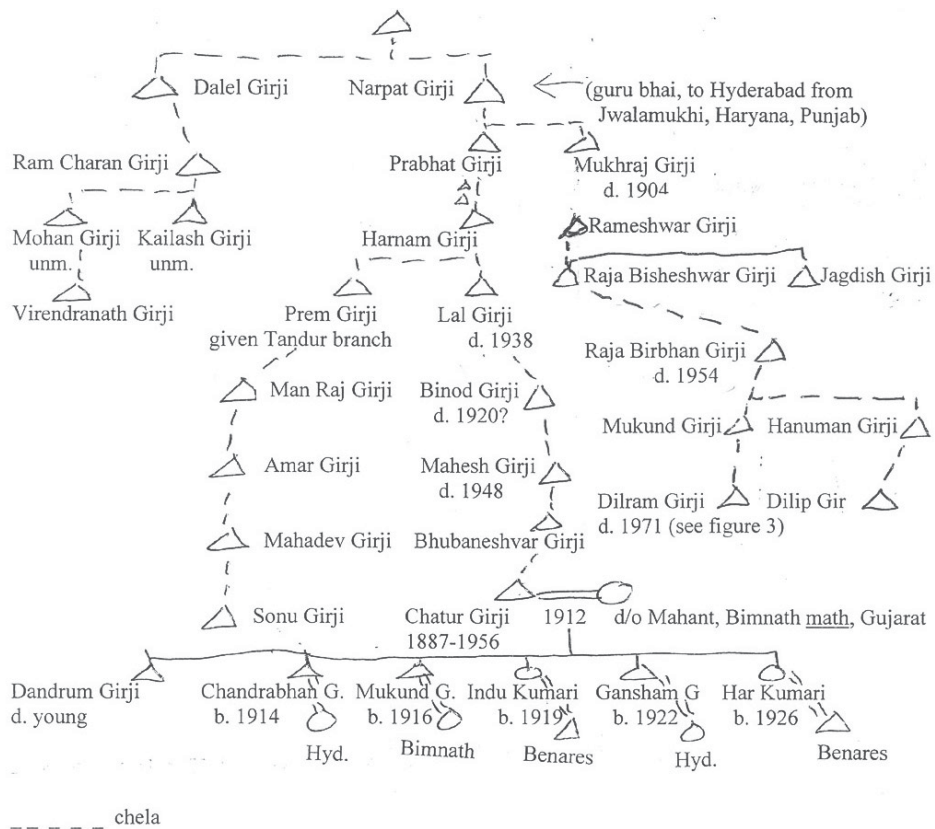


Suryakantgir, Chandrakantgir, Vijaykantgir, Krishnakantgir, Dilipkantgir,  
Rajankantgir, Kewalkantgir, Ajaikantgir.

**Sources:** Hindi version from Bansi Girji, 11 November 2003; English version from Chandrakant Gir, 19 August 1983, Hyderabad.



Figure 2  
Narpat Girji math, Begum Bazar



**Sources:** Chandrakant Gir, 27 August 1983, Hyderabad; Chandrabhan Gir, 3 August 1983, Hyderabad. See Figure 1 for fuller *Guru-chela* lines.

Girji's deceased brother, Jagdish Girji, was worthy of support. Birbhan Girji raised Dilram Girji in his math and made sure that he became the chela of Mukund Gir and that Dilram Gir's young son Dilip became the chela of Hanuman Gir. The children of Dilram Girji and Tulja Bai<sup>41</sup> later referred to Birbhan Girji as their grandfather—their real grandfather, Jagdish Girji, having died young and Bisheshwar Girji also having died by the time they were growing up (see Figure 3).

Among these younger chelas, both Mukund Girji and Dilram Girji had garlanded women from Hyderabad, daughters of other Goswamis. Dilram Gir was one of the young reformers, a member of the Goswami association founded by Anup Gir of the Narsing Gir/Dhanraj Gir dhada and perhaps the only member from his dhada. Dilram Girji's wife, Indira

<sup>41</sup> Tulja Bai's own mother, Shanta Bai, was Maharashtrian and the *haathiambariwali* (she who rides in the palanquin on the elephant, i.e., special wife) of Bansi Girji.

Photo 1

*Raja Bishweshwar Girji Bahadur, guru of Raja Birbhan Girji*



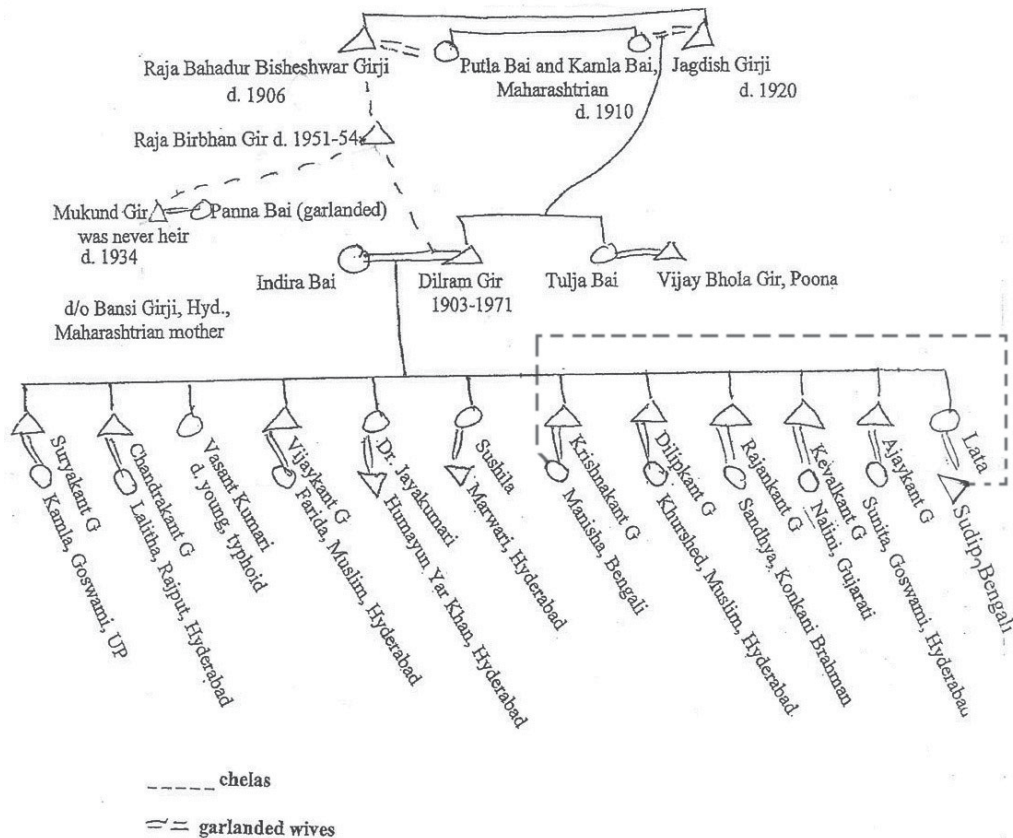
**Source:** Chandrakant Gir and Dilip Gir, Hyderabad

Bai, was the real daughter of Bansi Girji, the wealthy head of the oldest math and part of the Narsing Girji/Dhanraj Girji dhada; she was also a close friend of the first wife of Pratap Girji (who had lost the math to Dhanraj Girji because of this legal marriage).

After Mukund Girji's death and his inheritance of that math,<sup>42</sup> Dilram Gir decided to accept Hindu law so that he could make his math a joint property and divide it among his sons. In the early 1960s, following a strategy advised by lawyers, he arranged for his eldest sons (of legal age)

<sup>42</sup> Mukund Girji had children by a garlanded wife, Panna Bai, and she brought a court case for possession of her house but lost the case, not having been legally married (interview with Chandrakant and Lalitha Gir, 8 January 1997, Hyderabad).

Figure 3  
Raja Birbhan Girji's family



**Sources:** Chandrakant Gir and Lalitha Gir, 1983, 1997, Hyderabad.

to file a suit against him (he was said, in the suit, to be the 'son' of his guru Mukund Girji). The final deed of compromise declared the property joint under Hindu law and distributed it in nine parts, one to the father and eight to his sons (Original Suit #11 1964).<sup>43</sup>

Goswamis began marrying legally, although not always, especially among the highest-ranking families, endogamously. Of Dilram Gir's 12 children, 11 lived to marry. 'Goswami' potential spouses of their socio-economic level were scarce, so only two spouses were Goswami, three were Muslim, two were Bengali, one was Gujarati, one was Marwari, one was Rajput and one was Konkani.<sup>44</sup> Dilram Gir's oldest son married a

<sup>43</sup> The suit was between Suryakant Gir, 37, Chandrakant, 34, Vijaykant, 30, Krishna Kant, 23 and Dilip Kumar, 19 and Raja Dileram Girji, about 61, 'son' of Mukund Girji of Puran Bagh and the Raja's minor sons Rajan Kant, 13, Kewal Kant, 12 and Ajoy Kant, 11 (Papers with Chandrakant Gir, Hyderabad).

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with Chandrakant and Lalitha Gir, 8 January 1997; and Chandrakant Gir, 23 January 1997, Hyderabad.

Bharti Goswami from Gonda, UP and that woman's brother was betrothed to one of Dilram Gir's daughters. The second oldest son, Chandrakant Gir, married Lalitha, daughter of a leading Rajput doctor.<sup>45</sup> When the Gonda Goswami man came to claim his 12-year old bride, she had just died of typhoid and her younger sister, Jayakumari, was married to him. Later, Jayakumari became a doctor and refused to go to this Goswami husband; she married a Muslim instead and the couple eventually moved to London. Two sons, Dilip and Vijaykant, also married Muslims. Dilip and his wife, a doctor, lived in Dubai for many years and moved to Chicago in 1991. Vijaykant and his wife were star badminton players and met as team members for Hyderabad.<sup>46</sup>

Some practices and narratives based on ascetic traditions continued, especially the appointment of chelas. When Birbhan Girji died in 1952, Dilram Gir's young son, seven-year old Dilip Gir, was confirmed as chela of his 'uncle' Hanuman Girji and successor to his math (see Photo 2). Dilip remembers crying as *vibhuti* (ashes) were rubbed on his forehead, because Hanuman Girji being deceased, the confirmation was held on his samadhi. Dilip did inherit the math and his oldest brother resided there for decades until it became dilapidated.<sup>47</sup> Chelas sometimes do stake legal claims to math property. Among Raja Dhanraj Gir's descendants, one is still claiming to be a chela and the legitimate inheritor of properties under Goswami law and he has appointed a chela of his own.

The subsequent history of Mahesh Girji, the mathdhari installed in 1938, again illustrates the rapidly-changing prospects for chelas and biological sons (see Figure 2). Mahesh Girji had a chela, Bhonesh Girji, who died before him (although he was two years younger than Mahesh Girji); Bhonesh Girji's chela, Chatur Girji (whose own chela was Nandram Girji), was a possible replacement but Chatur Girji had been sent to Gujarat when he was 15 or 16 to help run a mill purchased by Lal Girji (Mahesh Girji's guru). There, Chatur Gir was prevailed upon by a Gujarati Goswami, Bhimnath, to marry his daughter. Probably the first

<sup>45</sup> Their daughter married into an inter-caste Madras family and their son also had an inter-caste marriage.

<sup>46</sup> One of their sons married a Hindu and the other a Muslim.

<sup>47</sup> Legal disputes hindered the math's redevelopment and by 2009, much of the property had been sold and the math torn down (the samadhis remain) (interviews with Chandrakant Gir, 9 October 1993 and [along with Alka Patel] on 27 December 2008; and with Dilip Gir, 7 January 1996, Hyderabad).

Photo 2

*With his father Dilram Gir, Dilip Gir becomes the chela of Hanuman Gir, 1952*



**Source:** Chandrakant Gir and Dilip Gir, Hyderabad.

legal marriage among Hyderabad Goswamis, it occurred in Gujarat about 1912 and initial disapproval prevented Chatur Girji's immediate return to Hyderabad. Chatur Girji and his wife had sons in Gujarat, Chandrabhan Girji and Mukund Girji, while Lal Girji was still alive and Lal Girji, who had previously sent a Brahman to Rajasthan to recruit Brahman boys (like himself) as chelas, said, 'why not bring back these real Goswami boys?' After a third son, Gansham Gir, was born, the family came back to Hyderabad and all three sons were made the chelas of Nandram Gir (their father's chela). After Lal Girji's death and Mahesh Girji's 1938 installation, Mahesh Girji passed over Chatur Girji, his deceased successor Bhonesh

Girji's chela. Although it was he who had initiated the three brothers as chelas of Nandram Girji, Mahesh Girji then adopted Gansham Girji as his own chela and oversaw the marriages and modern educations of all three brothers.<sup>48</sup>

Burial customs have been changing as well. The recognition of wives meant that, increasingly, they were buried in samadhis in the math graveyards.<sup>49</sup> Dilram Gir, who had pioneered the acceptance of Hindu law, wanted to be cremated but a samadhi was erected for his ashes and his wife was buried next to his samadhi. When Dilram Gir's daughter died of typhoid, she was buried and given a grave marker.<sup>50</sup> One of Dilram Girji's sons was buried sitting up following the older custom, although his bones had to be broken because the decision was a delayed one. Raja Dhanraj Girji's body was brought from Bombay after his death in 1988 and he was buried, according to his will, in the customary Goswami way, sitting up, next to his guru's samadhi. Inexplicably, the Raja's samadhi was still unbuilt in 2008.<sup>51</sup>

The evolution of a Goswami caste in Hyderabad proceeded, with legal wives and real sons assuming importance and property divisions taking place (Hindu law recognises one head of the joint family but partitions occur). The maths and mathdharis are things of the past, the maths falling into disrepair and being torn down, their records, swords and firearms, chandeliers and teak beams dispersed or destroyed. Among old Hyderabadis and their descendants, Goswami Rajas may be remembered, but even among the descendants of the Goswami Rajas, the details of their way of life are being lost.

While the spectacular out-marriages of the two leading families, those of Raja Dhanraj Gir and Raja Birbhan Gir, did not help create an endogamous marriage network, the many non-elite Goswamis in Hyderabad are marrying endogamously, accepting Goswami-fathered children as Goswamis. Most Goswamis are members of Hyderabad's continuing

<sup>48</sup> Chandrabhan Gir married a Hyderabad Goswami, Mukund Gir married a Gujarati Goswami and Gansham Gir married a daughter of Raja Pratap Gir. Gansham's son married a Goswami from Nepal and their two daughters married a Reddy from Andhra and a Muslim from Delhi (interview with Gansham Girji, 14 November 2003, Hyderabad).

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Kamal Giri (email exchanged in September 2011) maintains that only *mahants* and gurus should have samadhis.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Chandrakant and Lalitha Gir, 8 January 1997, Hyderabad.

<sup>51</sup> Interview (along with Alka Patel) with Chandrakant Gir, 27 December 2008, Hyderabad.

Goswami Mandal (sometimes split into two, sometimes united). The non-elite families are working together to improve economic opportunities, currently requesting backward caste status from the Andhra Pradesh government. Gosains or Goswamis do have backward caste status in UP, MP and Gujarat and are listed as a nomadic tribe in Maharashtra.<sup>52</sup> This effort, produced by political competition based on cultural difference, increases self-identification as Goswamis. Ironically, those recognised as leaders of the caste are from the Goswami Raja families whose marriages have been least endogamous.

## V

### *Comparisons: Goswamis in Mirzapur and Varanasi*

How do the developments in Hyderabad differ from those evidenced in recent work by William Pinch and Malavika Kasturi on north Indian Gosains? Pinch's 2006 book features Gosain warrior ascetics in north India from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a chapter entitled 'Mughal *Yogis*', he explains that the adjective 'Mughal' emphasises the degree to which the history of the Gosain warrior ascetics was shaped by Mughal imperial politics and culture (Pinch 2006: 56). Another chapter, 'Begums and Ranis', discusses the Muslim and Hindu women, variously termed 'wife', 'concubine', prostitute or slave and children 'linked' to the Gosain ascetics (ibid.: 151). Charting his five major warrior ascetics and the women and children associated with each (ibid.: 192–93), he differentiates 'adopted' or 'purchased' chelas from other children (the latter appearing only in the later period). Pinch found women with 'some independence and power' (ibid.: 152, 184–87) playing roles in inheritance conflicts as the region came under British rule and 'natural-born sons' were pitted against 'adopted sons' or chelas. His sources show considerable confusion about Goswami law and interpretations of it by British administrators, armed ascetics and the women and children linked to them, but clearly by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, large numbers of 'married' ascetics with children resided in the region (ibid.: 152–63).

Malavika Kasturi's 2009 article is based on British Indian legal records and she frames her material about Gosains in northern India by several key assumptions. As her title "'Asceticising" Monastic Families' indicates,

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Bansi Gir, 11 November 2003, Hyderabad.

she assumes that ascetic families, that is, men, their female companions, children and relatives, were the norm and that both Gosains and British colonial rulers used Anglo-Hindu law and colonial courts to ‘purify’ spiritual genealogies and prevent ‘unwanted members’, especially women and children, from inheriting property. She sees Dasnami assertions that a *mahant* or mathdhari could appoint only a disciple, not a blood relative or woman as his successor, as countering tradition; thus, she sees the Dasnamis adopting British ideas that ascetics should not be family men to instigate new, narrower succession rules (Kasturi 2009: 1039–40). She refers to ‘Gosain women’ as though they constituted some sort of community<sup>53</sup> and partly drawing on Pinch, she attributes strong roles to them in the maths.<sup>54</sup>

Both Pinch and Kasturi are certainly right in drawing attention to the roles of sexuality, women and families in Gosain maths. However, the legal trajectory in Hyderabad seems to be the opposite of the one Kasturi suggests. Hyderabad state was not under colonial rule and the Goswami Rajas had a distinctive place in its continuing Indo-Muslim court culture. Yet, legal systems from British India were having an impact in Hyderabad and other princely states. Kasturi directs attention to Indrani Chatterjee’s introductory remarks about families needing to be studied as social formations with their own histories, as products of local cultural practices, state formation and political economy (Kasturi 2009: 1041, note 5 citing Chatterjee 2004). Keeping this and Pinch’s remark about the Mughal context for his warrior ascetics in mind, let us consider again the histories of the Hyderabad Goswamis and some comparative material about Goswamis in Mirzapur and Varanasi.

In more than two decades of interviewing in Hyderabad, no one designated those diverse women garlanded by the Goswami men as ‘Goswami women’. No one mentioned women playing important roles in the maths or inheriting property. But in the transition to publicly recognised marriages and family life, biological sons and garlanded wives alike did turn to the developing legal system in the state to claim rights previously

<sup>53</sup> She uses this term only ‘as a means of discussing a group, drawn from very disparate origins and with varying relationships to ascetics, depending on whether they were gharbari or *nihang*’ (email exchange with Malavika Kasturi, 1 August 2011).

<sup>54</sup> For the latter assertion, see Kasturi (2009: 1046, 1066). She found one order, the Madhavi Gosains of Brindavan, where male and female descendants of the founder could inherit property and use the wealth (ibid.: 1051).



monopolised by chelas under Goswami or sanyasi law. It seems that in Hyderabad, Goswami law had maintained an exclusive male control over resources, while the gradual move to Anglo-Hindu law in its Hyderabad incarnation (an under-researched topic) made it possible for wives and children to become full community members and claim resources.

The interviews Alka Patel and I conducted in Mirzapur and Varanasi in 2009 confirm this view of a monastic community opening up to its women and children. As part of our study of diasporic banking communities in Hyderabad, we travelled to north Indian sites with historical links to Goswamis in the Deccan. As in Hyderabad, many northern Goswamis engaged in trade and banking. The colonial ethnographer M.S. Sherring (in the 1860s in Benares) noted that: ‘there is a considerable number of Gosains...who, although by profession belonging to this religious class, apply themselves, nevertheless, to commerce and trade. As merchants, bankers, tradesmen, they hold a very respectable position. Some carry on their transactions on a large scale. One of the principal bankers in the city of Mirzapore, is a Mahant or high-priest of Gosains—a celibate of great wealth and influence’ (Sherring 1974 [1872]: 256).

In Mirzapur, a town once famed for its large Gosain community and strong trading relationships with the Deccan (Kasturi 2009: 1049; Kolff 1971: 215; Medhasananda 2002: 372), the Gosains once owned half the town, the British had rewarded them with much land and property, and they had been cotton farmers and revenue farmers as well as traders.<sup>55</sup> However, we found only remnants of the Gosain presence. Gosai Talab (tank) was still a name on a map but was filled with garbage and Gosain Tola (locality) no longer had many Gosain inhabitants. But we identified the site of the Mahant’s residence and temple and found two other maths, and Pande narrated some colourful oral histories of the lineages. He named the ‘first’ Gosain in Mirzapur as Parsuram Giri, arriving probably from Haryana in about 1790, whose chela, Jai Ram Giri, became the famous Mahant of Mirzapur. The math site and *shivalaya* (Shiva temple) associated with these two founding mahants were still local landmarks.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Dr. Bhudev Pande, 15 August 2009, Mirzapur.

<sup>56</sup> The mahant’s math had been replaced by a Fun City resort and petrol pump owned by a Marwari, but the temple still stood next to the petrol pump. Called the Shivalaya Mahant but without a resident Gosain, its *pujari* pointed to places where old paintings, whitewashed 30 years ago, showed through, one featuring Europeans on a ship (interviews with Mohamed Razi, 12 August 2009; and Shivalaya pujari, 12 August 2009, Mirzapur).

Both mahants had kept Adivasi (tribal) women, from south of Mirzapur. After Jai Ram Giri's chela, Parmanand Giri (a Dube Brahman from Gorakpur), two competing lines had developed. One line was 'pure' because there were no 'intrigues' and property was passed from guru to chela, while the other was said to be 'impure' although it too did not pass property to real sons from Adivasi mothers but to adopted chelas. Men in both lines kept women, usually tribals but sometimes Brahmans and the 'impure' line featured a number of deaths by poisoning or murder.<sup>57</sup> The latter line ended in the 1960s, leaving Brahman relatives and descendants. In the surviving 'pure' line, Jagannath Giri's chela Bhaonacarya Gir (a Brahman from Jaunpur) became the first to marry legally, in the 1890s, to a Gosain woman from Kamasin across the river. His real son Kamta Gir got property in Benares and went there, selling off parts of the Mirzapur math and leaving the Shanker mandir to a Brahman family. Jagannatha's other chela, Janbandan Giri, took a chela, Kamal Kishore Giri, from Lal Ganj on the Nagpur highway. That chela returned to Lal Ganj and married, and his real great grandson manages the math of Kamal Kishore Giri, with its samadhis, small temple and rented rooms in Mirzapur (see Figure 4).<sup>58</sup>

In Varanasi, considerable historical change had affected Goswamis and their maths, once so important in the city.<sup>59</sup> A historian commented:

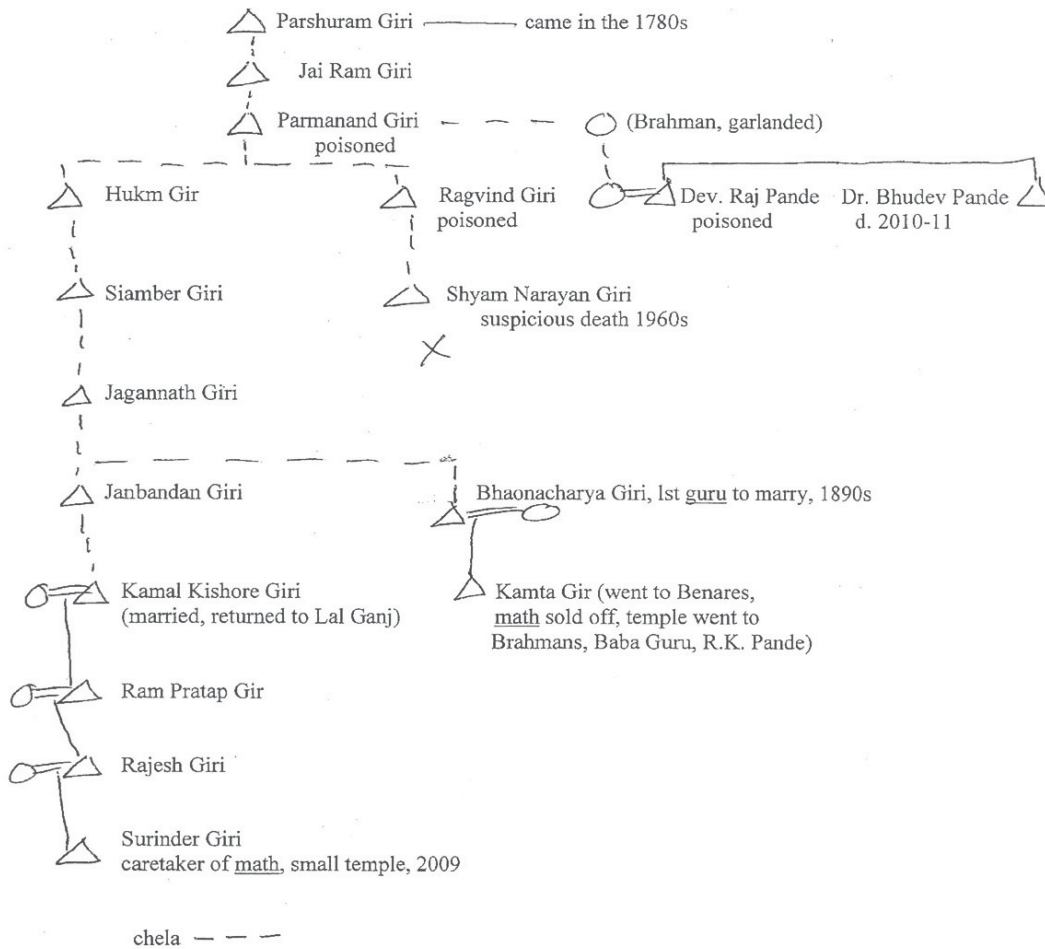
the enthusiastic members of some monasteries, like the Gosain merchants, enhanced their properties, constructed palatial buildings and amassed great wealth by starting money-lending businesses and in

<sup>57</sup> Bhudev Pande, retired Hindi Professor, Jaunpur and KV College, Mirzapur, was writing about Bhaonacarya Giri, the first Gosain to marry and a noted Hindi novelist. Pande was related to Parmanand Giri through his brother Dev Raj Pande, who married Parmanand's daughter by a Brahman woman. Pande (interview, 15 August 2009, Mirzapur) alleged that Parmanand Giri was poisoned, either by his successor Ragvind Giri or the Raj Kumar of Vizianagram; that Ragvind Giri was poisoned, either by his successor Shyam Narayan Giri or the Raja of Vizianagram; that Shyam Narayan Giri either committed suicide or was murdered in the 1960s; and that Dev Raj Pande was poisoned. (The Raja of Vizianagram maintained a palace in Varanasi until his death in 1847 and his son attended Benares Government College in the mid-1830s [Medhasananda 2002: 833–34, 841].)

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Surinder Giri, 15 August 2009, Mirzapur.

<sup>59</sup> British administrator James Prinsep prepared the Benares census in 1829 with a separate category for Hindu *fakirs*; one of the 11 sub-headings was 'Sannyasi', numbering 2,500 and the comment 'Mostly Gosain merchants' (Medhasananda 2002: 123).

Figure 4  
Mirzapur mahants



**Sources:** Dr. Bhudev Pande, 15 August 2009, Mirzapur; Surinder Giri, 15 August 2009, Mirzapur.

other ways. Court cases regarding properties held by monasteries were not uncommon. Persistent [sic] temporal pursuits by some led to undesirable consequences including disgrace in the public eye. (Medhasananda 2002: 212)

The principal bankers in Benares in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were generally classified in two groups, the *shroffs* or *naupati* bankers (Gujaratis and Marwaris) and the Gosain bankers (Medhasananda 2002: 362–64). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also, leading swamis or mahants in Varanasi were noted businessmen, bankers and zamindars (Sinha and Saraswati 1978: 79–81, 174, 262).

Dr Kamal Giri,<sup>60</sup> retired art historian in Varanasi and granddaughter of Raja Radhe Giri, the last *kotwal* (headman) of the Benares Gosains, narrated the changes in her own family history. Her grandfather was adopted from a Brahman family in Silkantpur village and most chelas then were Brahmans like him. Radhe Giri was a high school graduate and the first Goswami to marry legally, in the 1920s, the daughter of a Varanasi Goswami. But he was always called Baba or Babaji, the term for a sanyasi. The Goswami spouses of Raja Radhe Giri's children and grandchildren came from Lucknow, Gonda, Allahabad, the US, Varanasi, Meerut, Agra and Hyderabad.

However, in 2009, Alka Patel and I found that most of the maths in Varanasi identified as being Gosain or Goswami maths<sup>61</sup> denied that association,<sup>62</sup> telling us that Goswamis were householder Vaishnavites or Bairagis, not Shaivite or Dasnami sanyasis.<sup>63</sup> The Dhruweswar math in Mishra Pokhara, once a famous Gosain math and temple,<sup>64</sup> and its adjacent Dakshinamurti math had been overshadowed by a new Sanatan Dharma Inter-College. Mayanand Giri, son of the last Giri associated with Dhruweswar, had gone to Delhi.<sup>65</sup> Swami Sadanandji<sup>66</sup> from the Dakshinamurti math had moved to the nearby Gita Dharm Mandir or Gita Mandir Gopi Math, where he and other *sadhus* no longer identified as Goswamis.<sup>67</sup> The Juna Akhara on Hanuman Ghat claimed to be sanyasi but not Gosain

<sup>60</sup> Interviews with Dr Kamal Giri, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi.

<sup>61</sup> Dr Kamal Giri listed Goswami maths; Sherring named the localities where most maths were located, remarking that many families of Benares Gosains had left for Hyderabad, where they engaged in trade (1975 [1868]: 258). See Sinha and Saraswati (1978: especially 247–51 and Appendix 2) for the Dasnami orders and divisions within them.

<sup>62</sup> Pinch (2012) has found Gosain presence and influence declining in Varanasi.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with Swami Shamanand Giri and Bholenath Pandit; Sanyasi; and S. Balkrishan, 14 August 2009, Varanasi).

<sup>64</sup> Sherring in 1868 called it the Pole Star (Dhruveshwar), 'large temple dedicated to Siva, built by some Gosains or devotees, upwards of 70 years ago' (1975 [1868]: 128).

<sup>65</sup> The son, Anand Dev Giri, died in 2000 and his daughter still lived in Delhi (interviews with Dr Kamal Giri, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi). This may be the Surajkund Math (Kasturi 2009: 1053–54, 1059–60, 1071–75). The legal contests over Surajkund Math arguably mirror the transition in Hyderabad, with gurus and women turning to Anglo-Hindu law to fend off the claims of unmarried chelas.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Swami Sadanandji and other sanyasis, 13 August 2009, Varanasi.

<sup>67</sup> Dr Kamal Giri (interviews, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi) claimed the Swami of that math was Goswami.

and the same message was given by Dasnam sadhus at Niranjani Akhara on the Shivala Ghat.<sup>68</sup> Narayan Math, at Lachmi Kunda, did maintain a Gosain connection, identifying as Giriji and Dasnami; founded in 1893, its headquarters was in Hardwar. The Kali Math next to it, with a history going back some 500 years featuring the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb as a devotee, contained the samadhis of Kali Samadhi Baba and his consort Sukhandi Mataji. Here, conflicts continued amongst claimants to the math.<sup>69</sup> In Jaddu Mandi, we found the Tekara Math, again with a long history linked to Dasnami sanyasis and to Aurangzeb (a resident sanyasi said Aurangzeb had built or rebuilt it in 1680). The Mughal context still resonated in Varanasi.<sup>70</sup>

What do these admittedly fragmentary Mirzapur and Varanasi sources contribute to the debate about legal changes relating to marriage and inheritance among Goswamis? They provide more evidence of Goswamis moving from guru-chela lineages based in maths to householder families based in urban residences. Most of the maths have been redefined or have changed allegiances (Varanasi) or have become urban rental properties, sometimes including temples and samadhis (Mirzapur). The competing 'pure' and 'impure' lines in Mirzapur remind one of contested histories in Hyderabad.

## VI *Conclusion*

The Goswamis in Hyderabad participated in the Mughlai administration and politics of the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, their leaders playing

<sup>68</sup> The Lal Girji/Birbhan Girji math in Hyderabad had claimed property in the Juna Akhara and Dr. Kamal Giri (interviews, 13 and 14 August 2009, Varanasi) claimed both akharas as Gosain.

<sup>69</sup> See Sinha and Saraswati (1978: Appendix 12), about struggles for control of the Kali and Lakshmanpura maths. When they visited the Kali math in 1968, the last Swami's son and another householder had taken over (ibid.: 279–84).

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Kamal Giri's unpublished note, 'Maths of Kashi and its architecture' (n.d.: 5), mentions the Baraja Math and Aurangzeb's destruction of its beautiful *baraja* (railing); Aurangzeb said that if it could be rebuilt in one night, the remaining part of the math would not be touched (the baraja was reconstructed in one night). The grants given by Mughal emperors to Varanasi's Jangambari Matha, a Virashaivite one dating from the sixth century C.E., support these traditions. See Sinha and Saraswati (1978: 101–10 and Appendix 7: 264–69).

active roles as bankers and traders in the state. The Police Action of 1948 that ended the Nizam's rule and brought Hyderabad state into newly-independent India had a decisive impact on this evolving community. Leading mathdharis and heads of families lost government stipends that had long been hereditary, for example, the successors of Bhagwan Girji/Joginder Girji/Lachman Girji.<sup>71</sup> The state failed to pay back Goswami and other bankers and Debt Commission proceedings from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tracked the mounting debts. The new Indian government, however, decisively stopped those proceedings in 1954.<sup>72</sup>

Young Goswami men in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hyderabad began looking at futures beyond the maths, to occupations other than chelas and to family life. Most of them were being educated in English and Hindi rather than Urdu and some had identified with the growing nationalist movement in India (although participation was constrained by the Nizam's princely state). They attended secondary schools and colleges in the city, formed an association and reformed Goswami customs that encouraged rivalry and divisiveness. The young men recognised 'real' wives and children and moved out of the maths; these marriages under Hindu law made them ineligible to become mathdharis. Higher education and access to alternative legal systems helped Goswami youth move away from the chela system. The historical materials from Hyderabad evidence this change from Goswami law governing guru-chela successions in maths to Hindu law governing marriage and inheritance in families, thus constituting a caste for most Goswamis in the city. Some evidence about Gosains in Mirzapur and Varanasi as well shows the transition to family life and the decline of the guru-chela system. While the elite Goswami Rajas, participants in Hyderabad's Indo-Muslim court culture, were conspicuous non-participants in the move to endogamous marriages, they too used their

<sup>71</sup> Vishveshvar Gir (interview, 28 August 1983, Hyderabad) provided a table of guru-chela lines with the amounts given in Osman Sicca rupees to six lines of successors from 1856–57 when the fourth Nizam Nasiruddaula and the Diwan Salar Jung awarded a *chalni* (grant) of ₹600 per month in perpetuity to Bhagwan Girji and his successors to repay them for the large sums of money advanced to the government. Confirmed in 1886–87 by the Debt Commission, this grant was stopped in 1954 by Hyderabad's new government.

<sup>72</sup> Khan (1888: 15–16) reports claims of bankers against the state, including those of Mahant Jagandargir and Latchmangir dating from the Diwanship of Siraj-ul Mulk, just before 1853 and Harnam Gir Lal Gir, representative of Narpat Gir Parbhat Gir, dating from 1854 (*ibid.*: 20); and claims by Guuman Gir, grandson of Raghunath Gir and Gyan Gir Umrao Gir (*ibid.*: 21).

wealth and status to constitute families and they and their descendants are seen today as leaders of their caste.

We have seen that Goswamis in the time of the Nizam's Mughlai administration moved to become bankers and courtiers and as Hyderabad was incorporated into modern India, they moved to follow Hindu law and modern occupations. They spoke of their 'ascetic traditions' as their 'history' but such narratives have become increasingly vague. Yet, in much of the scholarly literature, sanyasis are still being framed as male ascetic lineages, analysed as subscribers to a temporal cycle of individual rebirths as opposed to 'the Brahman householder's interdependent system of caste' (Burghart 1983: 650), as 'non-caste Hindus' (Lorenzen 1987) or 'sectarian' Hindus (Shah 2006). Historical formations such as those of the sanyasi soldiers in central and northern India and the sanyasi bankers in the Nizam's state have been noted but remain relatively understudied. Those ascetics turning into householders in colonial and modern India, family men whose marriage and inheritance practices are now aligned with Hindu law and who self-identify as members of a caste, have been even less recognised and studied. Furthermore, preliminary investigation in Hyderabad suggested that Goswamis were not the only sanyasis undergoing such changes. There was also a Shri Vaishnav Vairagya Mandal in Hyderabad, formed by Bairagis, Vaishnavite sanyasis or sadhus similar to the Gosains but not involved in business. They too had a tradition featuring guru-chela lineages and samadhis, and they too were turning to marriages and to their own sons as successors.<sup>73</sup> Surely it is not too late to study processes of socio-economic change in earlier political contexts, under Mughlai or British Indian administrations, that testify to the flourishing of extremely diverse community identities and practices in India's past.

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<sup>73</sup> Interviews done on 16 July 1983 in Hyderabad at Janaki Das Math with Mahant Narsing Das, a married Bairagi; Jagdish Temple with Dev Raj; Kyali ka Baghisha Narsing Mandir with Mahant Gopal Das, a married Bairagi; and Mohan Das Math with Mahant Ramsarup Dasji, an unmarried Bairagi.

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