

Mourning for the dead, feeding the living: *mausar khānā*

Maria Angelillo
Università degli Studi di Milano

The present paper is meant to introduce a particular Hindū funeral feast, the so-called *mausar*, paying particular attention to the way it is celebrated by the members of the Kalbeliya caste.

The following analysis is based on extensive fieldwork amongst the members of the Kalbeliya caste who live in a camp on the outskirts of the holy town of Pushkar¹ and, in particular, on the participation in a joint funeral feast held in April 2011 in a temporary camp set up in the Pali district.

A detailed introduction to the cultural and social features of the Kalbeliyas goes far beyond the purposes of the present argumentation, whence, it will suffice to briefly dwell on two elements of their identity.

The first of these is their belonging to a caste of householder *Nāths*: Kalbeliyas, in fact, consider themselves to be descendants of Kanipāv, one of the nine *Nāths*, the semi-divine masters of the practice of *haṭha-yoga* which inspired the *nātha-yogin* movement and, as such, they are considered to be a caste of householder *Nāths*. The art of snake charming² is connected to descent from Kanipāv, and this activity with its host of spiritual and devotional meanings constitutes the caste's traditional money-earning occupation and its main social and cultural characteristic. Since the snake is regarded by many communities, especially in rural areas, as the embodiment of God, Kalbeliyas 'are regarded as the priest of snake'.³ Up till now Kalbeliyas have always been able to attract donations with a creature which is full of religious symbolism for Hindū people. Snake charming is basically related to religious begging, but, if at one level its nature is highly ritualistic and devotional, it also has a significant, practical

1. The small town of Pushkar is a famous place of pilgrimage, *tīrtha*, for Hindūs, and a popular tourist destination, especially for foreign backpackers. It is situated at the edge of the Thar Desert and at the foot of the outer fringes of the Aravalli mountain chain, at the centre of the western state of Rajasthan.

2. Robertson 2002, 281-88.

3. Bharucha 2003, 53.

side. The Kalbeliyas' ability in catching the poisonous serpents and also their knowledge and expertise in medicines against snake bites are very useful and even today often preferred over hospital treatment. Until not so long ago, in order to perform both their ritualistic services and their snake related knowledge and expertise, Kalbeliyas had to be constantly on the move: a single village, in fact, would not have been able to provide them with adequate work, while others might not have needed their services, meaning that nomadism was, and partly still is,⁴ an economic strategy caused by the limited demand for their services in any one location.⁵

The Kalbeliyas' traditional nomadic way of life and their past means of living describe a form of economic, social, and cultural adaptation common to groups defined both as service nomads and as peripatetic peoples.

In India, service nomads⁶ are endogamous groups offering highly specialized services, such as entertainment, ritual religious specialties, folk medicines, and repairs of specific types of implements, to settled populations, from whom they derive most of their subsistence.

Nowadays, Kalbeliyas have been shifting from one set of adaptive strategies to others, and the adoption of a new means of surviving has partially modified the structure of their nomadic way of life. We may say that the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar settlement are experiencing a change into a kind of sedentarization. Nevertheless, the members of the Kalbeliya community who have been living on the outskirts of Pushkar for approximately 20 years still consider themselves to be members of a *ghumakkar jāti*, a wandering caste, even if the definition does not exactly mirror their actual life style.

Keeping in mind these two elements of Kalbeliya social and cultural identity, namely, that they are both a caste of householder *Nāths* and a community of service nomads, let turn to the main topic of the present paper: the *mausar*.

The *mausar* is a ritualized funeral feast widely celebrated in Rajasthan by all the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes. The members of the *jātis* coupled with the first three *varṇas* do not perform this peculiar funeral rite, which must not be confused with the *mṛtyubhojan*, the Hindū funeral feast which concludes the twelve day set of funeral rituals following death. As far as I know, there is no written record of the *mausar*, both in ancient and in contemporary literature, and it seems that the only two authors who have dealt with it are Jeffrey G. Snodgrass and Shalini Randeria. While Snodgrass described the way the members of another Rājasthānī caste, the Bhats, perform and conceive the *mausar*,⁷ Shalini Randeria studied the Dalit mortuary rituals in Gujarat⁸

4. Angelillo 2013, 79-95.

5. Hayden 1983, 292.

6. Hayden 1979, 295-309.

7. Snodgrass 2007, 107-22.

8. Randeria 2010, 177-96.

which, in structure and meaning, partly recall the Rājasthānī *mausar*. The lack of studies on this subject is quite surprising seeing that the *mausar* is the central rite and the central activity for most Hindū Rājasthānīs. Since the *mausar* is definitely the most important ceremony in the whole social and personal life of the members of the Kalbeliya caste, the present paper means to identify the reasons behind this importance. When a member of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar dies, his or her corpse is transported to an area, a few kilometres away from the camp (*dērā*) where the whole group lives. The area in which the dead body is buried fits the local definition of *jaṅgal*, that is to say, an area not included in fixed and permanent settlements of villages or towns.⁹

As householder *Nāths*, it is not surprising that the Kalbeliyas bury their dead: in fact, householder *Nāths* typically bury their dead together in a separate gravesite, which generally lies just outside the village, neighbouring on the area where they live. The gravesite is usually small, and the dead are always buried without a coffin, generally sitting up in a lotus position like yogis. As D. Gold and A. Grodzins Gold state, the common gravesite of the householder *Nāths* usually constitutes a concrete reminder of their awesome strangeness as a community.¹⁰

Nowadays, the members of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar tend to bury all their dead in the same area, which they call *qabristān*, literally ‘burial-ground’. The first burial, which occurs immediately after the person’s death, is made up of a grave covered by a series of stones as long as the length of an average-sized body lying down. In the past, when Kalbeliyas used to lead an entirely nomadic way of life, their burial places were scattered all over the Rājasthānī landscape. The burial is followed by a series of funerary rites that last for twelve days, the so-called *barah dīn*. The ‘*barah dīn*’ formula consists of a broad and complicated range of rituals, which, as far as the Kalbeliyas are concerned, also includes the interpretation or, better, the divination of the next rebirth of the deceased. The *mausar* can be considered as being the last and final funeral ritual performed by Kalbeliyas. The *mausar* can be held in honour of the recent dead, the many years dead, and even before death happens, but it is not held for all the dead members of the caste. The *mausar* is only celebrated for all the married members of the caste and can be celebrated even when they are still alive. For example, if the husband dies, his wife’s *jīvat mausar* will also be celebrated along with his *mausar*, but if the wife should die first, her *mausar* will only be celebrated when her husband also dies or when her husband decides to celebrate his own *mausar* (which could in fact be a *jīvat mausar*). The sons can also celebrate their *jīvat mausar* together with the *mausar* of their dead

9. An interesting analysis of the word *jaṅgal* and of its evolution in the frame of Indian culture is provided by Zimmerman 1999.

10. Gold–Grodzins Gold 1984, 119.

father. In addition, a single *mausar* can commemorate more than one dead man, but the men must be brothers (with their living or dead wives). *Mausars*, as well as the *barah din*, are never celebrated for people who are not yet married, who have not yet chosen their own *guru*, for children, and for anyone who dies before reaching adolescence.

The Kalbeliya *mausar* is rarely celebrated immediately after the person's death: several years usually pass before a *mausar* is held and the main reason for this delay is that sponsoring a *mausar* is economically very demanding. Indeed, it takes a certain amount of time for the Kalbeliyas to collect enough money to celebrate it properly. However, the *mausar* is considered to be such a central, essential, and necessary ritual, that some Kalbeliyas, in fear of the fact that their children and relatives may not hold one or sponsor a minimally acceptable, even perfunctory one after their death, choose to celebrate their own *mausar* while they are still alive (*jīvat mausar*).

The close family of the deceased, basically his or her sons and unmarried daughters, is responsible for organizing the *mausar* after consulting both kinsmen and affines. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of the community's elders (*pañc*) to give permission to host the feast and to supervise its entire organization. When, for example, I asked Rakhi, my *dharm bahin* and my first and foremost collaborator in the field, if I could take part in her father Galla Nath's *mausar*, she had to ask the *pañcāyat* for permission, which I was eventually granted. Even the date of Rakhi's father's *mausar*, celebrated more than ten years after his death, was fixed a year before (May 2010) its actual happening (April 2011) by the members of the *pañcāyat* together with Rakhi's family.

In every Kalbeliya *mausar*, all the Kalbeliya communities of a *parganā* must be invited by the family sponsoring the ceremony: for the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar this rule implies that at least all the Kalbeliya communities who live in the four districts of Ajmer, Mewar, Pali and Nagaur must be invited to the funeral feast. The *mausar* is more than a simple funeral feast, since it is a rather complex performance, lasting three days, with some six to seven hundred participants: it includes extravagant feasting and food distribution, dancing and singing by men and women, the ostentatious exchange of money and gifts, and the building of a funeral monument. The elaborate ceremony is held on unowned land, generally near the place where the dead person was born or where he or she died, and all the facilities (the big tent-pavilion, *maṇḍapa*, where people can gather during the day and where all the rituals, meetings, and public speeches are held; blankets; mattresses; drinking water tanks; food; alcohol; matting; chairs; the sound system; microphone, etc.) must be provided by the sons and eventually the daughters of the dead person. Basically, Kalbeliyas pour most, if not all of their earnings, into a single mortuary feast.

It is difficult to give an exhaustive summary of the *mausar*, but at least two of its rituals are worth describing. The first one is held on the third and last day of the *mausar* and is called *māyṛā*: during the *māyṛā* the natal kin of each of the

married women in the deceased's household must make a gift of dresses and jewellery to their married daughters. Shalini Randeria¹¹ describes a similar transaction, called *marañ māmerū*, which is part of life-course ritual celebrations among the Dalits in Gujarat. Randeria states that women's status in their conjugal families depends in no small measure on the value of the gifts they receive from their natal families at mortuary feasts. It must be remembered that even though Kalbeliya women become part of their husband's household with marriage, thereby acquiring a new family, their ties with their natal families are not broken. Indeed, the relationship between married women and their natal kin proves to be much stronger and effective than it usually is in Hindū society.

A second noteworthy ritual consists of the placing of a stone slab (*mūrti*) portraying the dead person in a highly conventional way, on the funeral monument which is built, days before the *mausar* celebration, on the first burial. Kalbeliyas call this funeral monument *samādhi* and it must be noted that each *samādhi* corresponds to a *mausar* and not to a person. Since one *mausar* can commemorate more than one person, one *samādhi* can be dedicated to more than one individual. The *samādhi* is basically a sign that a *mausar* has been held. As far as a *jīvat mausar* is concerned, stone portraits are not placed on the *samādhi* until the person dies. As a rule, stone portraits are not provided for women: in some unusual cases a slab will be placed with just a name engraved on it. The highly conventional portrait of the dead person is placed on his *samādhi* during the morning of the second of the three days of the ceremony: the sponsors of the *mausar* and their families move from the camp where the *mausar* is held to the burial place, where a funeral monument, the *samādhi*, has been built on the previous heap of stones which indicates the actual burial ground. The only people to attend and take part in the installing of the portrait on the *samādhi* are the dead man's widow, any existing sons with their own wives and children, his unmarried daughters, his brothers, and, if they are still alive, his parents. The stone slab portrays a sort of paradigmatic or ideal image of a Kalbeliya man, visually stressing his belonging to the *Nāth sampradāya*. In fact, the depicted male figure bears a striking resemblance to Kanipāv as he is represented in the *mūrti* of the temple on the outskirts of Pushkar, which the Kalbeliyas dedicated to him around fifteen years ago. In both cases, the male figure represented is a young adult male, with a fair complexion, a long, black beard and black moustache, sitting down in *padma āsana*, with a couple of *mālā* beads around his neck and his body completely covered by a pink or orange garment, except for his feet and hands. There are a few differences between Kanipāv's *mūrti* and the ones placed on the Kalbeliya *samādhis*: while Kanipāv is depicted with long black hair and holding a small plate in one hand and a snake in the other, the *samādhis'* stone slabs portray men wearing turbans of

11. Randeria 2010, 177-96.

the same colour as their pink or orange garment, holding *mālā* beads in one hand while their other hand with its open palm facing forward is raised to chest level. This hand reproduces the form of the *abhaya mudrā*, a ritual hand pose, common to both Buddhist and Hindū iconography, which denotes the granting of the condition of being without fear, the imparting of calm or reassurance to the soul, and the transmission of protection against harm, generally of a spiritual nature: *abhaya mudrā* is commonly held by Hindū deities and is directed at the devotee who falls under the deity's protection. Along with this highly conventional representation of the dead person, the stone slab also reproduces his name and the date, not of his death, but of the first of the three days of his *mausar*.

The extravagant feast usually sends Kalbeliya families into debt, but even so, each Kalbeliya family must spend on the *mausar*, before other essentials like food, clothing, and shelter. When Kalbeliyas are asked about the reason behind such impressive but necessary destruction of wealth, they say that they celebrate *mausar* '*nāk ke liye*', which basically means 'in order to save face', and they explain that it is a matter of *izzat*,¹² reputation, honour. However, their answer still does not really explain how and why their reputation depends so strictly on the *mausar*.

According to Snodgrass, an extreme form of competition lies at the heart of the *mausar*, together with an attempt to distinguish oneself hierarchically from the other caste members: the *mausar* would basically represent a display of status.¹³ Snodgrass's statement, applied to the Kalbeliya experience, can only partly be held true: the *mausar* for the Kalbeliyas is certainly a matter of reputation, but I do not think that it is a way to display their social and material status. First of all, it should be noticed that displaying social and material wellness is not part of the Kalbeliya's attitude. In general, the members of the Kalbeliya community living in the Pushkar settlement think that through the displaying of their poverty they can obtain several material advantages: not only in their relationship with the foreign tourists who come to Pushkar, but even with Indian people and with the members of their own caste and their own family, they always admirably fill the role of poor people. They are, in fact, convinced that people, whoever they may be, will comply with their requests only out of sympathy for their poverty. I would therefore not go so far as to state that the *mausar* is about showing a wellbeing and wealth that they are constantly trying to hide. On the contrary, I think that the sponsoring of the *mausar* is strictly related to what may be called the moral economy and the 'highly personal

12. An interesting analysis of the concept of *izzat*, applied to the Baluchi society, can be found in Fabietti 2004, 139-43. It must also be noticed that the Hindi word *nāk* that literally means 'nose' also translates the word 'honour', 'prestige' in a figurative sense.

13. Snodgrass 2007, 107-22.

mechanism of mutual support¹⁴ subscribed to by the Kalbeliya community. Kalbeliyas are morally obliged, if asked, to help out and share their wealth with needy members of their family and their caste. What Randeria writes about Dalit castes in Gujarat proves to be very true with regard to the Kalbeliyas:

To insult a man who refuses to host a mortuary feast for his father or mother by saying that he eats [his wealth], but does not feed [it to others] (...) is to accuse him not only of stinginess but of sheer immorality. The purpose of acquiring wealth is not individual private consumption but public redistribution.¹⁵

Kalbeliyas are morally obliged to share every kind of goods, from food to money. According to my experience, Kalbeliyas never refuse to lend money to a member of their own caste, and since denying a loan is shameful for the person who does not fulfil the request for money, Kalbeliyas will never try to borrow money from a member of their caste if they are not sure whether he or she has some money. On many occasions, I have bought special food, the kind of food they never buy, such as fruits, almonds, pistachios, honey, rice, etc. for the Kalbeliyas I am close to, and they have always, even if sick or seriously in trouble, shared my gifts with the members of their joint families. Very rarely have I ever seen anyone hiding my gifts to avoid having to share them. Therefore, once again in Randeria's words, for Kalbeliyas 'the mere hosting of a mortuary feast to honour one's deceased parent is no virtue, but a *sine qua non* of belonging to the community'.¹⁶ The *mausar* is based on a moral economy, whereby lavish spending on a socially valued event in which the entire caste participates is considered productive and moral, while individual personal consumption is barren. Between the end of *barah din* and the celebration of *mausar*, the sons of the dead person are subjected to lots of restrictions: they cannot spend money on anything before they sponsor their father's *mausar*, and until they are able to sponsor it, they will constantly be blamed by the whole Kalbeliya society.

Not only do Kalbeliyas generally consider themselves first and foremost as part of a social body more than independent individuals, but they basically level their individual self-identity to that of their caste. Quite interestingly, it has been stressed that this mechanism of quasi-fusion between individual and collective identities intensifies when there is a marked difference between the group the individual belongs to and the outside,¹⁷ and also when identity salience comes through defining the group's identity against other groups.¹⁸ Both these conditions apply to the experience of the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar's settlement. Based on my familiarity with these Kalbeliyas, I would state that it is difficult

14. Snodgrass 2002, 613.

15. Randeria 2010, 192.

16. *Ibid.*, 193.

17. Terry-Hogg 1996, 776-93.

18. Oakes 1987, 117-41.

for them to perceive themselves as different from their social group and, although they yearn for the social approval of the members of their own caste, they accord no importance to the judgement of third parties who do not belong to it. Pushkar, the most important and famous Rājasthānī *tīrtha*, is socially and culturally pervaded and even ruled by Brahmanical values and morals to such an extent that socially sanctioned behaviour is the one inspired by Brahmanical orthodoxy. Not only do the members of the Kalbeliya community make almost no attempt to conform to the Brahmanical behaviour patterns, but they actually openly challenge and defy them. Their explicit autonomy from brahmanical policy in Pushkar draws wide criticism, disapproval, and reproach, which however does not seem to bother the members of the caste at all. On the contrary, the Kalbeliyas, prompted by brahmanical social and cultural hegemony, proudly highlight their singularity and peculiarity, reiterating and reaffirming their unique social and cultural identity. If conformity of behaviour with regard to the body of social conventions does indeed constitute a strong marker of identity, then it follows that opposition to these conventions is also a solid identity statement. It is now clear that belonging to the Kalbeliya caste is not a mere matter of birth and blood: Kalbeliya caste identity depends on involvement in a social network of relationships and on agreement with a moral and ethical system of values. This agreement is testified by the actual behaviour of the members of the caste: individual identity is defined by the individual's membership within a community and for a given caste, and hence it results in conformity in terms of behaviour within each community.¹⁹

Communitarian cohesion and the socially imposed and prescribed solidarity are the driving forces behind most of the behaviours of the members of the community: for example, if a group of Kalbeliya women go together to Pushkar from the camp (*dera*) where they live, and when they are at the town's market, one of them manages to earn some money from a tourist, perhaps by drawing a henna tattoo for example, she has to share her earnings with all the women who went with her to Pushkar before they return home. Or, if a Kalbeliya living in the Pushkar settlement is admitted to hospital, the members of his/her joint family and a good share of the Kalbeliyas living in the Pushkar camp will bed down outside the hospital until the Kalbeliya patient is discharged. The patient's family has to pay for the daily food and tea of all the members of the caste camping outside the hospital. The reader may now appreciate how Kalbeliya cohesion can be both a relief and at the same time a huge burden for the members of the caste. Throughout their lives, Kalbeliyas are used to behaving and thinking first as members of a community rather than as an individual with his/her own needs and ambitions. The *mausar* can ideally be considered the final step of an education through which people are taught to subordinate their own needs to the promotion of the social wholeness of their community.

19. Ballet–Radja 2006, 7.

Moreover, the behaviour of the caste members is supervised and continuously questioned by the community they belong to: all the aspects of their life, be it their attire or their means of living, are implicitly or openly judged, and whenever their conduct is considered to be inappropriate and not in compliance with the caste's moral and ethical code, the *pañcāyat* intervenes, fining or expelling the transgressor from the caste. It must be noticed that Kalbeliyas allow members of other endogamous groups to join their caste and to become Kalbeliyas: of course, due to the low status of the caste, this does not happen very often, but it is however possible. In fact, during my fieldwork period in Rajasthan I met two men, an Indian and an Australian, who had succeeded in becoming Kalbeliyas. The main reason and perhaps the only one that can push people to acquire Kalbeliya caste identity is marriage. Even today, Kalbeliyas do not allow marriages outside the caste, and if a Kalbeliya marries someone belonging to another caste, whatever this caste may be, he or she is cast out by the *pañcāyat*. Nevertheless, inter-caste marriages are gladly accepted when the non-Kalbeliyan half of the couple agrees to give up his or her original social belonging and to become a Kalbeliya.²⁰ Kalbeliya identity is constructed by social agents, according to an interactionist rationale that is based on the expectations that group members have about their roles. As Claude Dubar suggests, 'identity is nothing else but a result (...) of diverse processes of socialization which at the same time construct the individuals and define the institutions'.²¹ And the *mausar* is precisely an example of such a process of socialization: by sponsoring a *mausar*, Kalbeliyas prove their compliance with the caste's moral code, its values, its beliefs, and its ethical thinking and show that they behave accordingly. The *mausar* is based on feelings of social belonging which sustain the group's existence: in other words, the *mausar* feeds those feelings of social belonging which reiterate caste identity. Besides being, as Snodgrass states, a memory machine which constructs images that freeze the dead into a perfect and durable form,²² the *mausar* can also be considered an identity building machine, inasmuch as identity is understood, in accordance with the most recent research in sociolinguistics, social psychology, and cultural studies, as a performative act, realized when people expose who they are in specific social interactions.²³ Identity is a negotiated process of exposure and interpretation of social positions, affiliations, roles, and status.²⁴ During the celebration of the *mausar*, the main features of Kalbeliya identity are explicitly and consciously displayed. On this occasion, the Kalbeliyas act as paradigmatic householder *Nāths*: their attire, the

20. Adoption of Kalbeliya caste identity first of all entails changing one's name and paying a sum of money to the *pañcāyat*. The amount is fixed by the *pañcāyat* itself and is supposed to be redistributed among the members of the Kalbeliya community the person will join.

21. Bauman 2008, 18-19.

22. Snodgrass 2007, 117.

23. De Fina-Schiffrin-Bamberg 2006, 189.

24. Ochs 1992, 335-58; Ochs 1993, 297-306.

food, the very place where the *mausar* is held, the linguistic strategies adopted, the dancing, and the music are all aspects that convey the ideal image of the caste as it is perceived by its members. The *mausar* represents Kalbeliyas as they are supposed to be according to their own inner representation of themselves. One example of this paradigmatic performance of Kalbeliya identity is offered by the way the Kalbeliyas greeted each other during the *mausar* I attended. The usual Kalbeliya greeting, at least for those living in the Pushkar settlement, is ‘Rām Rām’ or more rarely *namaste*. Nevertheless, during the three days of celebration of the *mausar*, the Kalbeliyas addressed each other saying *ādeś*, the common greeting formula used by members of the *Nāth sampradāya*. In the period between 2005 and 2011, this was the first time I had ever heard Kalbeliyas uttering this word, which in fact I expected them to use being distinctive to the *Nāths*, be they ascetics or householders. It goes without saying that after this *mausar* experience I never heard it again.

As Bloch states, the *mausar* therefore proves that ‘death as disruption, rather than being a problem for the social order, (...) is in fact an opportunity for dramatically creating it’.²⁵ The *mausar* presents the social fabric, which has been torn apart by the death of a member, as a coherent whole, ruled by moral and ethic feelings. The funeral feast is the occasion for the reproduction, rebuilding, and reiterating of the caste as a meaningful, ordered group fed by its members’ sense of belonging.

The idea that the *mausar* confirms and restores the structure of the Kalbeliya caste and the roles of its members is further suggested by the custom of celebrating *sagās*, betrothal and formalizing marriages during this funeral feast. There are two main reasons that generally underlie the connection between the two rituals: an economic one and a social one. Economically speaking, the co-celebration eliminates the cost of re-inviting and entertaining the same guests, and thereby reduces expenses for the family hosting the *mausar*. In turn, the social motivation concerns both the status of the deceased person’s family within the caste and the enhancement of the caste bond. Marriage is, in fact, an opportunity for families to maintain their social rank, to distinct socially and to receive social approbation from the other members of the community. As briefly explained above, families must respect caste rules and norms regarding weddings under constraints of dishonour and non-social esteem. Marriages, which promote and finalize new alliances within the caste, enlarge the social network on which the caste is based and sustained. Moreover, a third evocative explanation has been suggested by some Pushkar inhabitants who, when questioned about this low caste tradition, explained that marriages are formalized during the *mausar* in order to balance the inauspicious (*aśubh*) character of the mortuary feast through a highly auspicious celebration (*śubh*), such as a wedding.

25. Bloch–Parry 1982, 218–19.

Considering death an unavoidable rite of passage, consisting of the classic tripartite sequence outlined by Van Gennep²⁶ and made up of the three phases of separation, transition, and incorporation, the Kalbeliya *mausar* undoubtedly acts as the last of the three ritual phases. The *mausar* is a rite of incorporation, where the purpose of the shared meal is to reunite, in a meaningful framework and structure, all the surviving members of the group. In fact, the main action connected to the *mausar* is eating, as is testified by the expression *mausar khānā*, which is used to describe the act of taking part in the celebration. As Parry,²⁷ Inden and Nicholas²⁸ have underlined, food is a key symbol of nurture and kinship, and the refusal to eat is a repudiation of kinship, where outcasting is expressed above all in a withdrawal from commensality. According to both Van Gennep's well-known model and to Inden's and Nicholas's interpretation of the Hindū *samskāra* function,²⁹ the main aim of Kalbeliya funeral rituals, in common with all rites of passage, is to provide the subject of the rite with a new identity.³⁰ In fact, apart from its socially unifying function, the Kalbeliya *mausar*, as the very last funeral ritual, provides a new identity to all the ritual actors involved therein: the deceased, the sponsors, and the caste. The dead person is, in fact, transformed into a perfect and paradigmatic householder *Nāth*, a model and epitome of caste membership; his sons are identified and legitimated as Kalbeliyas not through a mere blood-birth tie, but through the moral and social acknowledgement bestowed on them by their community, and, finally, the caste is renewed, rebuilt, and restated by the sense of belonging of its members and through the maintained prominence of its moral code on individual needs, desires, and aspirations. It is worth remembering that until a very recent past, the *samādhīs* were the only fixed, stable structures built by Kalbeliyas, and the only fixed signs of their presence on the Rājasthānī landscape. *Samādhīs* outline and sketch out the history of the caste in the region: they are documents that produce the caste as a local community and testify to its ongoing biography. It can be noticed that the present shifting of the Kalbeliya community living in Pushkar to a kind of sedentarization is mirrored by the confluence of all the *samādhīs* in a single area. *Samādhīs* are the signs which prove that the society of the living regularly recreates itself, and that the individual's ability to influence and interact with the world does not end with biological death.

In conclusion, by sponsoring the *mausar*, the Kalbeliyas subscribe to a moral community, that is to say, a community of people who share the same values and the same behaviours: by sponsoring this celebration, they prove that

26. Van Gennep 1909.

27. Parry 1985, 614.

28. Inden–Nicholas 1977.

29. 'every *samskara* is regarded as a transformative action that "refines" and "purifies" the living body, initiating it into new statuses and relationships by giving it a new birth', *ibid.*, 37.

30. Boivin 2000, 374.

they endorse and are part of a cultural and social framework of values. This fact of being established within the same moral norm shapes their concept of *izzat*: the same values and the same behaviours that outline the group as a moral community define their idea of *izzat*, honour. The reproduction of these values, as proved by the *mausar*, is highly pragmatic, since it occurs through appropriate and morally fitting behaviours handed down to caste members of the same and of different generations. The *mausar* is therefore a matter of *izzat*, inasmuch as it is a matter of endorsing the values and the behaviours on which the moral community of equals is based.

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