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Sexuality, Fertility, and Erotic Imagination in Rajasthani Women's Songs

Students of South Asian society, mythology, and psychology frequently portray the cultural image of Hindu women as ambivalently construed and inherently split.[1] Variously characterized, this split image is generally grounded in two linked perceptions. The first of these is that for Hindus there exists a deep disjunction between women's sexual potency and their procreative and nurturing capacities as respectively dangerous and essential to men. Contrasting forms of the great goddess reveal this split, writ large in terms of destructiveness and beneficence. The solitary and wild dance of blood-drinking, gruesome, disheveled Kali threatens the cosmos; but stately, beautiful, well-groomed Lakshmi —paired with and tamed by a divine mate—brings prosperity to the home.[2]

1. Some works that present various aspects of the split-image theory of South Asian females, highlighting different dimensions of its social and cultural sources and consequences, include Amore and Shinn 1981:26–27; Das 1976a; Druvaranjan 1989; Dumont 1975:213; Fruzzetti 1982:31; Hershman 1977; Jacobson 1977b, 1978; Vatuk 1982b; Vatuk and Vatuk 1979b; and Wadley 1977. Three such accounts to which I give particular attention here are Bennett 1983, Kakar 1978, and O'Flaherty 1980. Hansen (1988), Robinson (1985), and Sax (1991) attempt in diverse and illuminating ways to develop less dualistic configurations of South Asian females, drawing on various dimensions of popular culture.

2. For characterizations of these well-known Hindu goddesses, see Kinsley 1987:19–34, 116–31. For a discussion of a cross-culturally apparent split "at the level of myth, religion, and high literature" between "sex/sensuousness and maternity/motherliness" see Friedrich 1978. In India, however, even at the mythological level an analysis of these images in terms of opposition distorts their meaning. Kali is, after all, adored and worshiped: see the marvelously titled *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair* (Sen 1982). See also Coburn 1982 and Hiltebeitel 1988 for divine female multiplicity not reducible to splits. See Erndl 1993 for a spirited argument against the use of dualisms (especially Babb 1970) to interpret Hindu goddesses. Any Rajasthani villager will readily pronounce all goddesses to be manifestations of one Goddess; Babb (1976) and Nicholas (1982) convey ways evident splits merge in popular Hinduism of other regions.

The second notable aspect of a split female image derives from women's several strongly contrasting domestic and ritual roles within the kinship system. Among these roles, those sets that differ most strikingly are daughters and sisters, on the one hand, and wives and sons' wives, on the other. The following two chapters discuss some ways that women consciously bridge and undermine such splits in manipulating kin relationships. According to pure split-image theories, wives are in a double bind: they should be fertile and thus must be sexually active; simultaneously they must be absolutely chaste, in terms not only of marital fidelity but of sexual reticence.[3] This problematic chastity of wives evokes anxieties recreating the conceptual split between sexuality and fertility at the human level.

Without denying the strong and pervasive foundations in South Asian culture for these contrasting dimensions of female nature, I seek here to contribute an alternative and complementary view. This view explicitly and happily links erotic union with procreation and birth. Concomitantly, I propose another, equally self-evident notion: although to be a daughter, sister, bride, daughter-in-law, and mother certainly demands varying behaviors, women playing their multiple parts as they pass through life stages and between natal and marital homes do not necessarily perceive them as ultimately conflicted. The material presented in this chapter most directly concerns the apparent conflict or opposition between women's sexuality and fertility, specifically in the context of rural, Hindu North India. But I shall also touch on women's kin roles, particularly to consider the presumed incongruence between active sexual interest and motherhood in a good wife.

My argument in this chapter draws solely on women's songs recorded in Ghatiyali, the Rajasthani village where I lived from September 1979 through March 1981 and to which I returned for a few weeks in the winter of 1987–88.[4] Although I was not there

3. Jacobson (1978) portrays one woman's life lived according to this ideal. Jacobson's "chaste wife" is not a particularly happy woman, but she is proud of herself and explicitly proud of the contrast between her own success at chastity and the majority of women's, including her own daughter's, deviations from such an ideal.

4. My colleague Joseph Miller settled in this village in January 1979; thus our joint coverage of village events spanned a continuous two years and three months. As a folklorist, Joe recorded and had transcribed what amounted to hundreds of women's songs, and I have benefited greatly from access to his collec-

to do research on women or folklore, the interpretations I offer here draw shape and substance from twenty-one months of fieldwork, and frequent participation in the performance contexts of the songs I examine. These oral traditions, although hardly oblivious to the splits imposed by women's several roles in society and men's attitudes toward them, strikingly show female self-images that are simultaneously sexy and motherly, that explicitly celebrate continuities between erotic playfulness and procreation. Sometimes this celebration remains clearly within the bounds of marriage; sometimes it bursts through to more free-floating, promiscuous modes. Even in the latter case, the songs and their contexts deliver a cheerful and creative, rather than angry and destructive, portrait of womankind.[5]

First I exemplify some manifestations of the split-image paradigm as variously rendered by three scholars with different disciplinary orientations. Then I describe the sources of my alternative view, exploring these materials in two segments. In the first, I describe the use of one image—that of the "wrap" (*oṛhnī*), a garment essential to all married and adult women—in several genres of women's songs. In the second I offer a more general discussion of birth, sexuality, and erotic sensibilities as interwoven themes in the same corpus of traditional lore. In conclusion I stress the performative, "emergent" character of female self-imagery vitally produced in folklore.[6]

SPLIT IMAGES

Not all who write dualistic descriptions of South Asian female nature perceive the split as falling along exactly the same lines. Here I will briefly sketch, and certainly oversimplify, the cases made by three writers: a psychoanalyst, a Sanskritist and historian of

tions, both in the field and since returning. Songs that Joe recorded are marked with an asterisk after the title; all translations are my own.

5. For the regenerative quality of women's sexuality and its relation to Rajasthani villagers' ideas about death see Gold 1988a. Marglin (1981, 1985a, 1985b) develops a powerful argument for the positive, vital, and creative aspects of female sexuality in Hindu thought. See also Blanchet 1984:43, 47 for positive associations of women with communal fertility in rural Bangladesh that emerge even in the negative context of the author's focus on the polluting aspects of female reproductive processes.

6. For innovative, subversive, and political qualities of artistic, oral performances see, for example, Basso 1985; Bauman 1977, 1986; Egnor 1986; Limon 1981.

religions, and an anthropologist. These offer three lucid representations of a dominant vision of South Asian femaleness—a vision to which the authors of this book pose certain challenges. I do not present these sketches in order to attack their authors' unquestionable scholarship and insight, only to test their totalizing impact.

By speaking of images and visions I perpetuate a visual discourse that seems, or I should say appears, intrinsic to my subject. Split images may indeed derive from watching, rather than listening to, women. They may be based on assumptions of female voicelessness that subject women readily to definitions by others. South Asian women are too often perceived as veiled figures acting out graceful pantomimes of submission and debasement. Later in this chapter my aim will be to hear in their unmuffled voices explicitly worded expressions of power and pleasure.

Sudhir Kakar, a psychoanalyst with an anthropological bent, has in his examination of Hindu mythology and culture highlighted a prominent disjunction between the images of a good mother and a bad mother—the former all-nourishing, the latter threatening (1978: 79–112).[7] Underlying Kakar's portrayal of the divided perception of females is an idealized purity and chastity set against a dread of "lustful and rampant" sexuality. The source of the bad mother's lust Kakar locates in a general cultural repression of female sexuality that then becomes displaced onto the fragile egos of male children. Thus develops a terror of the larger-than-life, sexually aggressive, potentially destructive goddess.

Kakar does not claim that women share the experiences that, for men, shape split female images. While he does give attention to the development of female as well as male psychological complexes, and in fact attempts to follow the life course of a girl through marriage and motherhood (71–79), his sources—beyond Sanskrit literature—are for the most part secondhand, largely male-authored ethnography.[8] In any case, Kakar culls his most vivid analytic imagery from Hindu myth.

Along with many others, Kakar finds Lord Rama's consort Sita

7. Kakar's first book (1978), the subject of my discussion here, has had considerable influence on subsequent scholarship, although it has not gone unchallenged; see Kondos 1986 for a vigorous refutation and Derne 1988 for a faithful defense of Kakar's viewpoint.

8. Roy (1979) offers a salubrious Jungian alternative to Kakar's Freudian imagery in her treatment of women's life stages.

of the pan-Indian epic *Ramayana* tradition to be the personification of ideal womanhood "for both men and women in Hindu society" (63). She is forgiven (for sins never committed) by Rama after he sees his sons for the first time—presumably transforming his view of her sexuality from dangerous to virtuous.[9] Tales of Devi, or Durga—another form of the mother goddess, less frightening in appearance than Kali but nevertheless uncontrolled by any male—demanding self-castration from Shiva as sacrificial food support the image of "maternal threat" (102).

Some of Kakar's more recent work, especially his volume on sexuality (1990), draws on a much wider range of sources, including life histories, cinema, and folklore. In these he finds much evidence that women desire intimacy, but concludes that males do not share this desire, and that women are inevitably disappointed. He has not revised his bleak view of South Asian female sexuality and its potential for fulfillment. He continues, moreover, to ground his analysis in the split-image mode, speaking of an "age-old yet still persisting cultural splitting of the wife into a mother and a whore," and claiming that although women may be honored as ritual partners and mothers, "as a female sexual being . . . the patriarchal culture's horror and scorn are heaped upon the hapless wife" (1990: 17).[10]

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1980) depicts and explains opposing types of goddesses more fully than does Kakar. She traces from the Upanishads a split in Hindu myth between dominated "goddesses of the breast" and dominating "goddesses of the tooth," or genitals (90–91). This split she also formulates as the sacred cow and the profane mare (239–80) or the fertile mother and the erotic whore (247–49). She suggests that such a mythological split is reflected in behavior patterns that in turn resonate in later myths, thus proposing a more complex, dialectical inter-

9. The *Ramayana*'s popularity has recently been boosted by a television maxi-series that has drawn severe criticism from Indian feminist activists for its portrayal of female passivity.

10. I am very grateful to Sudhir Kakar for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter. He elegantly contrasted his "analytic eye" as more prone to see things negatively with the "anthropological eye (and heart) [that] dwells in a 'roseate light'" (personal communication 1990). I have amended some of my discussion of Kakar's work on the basis of his thoughtful comments, and I apologize to him for any remaining injustice done here to his very compelling writings.

relationship between the natures of deities and humans than psychological projection.

Cow worship O'Flaherty explains as the worship of a nonerotic, fertile, nourishing female, while self-sacrificial devotion to a nonfertile, erotic Tantric goddess (the mare transformed) offers risky access to power for a devotee adept. Note that the mother/whore or fertile/erotic split does not quite jibe with Kakar's good mother/bad mother paradigm, since presumably neither the erotic whore nor her Tantric transformation is a mother at all. O'Flaherty does state that Devi "in her full form embodies both aspects of female divinity" (91). But the goddess gets split by her worshipers. And there is a sense that most of these worshipers —certainly those who authored the Sanskrit texts that are O'Flaherty's staple sources—are male.[11]

In the case of Lynn Bennett's *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters*, however, the informants are women. Bennett spent many years in Nepal and clearly has an open, warm, and sympathetic attitude toward the high-caste women with whom she lived and worked. Bennett attempts to show how social and symbolic splits in female roles and identities are mutually reinforcing. Although she notes these Nepali women's fondness for jokes about "the phallic nature" of bananas and cucumbers (1983: 258 n. 18), and although many of her informants are frankly earthy in their references to sexual activities and appetites, Bennett has chosen not to focus on these relaxed and humorous attitudes toward female sexuality.

Instead, she is primarily concerned with contrasting two opposing perceptions of women in kinship complexes, which she labels "patrifocal" and "filiafocal" and which pertain to the respective roles of wife and sister. Thus she contrasts the sexuality of wives in their husbands' homes, necessary to increase the patriline but requiring vigilant control, with the asexuality of married women in relation to their natal families (241). All over South Asia the new, young wife has little status and power in her mari-

11. O'Flaherty suggests, provocatively, that women may have made "an oral contribution to the tales that were ultimately written down by men" (1986:11). In a forthcoming book on "sexual masquerades" this author (now publishing under the name Doniger) plans to pursue across cultures and genders the linked themes of splitting, doubling, and trading identities; here her interest in the psychological dimensions of split and double identities in myth and literature takes precedence over any focus on South Asia or on women (personal communication 1989).

tal home and looks forward to the freedom and relief from housework drudgery that she experiences on visits to her parents. When she is around, a husband's sister may be at times a cruel taskmaster to her brother's bride. Bennett locates the source of this status difference squarely in the wife's acknowledged sexuality.

In her conclusion Bennett notes that, like the title of her book, the oppositions and mediations she proposes are "essentially the Hindu male's perspective on women." And she agrees that women "must somehow integrate and internalize two different roles and valuations of the self" (316). Why then does she draw her portrait so dualistically? Certainly the voices of her informants, whom she often allows to speak at length, do not always convince us of the stark contrasts drawn in the analysis.

Bennett's polarized view of female nature, I would suggest, derives not so directly from women themselves as from the oppositions she initially defines as central to South Asian culture. Her work begins with dualities: the world of flux (*samsāra*) versus liberation from birth and death (*mukti*), householder versus ascetic, and purity versus pollution are among what she calls central oppositions (34–51).[12] It is Bennett's concern to understand the ritual and social life of women in terms of these binary tensions that leads her then to focus on striking absolute splits in women's roles. By doing so she neglects investigating the many ways that women, playing their multiple, responsive roles, may also forge for themselves and voice a sense of unified identity.

One further point from Bennett helps to summarize the three distinct but parallel analytic views that I have sketched. Bennett observes that motherhood mediates between the two opposed identities of sister and wife. "Female sexuality is not denied in the mother as it is symbolically in the sister and the daughter" (255). Motherhood, then, purifies dangerous wives and makes their sexuality auspicious instead of dangerous. This echoes Kakar's observation that Rama accepts Sita as a mother. It also recalls O'Flaherty's dominating "goddess of the breast" (or docile cow) as an unambiguously beneficent form of female power.

12. Here of course she follows Dumont (1975), espousing his view of the structural oppositions that define social relations in Hindu culture.

Although Kakar, O'Flaherty, and Bennett do not formulate the split female image in exactly congruent terms, they all, in fact, describe similar profound disjunctions. These are related to discontinuities between female beings' (women's or goddesses') sexuality and their fertility, or among their various roles as erotic partners, wives, and mothers. All three arguments—even Bennett's, which is based on extensive fieldwork—draw heavily on mythic images of the feminine. And, for all three authors, woman as genetrix is a critical fulcrum. In Kakar's analysis, the mother image can swing either way, presenting protective and nourishing or destructive, devouring, and sexual aspects. O'Flaherty also contrasts milk-giving cow mothers with blood-eating types, connecting the latter with myths of the toothed vagina. Thus for both Kakar and O'Flaherty maternal sexuality tends to be associated not with woman's nourishing but rather with her terrifying aspects.

Bennett points to similar contrasts in analyzing goddess mythology (indeed she draws frequently on O'Flaherty's earlier work). She suggests, significantly, that women are less inclined than men to worship blood-eating goddesses, preferring to give their devotion to female deities with whom they share painful but ultimately positive life-cycle experiences (1983: 306). Bennett finds in the social universe of high-caste Nepalis that the mother is singularly beneficent, her sexuality transformed and acceptable. For mortals if not for goddesses, then, motherhood may offer a solution to women's ambiguous status, rather than further conflicts; here there is no bad mother.[13]

The split-image approach to South Asian women derives largely from the male point of view. Although Bennett at various illuminating moments does present a feminine perspective in fragments, none of these authors claim to give women's view of women. In particular, none deal directly with how women may be able to understand their own sexuality, not viewing themselves as lust-maddened demonesses but simply as participants in a society strongly oriented toward fertility.

13. See Erndl 1989:243 for the Hindu aphorism "A mother can never be a bad mother," which is significantly quoted by the lusty deity Bhairo in praise of the great goddess after she has decapitated him.

The perspective I shall offer here, drawing on Rajasthani women's oral traditions of celebration and worship, is arguably a women's perspective on women.[14] But it is also a nonliterate or folk perspective that contrasts with textual, Sanskritic traditions. As such, I believe it is shared by men.[15] Rural North India is by and large a highly sexually segregated society, but although sexual segregation sets the formal tone of social interaction, it does not preclude many forms of social intercourse. Women may not sing with men, but they often sing at them and very often in close proximity to them. I fully concur with Bennett's view that women's worlds and worldviews should not be treated as separately construed and separately analyzable from men's. Indeed, I would argue that those positive, unified constructions of female being and power available in women's oral performance traditions often complement—although they may also significantly subvert, as we see in chapter 3—the male-generated order of things.

Rajasthani folk culture, transmitted in women's songs and stories, supplies many images of females that are simultaneously seductive and fertile, erotic and domestic, and positive. In striking contrast to Kakar's bleak portrayal of repressed female sexuality, this lore gives an impression of women as sexually playful and exuberant, taking pleasure in their own bodies and celebrating their bodies' capacities both for erotic engagement and for painful but fruitful birth giving. It displays, moreover, an erotic imagination both poetic and humorous, ranging from mundane, earthy metaphors to pure fancy.

14. The introduction and essays—especially those by Daniel, Egnor, and Wadley—in Wadley 1980c are important contributions to providing a more multidimensional and female-generated view, but they treat only Tamil women. This is also the case with Egnor 1978 and McGilvray 1982. Wadley (1978) points to and demonstrates the uses of oral traditions for deriving women's self-perceptions in North India. Henry (1975) and Jacobson (1975, 1982) report on bawdy singing without extensive analysis. Jacobson (1978) and Roy (1975) present women's life histories, also important sources for their own perspective.

15. Interestingly, modern Indian literature, authored by males, sometimes presents a merged rather than split vision of woman's sexuality and fertility. In the short story "Married Women," for example, Rakesh (1975) describes a young wife living apart from her husband for the sake of a job, whose erotic reveries are entirely fused with her intense desire for a child. Murthy's novel *Samskara* contains this image of a desired woman: "Not utterly black, nor pale white—her body the colour of the earth, fertile, ready for seed, warmed by the early sun" (1976:36).

SOURCES: ROMANCE AND ABUSE IN CHORUSED CONVERSATIONS

One dark moon night in spring I joined a group of women, mostly of the Potter caste, in a house neighboring my own where they had gathered to sing worshipful songs in order to please the spirits of dead children (Gold 1988a: 72–65).[16] After they had sung the requisite five songs and thrown in a few praise songs of the goddess and other local deities for good measure, the women were in no hurry to disperse. Feeling expansive—plied by their wealthy hostess with milky tea and brown sugar and excited by the novel presence of me and my tape recorder—they offered to sing for my benefit some songs special to the season called *keśyā*.

The tunes they proceeded to perform sounded very different from the previous gentle lullabies for baby ghosts, and there was a lot of giggling and wisecracking, at my expense, in between songs. I wasn't able to follow the word-for-word meanings but easily perceived a drift toward bawdiness. When I inquired—with deliberately exaggerated naïvete—whether my male, Brahman research assistant would be able to explain these songs to me the serenaders answered with virtual gales of laughter. A woman eventually helped me translate that night's recording, and it was quite a revelation. Some songs abused husbands in very strong language, and others praised lovers for their sexual capacities.

The Potter women had sung more than the promised *keśyā*, a genre named after the opening word of each verse, meaning "illicit lover" or "red flower." These *keśyā* were among the milder verses I recorded that night:

1. *Keśyā*
Keśyā, I brought a skirt from Agra, Lover,
and a wrap from Sanganeer;
Lover, through the wrap the whole body shows,
through the veil the fair cheeks show.
Bite, bite the whole body,
Don't bite the cheeks or husband will beat you.[17]

16. The lunar calendar that structures ritual life in rural North India divides each month into bright and dark halves, with the new moon and the full moon often marked by particular observances. Ghost deities are traditionally worshiped on the new moon night.

17. The Appendix provides transliterations of all translated songs in the order in which they are cited. I have generally attempted to transmit evocative "flavor"

At this point the significance of the revealing wrap had not yet struck me, but I was generally shocked and almost dismayed by the shattering of my own preconceptions about Hindu women. Where were their famed modesty, shame, and sexual innocence? Although I had already heard rumors of errant wives during my stay in the village, I had no evidence of actual adulterous liaisons, nor had I noted any awareness of the pleasures that would make adultery attractive. Those who spoke of sex at all portrayed it as something accomplished as rapidly as possible during that rare moment of privacy that couples in a joint-family household must await.

But these women appeared to be singing about flirtation, enticement, erotic bites, exciting entanglements. They were also, as another verse performed that night demonstrates, imagining the pleasures of a less confined setting for their amours:

2. *Keśyā*
If you want to fuck, go up on the hill, Lover,
If you want to fuck, go up on the hill;
From up there you can see Delhi and Agra.

Actually when they sang this for me they thoughtfully inserted "North America," but I later heard it many times with these two glamorous North Indian cities named. The fact that sex up on the hill with a view—an experience remote from ordinary existence—was gleefully imagined by these stolid Potters' wives provoked a gradual rethinking of my understanding of female sexuality in Indian culture.

Almost all women's songs either directly address a specified listener, as the illicit lover in *keśyā*, or, still more commonly, represent verbal interactions among different persons that might be described as alternating voices. However, as the songs are generally performed, these separate voices are in no way highlighted or distinguished. Indeed, as long as my foreign ears were unable to take in the meaning of sung words, I had no idea that the chorused songs I heard and recorded were so often made up of

rather than to execute perfectly literal, word-for-word renderings of these poetic texts. Moreover, if I am translating blatantly blunt terms, I use English equivalents (e.g., *chodnā* means "to fuck," not "to have sex").

questions and responses, spirited arguments, or suggestive flirtations. Usually, the speakers' identities and the sequence of their exchange are simply understood—indeed obvious to the cultural insider—from the content of their respective statements. Sometimes the songs have a narrator's voice and employ dialogue markers.

On the same night that I first heard *keśyā*, addressing the lover without providing his response, I also recorded the following lines in the form of an insult for me (Ainn-bai, or "Timothy's wife," as I had given them my ex-husband's name):

3. *Gālī*
That lewd hussy Timothy's wife lifted a load, yes![18]
She climbed on his chest and pissed on his mustache.
Yes-oh-yes!
She climbed on his chest and pissed on his mustache.
Yes-oh-yes!
Get away wanton woman, what have you done?
Yes-oh-yes!
I'm afraid of the dark, old man.
Yes-oh-yes!
If I did not wake you, you would not take me to piss.
Yes-oh-yes!
If you did not wake me, I would not take you to piss.
Yes-oh-yes!
That hussy Ainn-bai is bad too!

This outrageous and seminonsensical ditty, like most *gālī*s, is sung by women about one another, with different husbands' names substituted. Belted out in chorus with comradery and hilarity, it includes an antagonistic interchange between spouses. One woman explained to me that the husband has awakened his wife for sex. She takes a tricky revenge upon him for disturb-

18. This was the final song of the evening and began slowly after much chatter and laughter. The beginning of the first line was sung slowly in solo, as if trying something out, but by the middle of the line several voices joined in, and it is difficult to be sure of the words. It was transcribed *dārī ra dārī ra ṭīmalṭī bāḷī lūṅṭī bhī ūṅchī haṅ*. I was advised that *lūṅṭī* should have been written *lūṅchī*—a term for "lewd woman" that appears frequently in folklore and here would be echoing and reinforcing *dārī*. However, *lūṅṭī* could be the feminine verb of *lūṅṭno*, meaning not only "to rob" but "to have sexual intercourse," according to the dictionary. In that case, the line could mean "She had sex and lifted a load"—the load perhaps being her husband's body, or her own. After this line the chorused enunciation is loud and clear.

ing her sleep by assuming a dominant position that could be a prelude to more sexual activity (which incidentally I often heard women euphemize as *bātchit*, or conversation)—and then performing a rude, childish, unlikely act. Grammatically this interpretation is difficult to construe because "If I did not wake you" has a feminine verb form, and "If you did not wake me" has a masculine one, implying that she has awakened him.[19] Either way, bantering antagonism and active sexuality combine here, and the foreign listener with her suspiciously absent spouse is included in the jolly circle of self-proclaimed "bad" (*khoṭī*) women.

Women's songs are filled with verbalized expressions of misunderstandings and debates, conflicts and confusions, of which the preceding example is perhaps a peculiar example. But there are no exceptions to the choral unity that overlies these. What is the meaning of this harmonized multivocality? One obvious point is that most sung conversations would not take place in real life. That is, the songs imagine rather than replicate human interactions, making speakers forthright in unlikely contexts, and at times making women articulate and assertive where they would more probably be tongue-tied or acquiescing. Another general characteristic of these conversations is that some kind of tension seems evident in all the situations they suppose. Both these factors are clear in the example just given, as well as many we encounter below—from the playfully opposed wills of the bride who wants a valuable gift and the husband who wants to retire pleasantly to bed ("Song of the Seven-colored Wrap") to the more subtle and painful three-part conversation between a devoted wife, lecherous father-in-law, and unpleasant sister-in-law ("Song of Pea Pods"). Thus the songs' words tend to express testy interpersonal situations, while the singing style in which they are presented smooths over any hint of histrionics.

Situations and relationships marked by self-imposed silence, restraint, lack of communication, or other kinds of stress appear frequently in women's songs. Through the songs' imagined conversations, these stressful situations and relationships are eased and opened up: grievances expressed, dominance defied, love declared, contact established. At the same time, no risks are taken even on the level of imagined discourse, for the choral performance superimposes harmony over dissonance, and the unemotional delivery inherent in the tunes and singing styles masks emotional chords that may be struck by the words. Chorused conversations submerge discord between the sexes even while they suggest behavioral alternatives that may blatantly contravert dominant ideas about how women should act.

19. My research assistant, Bhoju Ram Gujar, suggested that the problem was the singers' attempt to use Hindi grammar on my behalf. But see Trawick 1988 on the deliberate confusion or merging of identities and voices in Tamil songs.

Rajasthani women's songs are embedded in situations; songs are evoked and typed largely by context. Personal repertoire and choice are certainly involved in determining which songs within a given category are performed at any given time, but the scope for choice is fairly circumscribed, at least conventionally. The Potter women consulted among themselves before performing *keśyā*, assuring one another that Phalgun, the month for *keśyā*, wasn't over yet. It was thus that they understood the switch from worship to play, rather than by reference to mood or persons. Songs' meanings then are understood as situationally appropriate—prescribed by season, event, activity, or the presence of certain relations. Songs' primary reference is essentially to groups or categories of persons, not individuals; the emotions to which they give vent are similarly patterned. At times, it is true, particular persons confided a particular song's strong resonance with their own state of mind or current social predicament, but such identification is incidental rather than integral to performance.[20] Central, rather, is a strong sense of appropriateness to time, place, and company.

At many life-cycle celebrations, annual festivals, and other events, Rajasthani village women sing, both metaphorically and explicitly, of sexual engagement with spouses and lovers. Songs sung at rites concerned with birth, child rearing, and many stages of weddings tend to hint, through oblique references and pretty metaphors, at wives' tender and exciting unions with their husbands. Insult songs hurled at specific junctures between marrying parties and *keśyā*—bawdy verses sung on and around certain

20. In this respect Rajasthani songs offer a strong contrast to the expressive singing reported by Abu-Lughod (1986) among the Bedouins. Their songs, although the words may be conventionalized, are deliberately sung to reveal intense personal emotions. This does not seem to be the case in Rajasthan.

holidays—include the equivalent of four-letter words for body parts and sexual intercourse; both these genres may speak of infidelity and promiscuity.

The women who enjoy singing such songs justly claim for themselves the same behavioral standards of modesty and shame required of the ideal Hindu wife as anthropological literature habitually depicts her. Yet clearly the songs express other powerful cultural motifs. For example, illicit liaisons evoked in wedding insult songs result, happily, in pregnancy. Singers themselves do not recognize a conflict between acting out the values of wifely devotion and lustily singing out such countervailing themes. They may describe the playful singing of such songs as making "jokes," but the humor is grounded in positive attitudes toward reproduction and pleasure that coexist with more austere Hindu precepts.

While the following chapters look specifically at subversion of domestic power hierarchies in certain narrative songs, my argument here is for coexistence, not inversion or subversion. The songs do not represent temporary reversals of a monolithic normative value system but powerfully express another, also valued worldview.[21] Certainly some festival events in the Hindu calendar—notably Holi—explicitly turn hierarchies and moral codes upside down for a limited period of carnivalesque revelries (Marriott 1966). But, at least where I lived in Rajasthan, female sexual exuberance appears in so many contexts and genres that it cannot be relegated to a seamy, repressed underside of a truly dominant ideology's structured universe. There are just too many of these songs and too many occasions for singing them to warrant this kind of interpretation. Nor can we conveniently file these materials under "low-caste" or "tribal." Women throughout the caste hierarchy indulge in this kind of musical play. In terms of public performances, Rajput wives are admittedly excluded, but the wildest, most explicitly sexual dances I have seen were in a cloistered Rajput courtyard.

I draw on a number of genres in this chapter. Indigenous classifications of Rajasthani songs are often finely drawn, but they may vary according to the classifier's involvement in performance. For example, what male scribes blanket-labeled "women's songs" (*auratoṅ ke gīt*) or "wedding songs" (*śādī ke gīt*) the singers themselves assign to many subcategories. Among wedding songs one class called *banā*, meaning "bridegroom-prince," will be of particular interest here. Caste sisters and neighbors gather to sing *banā* around a bride-to-be for days before her wedding, and women also perform these auspicious, happy songs at celebrations of the birth and early life-cycle rites of sons. *Banā* tend to the romantic vein but may contain "deep" or "hidden" sexual allusions. Other wedding songs and postpartum "songs of the new-mother queen" (*jachchā rānī ke gīt*) provide additional source material.

Of blatantly bawdy songs there are two basic categories: *gālī* and *keśyā*.[22] *Gālī* means "insult" and may refer to any verbal abuse. In this sense it is not limited to abuse incorporating sexual terms but also covers curses and milder exclamations—sometimes humorous—referred to as "small *gālī*s." Sung *gālī*s are always sexually oriented; they are appropriate to many occasions of encounter between relatives by marriage, although several moments in the protracted sequence of wedding events are prime opportunities for their performance. Essentially, *gālī*s are sung when a group of women encounter in a semiformal situation men who stand in the relation of bride givers or bride takers to them. As one person put it, "When a daughter's or son's connections by marriage are there, insults can be sung." The singers, usually a party of the same caste and lineage, would include in-married wives as well as the out-married daughters who happen to be present, as they often are for life-cycle events involving their brothers and nephews.

Hearing *gālī*s energetically sung at my village home when daughters' husbands' kin arrived, I at first assumed that this

21. Ramanujan (1986) offers a way of looking at alternative worldviews as contextually constituted "realms" of folklore. Daniel's elegant formulations of a "toolbox approach" to causality (1983), and of multiple models for marital relationships (1980), also suggest the pervasiveness of coexisting perspectives in South Asia.

22. *Gālī* and related genres have been reported and recorded from various parts of northern and central India. See Archer 1985:45, 107–10, Henry 1975:65–66, 76, 80–81, 85–87, and Jacobson 1975:48–54 for examples and discussions of such genres. Henry and Jacobson both give several examples of explicitly sexual *gālī*s performed at weddings in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh that are quite similar in tone and import to those encountered in Rajasthan; see Lutgendorf 1991:251 for *gālī* singing at recreations of Lord Ram's wedding. See also Kolenda 1990:128–29 on wedding jokes.

choral impertinence was a way for the ever-subservient, ever-polite bride givers to get back at these demanding guests. However, the groom's female relatives sing *gālī*s at the bride's male kin, and therefore I had to conclude that the songs possess no particular function of hierarchy reversals between in-laws. Certainly, as Doranne Jacobson points out (1982: 100–101), such singing offers welcome relief from the formality that characterizes an often tense relationship.

The genre of songs called *keśyā* is sung in relation neither to life-cycle rites nor to marriage connections. Mixed-caste parties of women, rather than groups of female kin, perform *keśyā* during specific annual festivals. During the festive spring month of Phalgun (our March–April) and on into the hot-weather month of Chaitra (our April–May), *keśyā*'s characteristic rowdy tune resounds from time to time. This season opens with Holi, a two-day celebration given over to all kinds of play, and includes the day of Sitala Worship (rites for the goddess of smallpox) and Gangaur (a celebration of divine and human marriage).[23] In the last month of the rainy season (our early fall), women again perform *keśyā* with zest on Bach Bahras (Calf Twelfth).[24]

All the sources I draw on here are from women's performance traditions, and it is true that women sometimes enjoy their bawdiest fun when the courtyard doors are safely barred against male intruders. Nonetheless, on many occasions, women sing these

23. In 1993 (just as this book was going to press), back in Ghatiyali for a research project focusing on agricultural and seasonal rituals, I had a new interest in the festival of Holi because of its association with the grain harvest. On the full moon night of Holi, a dead tree or tree branch embodying the wicked aunt of the great devotee Prahlad is burned. Believing that my graying hair gave me license to violate gender norms (which I could not risk twelve years earlier), I attended the Gardener caste's Holi fire. There many men, a number of whom were drunk, were dancing with abandon and singing—*keśyā*. They used the same tune women use. I heard and understood several verses with words identical with those in women's versions. Because women sing *keśyā* on several occasions for extended periods of time, and men only sing it—I am assured by male and female villagers—during the limited time that the Holi fire burns, I am inclined to continue to consider *keśyā* a woman's genre. And Holi is indeed a festival of role reversal, as Marriott (1966) points out. But a fuller understanding of gender, genre, and sexually explicit songs awaits further research. For a description of Holi elsewhere in rural North India, see Marriott's essay. Studies of Sitala Mata, "Cool Mother," or the goddess of smallpox, are plentiful; see, for example, Dimock 1982, Kolenda 1982, Nicholas and Sarkar 1976, and Wadley 1980b. Erdman (1985) vividly depicts Gangaur in the city of Jaipur.

24. For the Rajasthani celebration of Calf Twelfth see Gold 1988a:123–31.

sexy songs in the presence of men. Indeed, the insult songs are hurled directly at men and could hardly fall on deaf ears. Testimony to male assimilation of this material is that several times male informants, when they were shy about explaining something sexual to me, cited a verse from a women's song that made the matter quite explicit. If largely voiced by women, then, these traditions are well known to both sexes.

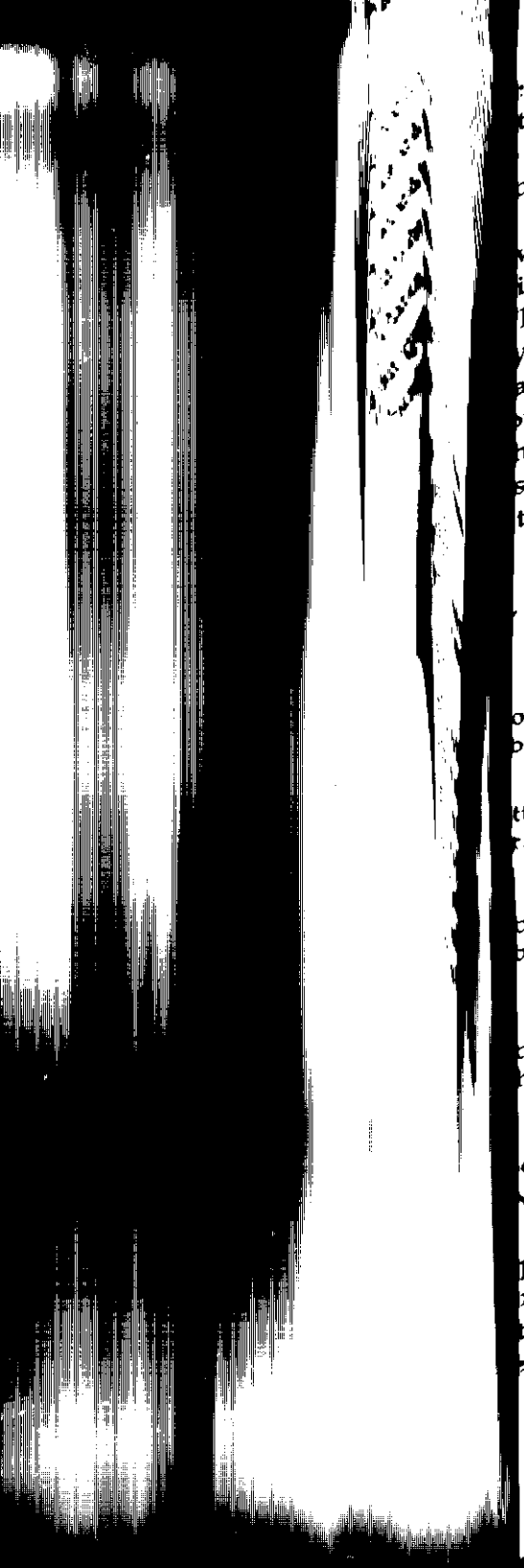
ALLUREMENT UNDER WRAPS

Skirts and blouses, not saris, are customary apparel in rural Rajasthan. A third and separate piece of cloth that tucks into the waist, wraps around the hips, and is pulled up over the back, head, and at appropriate moments fully over the face (a gesture called *ghūṅghaṭ*) is the garment with which Rajasthani women observe the strictures of purdah and the niceties of modesty and affected "shame" (*śaram*).[25] While *oṛhnī*, which literally translates "wrap," is the pedestrian, generic term for this cloth, a profuse vocabulary (including *chīra, chūndaṛī, dhanakpurī, sāḷū*, and *syāḷūṛo*) denotes various styles, colors, and patterns of full coverings in speech and song. In considering wrap imagery, I have also used songs about half-coverings or "shawls." These include the *ḍapaṭo*, flung over the shoulders and used like other wraps to cover the head and face by women or girls in Muslim or Punjabi-style pants and long tops, and the *dusālo*, wrapped over other garments for warmth in the cold season.

Wraps and shawls appear in a broad array of women's songs: they are envied, borrowed, begged for, danced in, and offered to the goddess. In these songs it becomes clear that their wraps are for women polyvocal media of self-presentation.[26] Certainly, the wrap epitomizes female modesty, neutralizing women's sexuality. It thus serves a double function—protecting men from overexposure to women's power and protecting women from unwanted male attentions (Papanek and Minault 1982). But in many songs

25. As we see in the following chapters, the term *ghūṅghaṭ* refers to a woman covering her face with the appropriate part of whatever garment is worn, including her sari end or *ḍupaṭā*. The term is used throughout North and Central India (see, for example, Jacobson 1982).

26. Abu-Lughod (1986) offers among many other things a fine, multidimensional interpretation of the veiling of women in a Bedouin community, using oral traditions as a major source.



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male Miller's elaborate appliances with his sexuality. On other, rowdier occasions they explicitly joked about his microphone, calling it a penis.

When I read the transcription of this dance song I realized that veiled women were not only conscious of men's eyes upon them, but that they enjoyed and sought after such admiration. While it is the husband's gaze that is enticed in the previous song, the *keśyā* verses I heard from the Potter women celebrate an explicitly extramarital eroticism. With the Agra skirt and the Sanganeeri wrap the idea of clothes that hide the body is subordinated to an image of exotic apparel that seductively reveals it. The lines "Bite, bite the whole body,/Don't bite the cheeks or husband will beat you" imply that the husband would notice marks on the cheeks but fail to see those on the body—perhaps because in this context his vision is less lascivious than the lover's.[27] Although eating the body may serve as a metaphor for intercourse, actual biting is an acknowledged, exciting part of village love play.

Women, then, sing of their veiled bodies on different occasions as attracting the husband's eyes, the lover's teeth. The wrap becomes an agent not of modesty but of dalliance in these songs. A wedding *gālī* goes farther still, making a shawl the backdrop for illicit intercourse, no longer on but underneath the woman's body.

5. *Gālī of the Borrowed Shawl**
Oh my fine colored shawl,
Oh my fine colored shawl,
Hey, Ram Kishan's wife came and took it away!
Yes, Gopiji's wife came and took it away!
She wrapped it, then spread it, that wanton woman,
She wrapped it, then spread it, that wanton woman;
She got stains on my shawl,
Yes, she got stains on my shawl!
She became a laundress and washed it, that wanton woman;
She became a laundress and washed it, that wanton woman.
She went to the pond, then dried it,
Yes, she went to the pond, then dried it,
And she folded it neatly, that wanton woman,
And she folded it neatly, that wanton woman.

27. See Kakar 1986 for a vivid discussion of the erotic superiority of adultery to marriage in Hindu poetry from the male viewpoint. It is not surprising that women could imaginatively exalt the forbidden and clandestine in similar fashion.

Thousands come and thousands go, oh yes,
Thousands come and thousands go.

Oh my fine colored shawl,
Oh my fine colored shawl,
Hey, the Char co-wives came and took it away!
[Repeats]

Char is the lineage receiving insults on this occasion. The line "Thousands come and thousands go" is probably a hyperbolic reference to the Char women's lovers. The story here is clearly of a woman who borrows a shawl and then spreads it beneath herself and her lover during intercourse, after which she tries to wash out the telltale stains. It is hard to appraise how deliberate is the irony of portraying a garment normally used to preserve modesty and protect virtue as a setting for adultery. But the whole song is performed with a raucous, mocking tone.

Many other songs that are not generally of the bawdy sort include requests to husbands for especially beautiful wraps and shawls. One such popular song in the "bring me a wrap" mode has numerous variations and is performed at many calendrical and life-cycle festivals, sometimes to the accompaniment of drumbeats and spontaneous dancing. It takes the form of a husband-and-wife dialogue: the woman speaks her admiration and envy of a shawl possessed by her husband's brother's wife and begs her husband to bring her one like it from the city. He asks her to model it, and she refuses for various reasons, some having to do with modesty. Usually the husband acquiesces to his bride in the end, promising to go get her the coveted garment.[28]

In most of these songs the shawl motif is associated with a bride's innocence; she is acquisitive, but appropriate shyness constrains her. However, the continuum between delicately romantic and more obviously sexual banter becomes clear in a somewhat more risqué variant. In the following example (recorded at a wedding celebration for two grooms of the Mina—a settled tribal caste), the wife's craving for a gorgeous, luxurious wrap is juxtaposed to her cravings for food and her inability to sleep—both

28. Gold (1982:77–79) provides two examples of this genre—dialogues between a mortal wife and husband and between the divinities Parvati and Shiva.

equatable with sexual desire. Her final complaint—"I miss my little brother"—provokes her husband into offering her a ride home, and she in turn finally admits that she cares for her bridegroom too. The bride manipulates this dialogue in a teasing but purposeful fashion.

6. *Song of the Seven-colored Wrap (Banā)*

Bridegroom-prince, please go to Jaipur, from Jaipur bring me a seven-colored wrap.
Bridegroom-prince, please go to Jaipur, from Jaipur bring me a seven-colored wrap.
Bride-princess, try it on, show me, how it will suit you, the seven-colored wrap.
Bride-princess, try it on, show me, what kind of a seven-colored wrap shall I bring?
Bridegroom-prince, it has a green border, and the middle is printed with peacocks and peahens.
Bridegroom-prince, it has a green border, and the middle is printed with peacocks and peahens.
Bride-princess, try it on, show me please, how it will suit you, the seven-colored wrap.
Bride-princess, try it on, show me please, how it will suit you, the seven-colored wrap.
Bridegroom-prince, how can I wrap it? I'm shy of your little brother.
Bride-princess, come into the castle, we'll go there and lie down.
Bride-princess, come into the castle, we'll go there and lie down.
Bridegroom-prince, I'm not at all sleepy; I'm dying of hunger, my liver is throbbing.
Bridegroom-prince, I'm not at all sleepy; I'm dying of hunger, my liver is throbbing.
Bride-princess, I'll bring a good measure of sweets and together we two will feast.
Bride-princess, I'll bring a good measure of sweets and together we two will feast.
Bridegroom-prince, I don't care for sweets, I miss my little brother.
Bridegroom-prince, please go to Kota, from Kota bring me a seven-colored wrap.
Bridegroom-prince, please go to Kota, from Kota bring me a seven-colored wrap.

[Repeats from this point until these final lines, the groom's response to "I miss my little brother"]

Bride-princess, I'll harness the chariot and take you to your little brother's.

Bridegroom-prince, I shan't sit in the chariot, then I would miss you.
Bridegroom-prince, if I sat in the chariot, then I would miss you.

This song combines implications of a woman's sexual power over her man with her traditional yearning for a covering that she wants to enhance, not hide, her beauty. The new wife denies that she is sleepy, which both thwarts her husband's amorous move and implies her own potential passion. She declares her hunger but will not yield to the enticement of sweets. Despite her own desires, this bride will not give into her groom's blandishments until he acknowledges her emotional needs.

The bride in the "Song of the Seven-colored Wrap" refers to her "shyness" (*śaram*) in front of her husband's little brother—normally the one male kin in a woman's marital home before whom shyness is not prescribed. In other "bring me a wrap" songs, however, the beautiful, enviable covering explicitly belongs to the husband's elder brother's wife, and the bride expresses her culturally imposed modesty in relation to him. Here the profession of shyness before the husband's younger brother may indicate the new bride's ultrashyness. In either case such verses acknowledge just those sexual undercurrents in the household that women's prescribed modesty is supposed to restrain. At the same time, the bashful bride is not acting particularly bashful or tongue-tied with her husband, and that could be the real point.

Looking at, or through, wrap imagery in Rajasthani women's lore has revealed one aspect of an unsplit feminine image. Coverings are not opaque; wraps can also unwrap; from the women's perspective, poses of sexual modesty and reticence can readily flow into allurement, involvement, and manipulation. Studies of purdah have often stressed its functions of separation and limitation, at best protecting women but fundamentally restricting them. Here I have tried to indicate the permeability of purdah and some of the ways it can be, at least poetically, manipulated by its wearers. In considering these aspects of women's self-images, I have not yet touched on themes of procreation. In the next section, moving beyond such conjunctions of modesty and allurement, I explore through other songs a more explicitly erotic sexuality that is nonetheless frequently a fertile one, sometimes involving liaisons with the husband's elder brothers.

BIRTH, SEX, AND PLEASURE

After the birth of a child, and before the ceremony of Sun Worship—performed on the ninth day or sooner, when the new mother is bathed, and birth pollution is considerably mitigated—close female relations and neighbors gather nightly outside the room where mother and infant lie. They have come to sing "songs for the new-mother queen" (*jachchā rānī ke gīt*).[29] Praise songs for the deities, in thanks for the wonderful gift of a living child, are part of each night's performance. But there are other songs of the new-mother queen that evoke in human terms the mysteries, pains, and delights of conception and birth.[30] These portray quite poignantly the mingled intimacy and formality that characterize relations between young husbands and wives in rural India.

Imaginary dialogues between baffled new fathers and deeply embarrassed but proud young wives evoke this humorous situation.[31] In one conversation song of this genre, the husband asks questions such as "Why is there howling in your room?" and "Why is your floor wet?" and the shy wife is evasive: "Two cats are fighting; two water pots spilled; I know nothing at all." Another song has the young father question not only his wife but his mother, sister, brother's wife, and neighbor, finally receiving the good news from an unabashed servant girl: "On one bed two persons slept, producing a third jewel." This song has the semi-nonsensical refrain "Son, she craves green beans cooked in oil." A woman's passion for green pod vegetables (as will become clearer shortly) is interpretable as a desire for sexual intimacy with the husband and is also one of several cravings associated with early

29. See Bryce 1964, Tewari 1988, and Wadley 1980a:59–61 for examples from other areas of Rajasthan and other regions of India.

30. According to Jeffery, Jeffery, and Lyon, who studied childbirth in western Uttar Pradesh, the new mother cannot enhance her self-respect by capitalizing on the power of "childbirth pollution" (1989:124). They state unequivocally, "The *jachā*'s condition is a *sharm-kī-bāt*; her physiological processes are embarrassing, distasteful and striking evidence of her sexuality" (150). Among Ghatiyali's matrons, a sense of *śaram* was not absent in relation to the physiology of childbirth, but it was considerably mitigated by expressions not only of pride but of power and competence.

31. These songs assume the proximity of the father in the postpartum period. Although it is common in some parts of India for wives to return to their natal homes for confinement, especially with a first child, this was not the prevailing custom in the area where I worked.

pregnancy. The refrain thus subtly bridges the gap between a young couple's sexual union and its fruits in the form of a child.

One new-mother queen song, however, suggests the conceptual merging of erotic attraction and birth giving more explicitly. Here, as in the shawl dialogue, a transition between sweets and sex is readily made. Women are supposed to be fed extremely rich sweets, loaded with clarified butter, sugar, expensive nuts, and other strengthening substances, during their postpartum confinements. Husbands as well as other members of the household are often portrayed in folklore as jealous or covetous of this food, sometimes stealing it or begging it from the new mother.

7. Song of the New-Mother Queen

Let me taste one spoonful of that halva you're feasting on, let me have a spoonful, lady.
The drum plays on, sir, the drum plays on.

Crazy, foolish husband, the halva costs a price, the spoonful costs a price, sir.
The drum plays on.

You gave birth to a son, let me have a peek, let me have a peek, lady.
The drum plays on, sir, the drum plays on.

Crazy, foolish husband, the baby costs a price, the son will cost a price, sir.
The drum plays on.

Crazy, foolish husband, I suffered labor pains, I suffered labor pains, sir.
The drum plays on, sir, the drum plays on.

You sleep on the cot, but have me sleep at its foot, you have me sleep at its foot, lady.
The drum plays on.

Crazy, foolish husband, on one side sleeps the darling boy, on the other side your beloved.
On the pillow lacquer bangles, at the foot ankle bracelets chime, sir.
The drum plays on.

Everyone I questioned about this song affirmed that the jingling of bangles and anklets in the final verse implies that the couple is having intercourse. I was puzzled by the husband being in the middle, rather than the wife, who could then nurse the child. According to my research assistant, however, if the husband lies down with his wife on his left side and his child on his right it is an explicit indication of sexual intentions. Women with whom I consulted told me that the chorus "The drum plays on" was just for the sound and had no specific reference. One man suggested, however, that it evokes the celebration that will take place on the day of Sun Worship when the new mother is washed and adorned for the first time. This celebration involves a public confirmation of paternity, by men outside the house, and a courtyard celebration by women.

In either case, the situation portrayed in this song is out of kilter with village custom. If the imagined encounter takes place before Sun Worship, then the husband is violating taboos that prevent him even from seeing his wife during this period, and brashly ignoring all that anthropological literature on Hinduism tells us about birth pollution and the danger of female blood (e.g., Jeffery, Jeffery, and Lyon 1989: 126). If it takes place during the celebrations that follow Sun Worship, then the young couple are blatantly affirming their private marital intimacy at a moment when the family should be concerned with its public image. Only as background to their love banter, the ritual drum plays on.

Nevertheless, such is the native exegesis. Moreover, precipitate intercourse after childbirth, when the womb was "open," could well produce another pregnancy quickly—a possibility one woman vividly evoked for me as *phaṭaphaṭ vāpas* (instant return). Here, then, we have the new mother, with baby by her side, as a teasingly seductive, and potentially once again fertile, wife—the total collapse of the erotic whore/fertile mother kind of split image.

Festivals celebrating life-cycle rites of children are also occasions for sexual innuendos in songs that anticipate the development of a male child into a bridegroom, but are usually voiced from the bride's point of view. The following song, recorded at a birth celebration among a group of Brahman women in very high spirits, expresses the difficulties that may surround a young wife's management of her sexuality among husband's relatives:

8. Song of Pea Pods

My father-in-law said, "Son's wife likes pea pods."
My father-in-law said, "Son's wife likes pea pods."
"Please don't bring me any, sir, my husband-lord will bring them."
"Please don't bring me any, sir, my husband-lord will bring them."
No sooner did he hear that much than he gave her two kicks in the waist;
No sooner did he hear that much than he kicked her in the waist.
And husband's sister said, "How do you like pea pods?"
And husband's sister said, "How do you like pea pods?"
But he lovingly brought pea pods in his pocket;
He lovingly brought pea pods in his bag.

[The singers dissolve in laughter.]

The bride in this song is subjected to the taunts, and perhaps the improper advances, of her father-in-law. Talking back to that figure of patriarchal authority, she draws his wrath and the husband's sister's mockery upon herself. But she wins in the end the loving, private attentions of her man. The bride's taste for pea pods, like the new mother's craving for green beans, implies both a taste for sexual pleasure and the desires of early pregnancy. Not only do seedy pods index fertility, but green pods are numbered among the foods pregnant women crave (Samskarta 1968: 75). However, the in-laws here appear to be reacting to the woman's craving as a craving for intimacy with her husband, not as a sign of pregnancy—a status that would bring sympathy rather than cruelty to a son's wife. The result of the encounters here is to stress the husband's devotion—which may explain why the singers trail off into hilarity. Although this song recognizes a potential for abuse, it is doubly positive in celebrating not only verbal resistance on the part of the woman but support from her husband.[32]

Female relatives of a first-born son perform songs of the bridegroom-prince (*banā*) at the boy's ritual first haircut (*jharūḷā*), after singing worshipful odes to the protective deity responsible

32. Nanuram Samskarta discusses pregnancy craving songs in Rajasthan—a genre called *hūṅs* that I did not record in Ghatiyali. In these songs, according to Samskarta, the bride asks her in-laws for the desired food substances, but they all refuse her. Only her husband brings them. The foods listed by Samskarta are sweets, watermelon, "green pods" (*phalī*), and "sour berries" (*bor*) (1968:75–77). Ghatiyali's "Song of Pea Pods" may well be related to such craving songs.

for the child's birth. These verses—extracted from longer songs—speak from the point of view of the child's future bride. In the course of our translation work, my embarrassed male assistants glossed over the obvious sexual metaphors by sagely referring to them as "very deep."

9. Song of the Bridegroom-Prince

Build a silver railroad, and a golden engine, Bridegroom-Prince,
He drives the train in fine white sand.
You're the driver, I'm the engine, Bridegroom-Prince,
We'll drive the train in the color-palace.
You're the driver, I'm the engine, Bridegroom-Prince.

["Color-palace" refers to the bridal chamber.]

10. Song of the Bridegroom-Prince

Bridegroom-Prince, your fan from Alwar has a golden stick.
Bridegroom-Prince, in the middle of your cot the fan will spin.

In neither of these verses is a bride's sexual nature portrayed as anything but eager. The songs stress sexual sport, not procreation, but their performance by maternal kin at a child's first haircut indicates continuities between celebrations of birth and sexual union.

Sometimes proud female relatives of a young boy may anticipate his growth to manhood and marriage yet still think of him, tenderly, as small. Companions to a bride may also tease her with the image of a small husband, and singers of insult songs make a husband's size into a sexual joke. Nonetheless, the laughably diminutive bridegroom may yet succeed in giving his wife a desired child. The image of the small husband, then, can unite maternal tenderness with sexual humor and procreative hopes.[33] Among many middle and lower castes of the area where I

33. See Bryce 1964:179–80 for a small-husband song with very maternal imagery; see also Trawick 1988 for a most interesting discussion of "vari-directional discourse" in dialogue songs from Tamilnad suggesting mother-son incest. Vatuk and Vatuk's discussion (1979b) of the "lustful stepmother" theme in Hindi folk dramas points to some absolute moral distinctions made between the role of nourishing mother and that of sexual partner—and the two different kinds of love associated with them. Yet the number of dramatic tales such as that of the lustful stepmother and others reported by Vatuk and Vatuk that revolve around attempted conflations of these roles indicates that such conflations readily stir popular imagination.

worked, especially when sets of brothers are married to sets of sisters, weddings may well include at least one groom who is indeed a very small child. Thus the small bridegroom is also a reality; not so his articulate, mocking wife as protrayed in songs. A child groom nowadays will have a bride even younger than himself.

Bride takers (women of Ghatiyali) performed the following small-husband song during a *gālī*-singing session aimed at bride givers (who had arrived for some preliminary negotiations). It sounds like doggerel (I have attempted to give a hint of the original rhythm and rhyme) but is not without meaning: the song plays with the "miracle" of phallic growth, the "male wonder" that could allow even a smallish husband to produce a son, and his bride to enjoy it.

*11. Gālī of the Small Husband**

On the cross-path grow those plants whose poison leaves are yellow.
Ram Kishan had a son, a floppy-eared fellow.
Take down my full water pot, small husband dear.
Small, small what's to be done?
See the male wonder:
In nine months I'll feed a son.
Daughter have a lot of fun!

Sexual meanings in *gālī*s need no longer be hidden or deep. In many such abusive songs, fertility is directly associated with infidelity. From women's point of view it may be better to deceive one's husband than to remain childless.[34]

*12. Gālī of the Barren Woman**

On a banyan sat a heron,[35]
On a banyan sat a heron,

34. See Das 1988:201–2 for similar attitudes in Punjab.

35. See Doniger 1991:92 for the classical "hypocrisy of the heron." Here, as we have argued in the preface, it is not the heron's voice but rather those patriarchal values that encourage women to seek fertility outside their marriage beds that are to be judged hypocritical. In another genre of songs, dedicated to the deity Bhairuji, the heron's voice again describes a situation characterized by ambivalent morality: Bhairuji's attempt to force his way into a woman's house. Like the birth of a desired son through illicit means, the entry of a male divinity into a female devotee's home suggests subversive access to power, perhaps through sexual encounter. At the same time, the woman inside's resistance suggests unwillingness to accept male aggression, whether divine or mortal. Bhairuji's power seems posed as an extension of all male power. Why doesn't she want to let him in?

Listen to the heron's words,
Yes, listen to the heron's words:
For twelve years Ram Kishan's wife remained,
For twelve years Ram Kishan's wife remained,
Useless and empty she remained,
Yes, useless and empty she remained.
One night with Bhuraji she remained,
One night with Ramji she remained,
At once a boy child she obtained,
Yes at once a boy child she obtained.
You did well, my stout in-law,
You did well, my handsome in-law,
You removed the stain of "barren woman,"
Yes, you relieved the barren woman with a birth.

There is of course an ironic tone in these congratulations to an adulterer, who would by village custom be culpable and punishable. But, given the agony of barren women (see Gold 1988a: 149–54), the "relief" (*sudhāryo*, a term for support that is used in prayer) received by the woman is genuine. The word for "barren woman," *bānjhaṛī*, is an insult and almost a curse. To remain "useless and empty"—by which I translate the scornful phrase *ṭhalaṛak ṭhālaṛ*—is to be pitied, possibly supplanted (for a man whose wife is barren has just cause to seek another), and at worst despised and feared (for it is barren women who most often gain the reputation of being witches). And men themselves so desperately desire progeny that, at least as some popular folk traditions along with rumors have it, they may allow themselves to be deceived if the result is the desired birth of a boy.[36]

In referring to the fertilizing adulterer as "relation by marriage" (*biyāī*), the insult singers imply that he too is of the bride-taking group. Sometimes the adulterous progenitor is specifically identified with the husband's brothers (*devar-jeṭh*), and thus the wife's infidelity serves the approved end of perpetuating the groom's patrilineage.

*13. Gālī of the Ribbon**

My splendid gorgeous ribbon was lying in the yard,
Up came Ram Kishan's wife and seized it between her thighs.
What happened to the ribbon?

36. In Gold 1988b I discuss this gullibility in the context of self-satire in a folk drama.

It's with the gaudy lady.
Ribbon, ribbon, what to do? It's like husband's brothers.
Ribbon, ribbon, what to do? It's like husband's brothers.
Poor husband's brother, what to do?
She's left with Bhuraji's belly!

My male research assistant patiently explained to me that the reference to "husband's brothers" here has more to do with a "husband's younger brother" (*devar*) being defined as someone with whom sexual joking is possible than with the song recommending adultery with a brother-in-law. In other words, the implication of the reference is not that one's lover is one's husband's brother; rather, by saying the word for "husband's younger brother" one may with a very slight degree of discretion allude to a lover. The word for "husband's elder brother" (*jeṭh*) is thrown in—to continue with a male exegesis of this song—for its felicitous rhyme with "belly" (*peṭ*). However, a husband's elder brother is not by any means an appropriate lover. I am tempted to depart one step from this male explanation (and I haven't discussed this particular point with women) and add that the song may deliberately mock the shame and reticence epitomized by a woman's behavior toward her *jeṭh*, or husband's elder brother.

Genuine *ghoṭā*, a decorative trimming traditionally made with threads of real gold or silver that is sewn onto the edges of wraps, is a rare commodity nowadays in Rajasthan. The woman in this song is attracted by a man just as she would be attracted by sparkling, precious ribbon (*ghoṭā*). Seizing him between her thighs, she is hardly a modest wife. The term *alabelaṛī*, which I have rendered "gaudy lady," my assistant explained as "someone who dresses beautifully and doesn't care what people think." The dictionary glosses its masculine form as "dandy."

Combining these elements, this song presents a kind of gross variation on the "bring me a wrap" theme, where the shy bride envies her husband's elder brother's wife's lovely *oṛhnī*. Here, attracted by her brother-in-law (or lover) just as she would be attracted by sparkling ribbon, she seizes not only the costly ornamentation but the man as well. She is not behaving with appropriate wifely modesty, yet her lust is fertile. The reference to the husband's brothers may also suggest that the fertility through adultery evoked here remains after all in an appropriate lineage.

The most blatant of the wedding insult songs are sung when the groom's party enters the house of the bride. At this moment the groom, often on horseback and flanked by numbers of his male kin and friends, strikes with a sword a wooden emblem placed for the occasion above the bride's door, and tosses it up onto the roof. He then dismounts and pushes his way into the house, his passage almost blocked by the bride's kinswomen and companions who are boisterously singing verses slandering his mother—particularly addressing her sexual capacities or lack thereof. Once the groom has broken through the throng of women the Sanskritic portion of the marriage rites, performed by a Brahman pandit and including oblations poured into a Vedic fire, takes place with some decorum.

There are two popular *gālī*s hurled at the moment of the groom's entry (recorded by both Joseph Miller and me at a number of middle-caste weddings). One of these accuses the groom's mother, in a rhymed nonsense couplet, of lacking genitals:

14. Gālī of the Groom's Mother
Black sheep's not woolly,
Bridegroom's mother's got no pussy!

The second, slightly longer *gālī* attributes to this same personage an excessive taste for genital enjoyment—equating her craving for sweet sugarcane with her desire to copulate, and using the crudest terms available.

15. Gālī of the Groom's Mother
Bridegroom's mother asked for a sugarcane stick.
Take this one, a piece of prick.
Oh, but it's sweet! I'll plant more quick,
In my cunt I'll plant that prick,
In my cunt I'll plant that prick.

The differing contents of these two basic insults of the groom's mother may be seen as complementary. General Hindu morality holds that parents of a married son who has brought home a daughter-in-law should themselves cease sexual activity (see Vatuk 1980, 1985). The two *gālī*s of the groom's mother, sung as they generally are in alternation, seem to say that only if she had

no genitals—as natural to women as wool is to sheep—would she, with her taste for sweets, be able to give up sex. Her lasciviousness, unlike that attributed to the younger wives of the groom's party, appears to be purely for pleasure—that is, not procreative. However, her very character at this juncture is as "mother." Although she has a grown son, the sexuality of the groom's mother, in the view expressed by these songs, is far from neutralized, as Bennett would have it.[37]

Before departing for his bride's village, the groom publicly gives one ritual suck to his mother's breast.[38] He thus affirms the continuities between his identity as son and as husband and accepts his mother's continuing nourishing and formative role in his life. Shortly after having thus parted from his mother, the groom, standing in his bride's doorway at the moment of symbolic penetration, must listen to "insults of his mother's genitals." In general, whether they speak of wives seeking lovers in order to become mothers or of mothers seeking lovers out of sheer lust, *gālīs* seem to associate women's sexuality with their birth-giving capacities rather than divorce the two aspects of their natures.

Keśyā verses celebrate a bawdy sexuality that is clearly promiscuous and ranges well beyond a husband's brothers. Indeed these verses sometimes describe prostitutes, and a gaping sexual hunger. This hunger, however, does not overpower and drain males but matches masculine lust, sometimes combatively, sometimes delicately. The vagina is wide and playful; the penis is large and aggressive. Mixed-caste groups of village women, including all the clean castes except Rajput, join together to sing *keśyā* repetitively in sessions broken frequently by jokes, chatting, and "goat talk" (imitation, with great hilarity, of male goats' mating cries). In the context of Sitala Mother's worship, sequences of *keśyā* are interspersed with songs of the goddess. Sitala is best known as the deity who both inflicts and protects from smallpox. However, she is also associated not only with the well-being of small children (their safety from all rash and fever diseases) but

37. In Rajasthan and other parts of North and Central India the groom's natal kin hold a mock, obscene wedding right after their son's departure for his bride's village, a practice offering further confirmation of these observations (Carstairs 1975:233–35; Jacobson 1975:56).

38. This Rajasthani custom appears in other North Indian regions as well (Archer 1985:30).

also with the fertility of newlyweds.[39] Bawdy verses please Sitala, and her worship, complete with avid singing of *keśyā*, is performed both to ward off childhood diseases and to improve community fertility.

Some of these verses are quite crude, but others display a rather brilliantly whimsical erotic imagination.

16. Keśyā

Keśyā, your penis is a pipal tree's trunk,[40]
Lover, your penis is a pipal tree's trunk.
And a prostitute's[41] vagina is four acres wide.

Keśyā, the big drum sounds on the water hole's bank,
Lover, the big drum sounds on the water hole's bank,
The two-mouthed flute sounds in the fine sand.

Keśyā, place the vagina to watch over the chick-peas,
Lover, place the vagina to watch over the chick-peas.
The penis comes and uproots the young plants.

On the vagina plays a black snake,
Lover, on the vagina plays a black snake.
Lover, within the skirt's waist plays a brown monkey.

Tie little bells on the vagina,
Lover, tie little bells on the vagina,
Lover, tie a big broken bell to the penis.

The vagina left hungry[42] at night
Will fix sweets and fried bread the next day.
The penis left hungry at night
Will fix sweets and fried bread the next day.

In thus personifying the sexual organs—giving them a life of their own—*keśyā* differ from *gālīs*. *Gālīs* focus on people, but *keśyā*,

39. For the relation of Sitala to fertility, see Das 1976a:137 and Kolenda 1982.

40. I had originally translated the words *phīpalī ko pheṛ* as "pipal tree," but Bhoju, my assistant, insisted that it must be "pipal tree's trunk." Perhaps this is because of the sacred and female identity of the pipal tree. In Rajasthan a pipal tree may be married like a daughter to a male deity.

41. I was told that *bhagatañ* meant "prostitute," but it does not appear in the Rajasthani-Hindi dictionary. I can speculate that it derives from *bhag*, for "vagina," or from the verb *bhugatṇo*, meaning "to experience."

42. Although the usual meaning of *bāsī* is "leftover, something stale," I was told that here it refers specifically to the way someone feels in the morning when they haven't eaten the night before. The implication seems to be that when someone has eaten nothing but cold leftovers the night before (had unsatisfying sex?), they want something especially good in the morning.

although they may also treat characteristics of persons, often—as in most of these examples—simply describe poetically the sexual act itself. The pipal tree-trunk penis and the four-acre vagina suggest a grandiose, ultrahuman scale for the sexual engagement evoked in these jolly, ribald moments. Another verse I've heard but failed to record offers an even more capacious image: "In the prostitute's vagina you can fit the whole *rāvalā*," or the Rajput neighborhood. Rajputs are hereditary rulers and warriors; thus the vagina imaged here contains the noblest houses as well as the most virile men.

While the penis uprooting chick-peas is perhaps a simple image of masculine aggression and domination, the playful black snake and brown monkey, the charming contrast of bells, and the somewhat obscure flute in the sand are more delicate conceits with implications of mutuality. The vagina as brown monkey is always ready to play. The image of fine sand as a good place to sport, for children as well as lovers, is a recurrent one in desert Rajasthan, and the two-mouthed flute is the traditional instrument of Bhil tribals, whose sexual morals are supposed less rigid than those attributed to caste Hindus.[43] Of course the idea of sexual hunger being transferred to food represents an insight of folk psychology probably close to many women's experience;[44] it also recalls the hungry bride who sustains arousal by refusing sweets in the "bring me a wrap" song. The mutuality of male and female desire is again implied by the attribution of similar cravings to both organs.

Still other *keśyā* verses consider how the environment may enhance or diminish sexual pleasures. Some, such as the one about hilltop fucking introduced above, express a yearning for open spaces and vistas, which is quite understandable given the cramped quarters in which marital sex is accomplished, and the even more furtive arrangements made by lovers. Another verse recognizes the discomfort of sexual engagement in the hot season:

43. Ethnic or communal associations frequently mingle with biological ones in *keśyā* (Gold 1988a:130).

44. See, for example, Wadley n.d. (forthcoming); Narayana Rao (1989) provides many charming examples of homologies between sex and food in Telugu literature.

17. Keśyā
Keśyā, if you want to play, then play before Holi,
Lover, if you want to play, then play before Holi;
Later the fierce sun beats down.

Finally, a number of *keśyā* propose that the community of women is sexually active and interested in amorous pleasures. Perhaps the most often repeated *keśyā* verse is the following:

18. Keśyā
Lover, if you want to play, play with so-and-so's wife;
Lover, if you want to play, play with so-and-so's wife.
Others will cost you 150 rupees.

Since this will be sung over and over again, eventually employing the names of all participants, it affirms a universal willingness to play among village women. Here is one of the most forthright *keśyā* verses:

19. Keśyā
On these women's housetops
they're drying greens for sauce,
they're drying greens for sauce.
All women say this:
"A long prick gives me bliss!
A long prick gives me bliss!"

Drying wild greens, to serve in the lean hot season as a supplementary vegetable, is a very prosaic, domestic task. Thus women's collective acknowledgment of sexual enjoyment in this verse is deliberately united with an image of their dull but important food-preparation work for the benefit of their families. Despite the free-floating nature of women's sexuality as expressed in *keśyā*, its manifestations do not appear to be conceived of as dangerous or destructive, by women or by men.[45]

In the context of the festival seasons when they are performed, and the particular worships with which they are associated, *keśyā* are part of a religious complex concerned not only with human

45. Men are afraid to come too close to women singing *keśyā*, but that is because the women would taunt and physically attack them, a threat they find both laughable and worth avoiding.

fertility but with life's prevailing over death and the general well-being of earth and community. The Calf Twelfth festival with its reproductive jokes and ribald dancing celebrates women's capacity to renew life. The worship of Sitala should produce as well as protect children. Holi is associated with agricultural plenty and the end of the cold season.

Songs of the new-mother queen portray women in confinement, allude to their continuing status as sexual partners, and even invite husbands to ignore pollution constraints and lie down beside them. Songs of the bridegroom-prince have virgin brides speak as bold and imaginative mistresses or anticipate their young husbands' transformation into sexually active and fertilizing men. In wedding *gālīs* men are taunted by verses accusing their wives of being adulteresses and their mothers of being horny. But these taunts can be read in a sense as affirming both the sexual prowess and ultimate fertility of the groom's lineage. They may also advise bride takers that for women the entwined goals of motherhood and sexual fulfillment can override the virtue of fidelity to one man—if the husband is inadequate, if the "male wonder" does not materialize.

This lore quite frankly acknowledges women's active, pleasure-taking sexuality. But it should not be interpreted as placing Rajasthani village women at the opposite pole from idealized female chastity—thus to be characterized as sexually insatiable creatures who will drain their partners of vitality and destroy the proper order of society and cosmos. G. Morris Carstairs (1975) reports fears of women as predators expressed by men in a Rajasthan village. I too heard, from men, that the health of puny men married to robust wives was likely to deteriorate—unless they supplemented their diet with plenty of butter and eggs. But such views were expressed less with terror than with an appreciation for the access to pleasures, progeny, and power that may well be available through union with strong women.

Folklore persuasively offers images of female nature that include a sexuality not rampantly destructive but seeking mutuality with males. The erotic imagination displayed in *keśyā* suggests a relish for sexual encounter on both sides that is more human than demonic. These are earthy hungers—cravings for sweets—and not the blood thirst of the castrating goddess. Many women's songs portray desire as inherently procreative; others are performed in ritual contexts stressing communal fertility. In either case the sexual and maternal aspects of female nature seem fused rather than split, and generative rather than destructive images of female power emerge.

GENDER PERFORMED

Using women's own performance traditions, I have attempted to amend split-image theories of South Asian females prevailing in literary, psychoanalytic, and cultural analyses. Such theories, I have argued, tend to accept or emphasize one dominant perspective—deriving from overlapping traditions that we may call high-caste male, Sanskritic, or literary. Folklore can offer a different story or, as this chapter has demonstrated, sing different songs. It is through listening to these songs—chorused by female voices in a regional vernacular—that I have been able to suggest an alternative portrait of South Asian womanhood.

I propose that Rajasthani village women's poetic use of words strongly contradicts the alien split images imposed on them—whether by literate males of their own community or by foreign scholars. That my sources are oral performance traditions rather than ordinary talk is no accident. The particular power of performance traditions to present creative viewpoints and to serve as reservoirs for cultural alternatives has been highlighted by folklorists and anthropologists working on varied materials in various cultural settings. David Parkin, writing on the "creativity of abuse" in Kenya, says of ritual insults that they "free speakers to experiment with alternative, normally hidden, views of personal worth and power relations" (1980: 62).[46]

The power of oral performances spills over into everyday identities, just as it certainly draws upon them—as I will show in chapter 5, where I explore one accomplished singer and storyteller's life history. Here I have chosen to highlight aspects of female identity that seem the loudest, boldest, and most contradictory to prevailing stereotypes. That these emerge from the study

46. See also Bauman 1986 on storytelling in Texas, Basso 1985 on South American Indian narratives, Karp 1988 on women's marriage rituals among the Iteso of Kenya, and Limon 1981 on Chicano lore.

of songs dealing with bodily processes—birth giving and sexual intercourse—is also not incidental.[47]

Both anthropologist Veena Das and historian Ranajit Guha have recently suggested that women may have a special knowledge and subsequent power over speech concerning their own bodies. Guha writes:

> This knowledge constitutes a challenge which is genuinely dreaded by male authority. For it operates in an area of liminality not strictly governed by the will of husbands and fathers—an area which appears to the latter as fraught with uncertainty and danger, since women speak here in a language not fully comprehensible to men and conduct themselves by rituals that defy male reasoning.
>
> (Guha 1987: 163)

Das somewhat more tentatively suggests that

> much of the communication between women on matters sexual is not accessible to men. As the lawful wives of men, women pay allegiance to the entire male discourse on female sexuality. However, burdened with the task of maintaining the orderly world of patriarchy represented by law, they are not always averse to maintaining appearances at the cost of individual transgressions.
>
> (Das 1988: 201)

The example Das gives is one in which "a woman who was not able to conceive was advised by her sister-in-law to exchange her quilt—a verbal pun by which she was being advised to become pregnant by another man, thus confirming that maintaining order sometimes involves individual transgression" (201–2). As we have seen, Rajasthani wedding insult songs give similar advice, observing that a lover is a boon to a barren woman.

For Das the order maintained by such transgression feeds ultimately into the interests of patriarchy. Certainly all the well-being ritually generated by women's singing about sexual play could be interpreted as co-opted by men—who, after all, appear to control village politics and economy. But I am not ready to jump to that metalevel of cultural criticism. My purpose here has been to let the sounds and meanings of women's voices contribute to our

47. See Bynum 1987 for an exploration of medieval Christian women's use of alternative religious imagery based on "ordinary biological and social experiences," including giving birth.

understandings of gender in the Hindu world. Rather than fractured wholes, these voices portray shifting, polychromatic self-images.[48]

Recent appreciations of the relevance and realms of Indian folklore and women's traditions offer a broader base for the limited examples and localized context I have explored in this chapter. Ramanujan (1986) describes two realms within the domain of folk performance in South India that are at least partially congruent with two categories of classical Tamil poetry—*akam* and *puram*, or interior and exterior. Although not frozen as female to male, these categories are strongly gendered. The interior is associated with women and families, domesticity and love; the exterior with men and heroes, statesmanship and war. But, if the inner realm is characterized by use of less formal language, less naming of places and persons, it is far from a silent realm, nor is its poetry inferior.

Working only from the written residue of women's oral performances in a very different place and time—nineteenth-century Bengal—Sumanta Banerjee richly documents and explores motifs and meanings very similar to those I have discussed here. He also describes the systematic repression, tantamount to obliteration, of such living traditions by the colluded forces of "Christian missionaries, English administrators and the Bengali bhadralok"—the English-educated, reform-minded urban elite. Banerjee, whose essay I read with mounting excitement in March 1990 after completing an earlier draft of this chapter, suggests that "ritualistic displays of defiance in the form of female ribaldry" might have afforded women a "dissenting space" in a society "that did not allow them formal means of protest" (1989: 140–41). The thrust of Banerjee's article is, however, that this form of protest has virtually disappeared, having surrendered to "a hostile male world." Perhaps bawdy wedding jokes "may . . . still be alive in rural

48. Rosalind O'Hanlon in a very complex critique of attempts to recreate "subalterns" as individual subjects of their own history concludes that "histories and identities are necessarily constructed and produced from many fragments." She goes on to assert, however, that "this does not cause the history of the subaltern to dissolve once more into invisibility" (1988:197). Switching from a visual to an aural sensorial mode, I may still follow O'Hanlon in suggesting that if village women's self-portrayals in song display an awareness of multiple identities, they need not dissolve into silence.

areas," he comments wistfully (160). I hope he will be heartened to learn that in Rajasthan, at least, these oral traditions are not only alive but integral to ritual life.[49]

Although she is not concerned with implications of social protest, Joyce Flueckiger's very interesting study (1989) of how the oral epic of Lorik-Candā has developed differently in Chhattisgarh and in Uttar Pradesh does reveal direct links between women's actual social status and female images in folklore. In Chhattisgarh, where women have greater economic independence and generally higher status than in Uttar Pradesh, female epic characters are initiators of action and of romance and use their ingenuity rather than the power of chastity to solve problems. Flueckiger's findings are important because they indicate that folkloric representations of women's power, rather than being hollow, wishful, or nostalgic, may relate to actual social standing and influence.

David Shulman has approached female power through South Indian folklore sources, describing it as raw force that must be contained, but that nevertheless spills out, and should—the motif of the goddess in the box. He states that the folkloric world is one in which "powerful forces are constantly breaking through the barriers erected against them." Moreover, this perpetual breakthrough is productive, not destructive (1986: 119). Frédérique Marglin's ethnographic and historical research on the *devadāsī*s, or temple dancers, of Orissa argues most persuasively for the positive force in women's sexuality. Particularly in their mythic and ritually enacted capacity to seduce ascetic men, the *devadāsī*s are the ones who bring rain and food (1981, 1985a, 1985b).

Scholars who have painted split female images, including Kakar, O'Flaherty, and Bennett, have tended to neglect folkloric realms and women's traditions—at least while in the split-image

49. The impulse among the literate elite to suppress, if not the performance, at least the public knowledge, of "bawdy wedding songs" exists in Rajasthan too, however. It is remarkable that in a generally excellent scholarly work on Rajasthani folk literature the author depicts the groom's entrance into the bride's house after *toraṇ marnā* (see above) as a moment when "the women of the maiden's side bring the groom into the house with great love" (*kanyā pakṣ kī striyāṅ bare sneh se var ko ghar meṅ le jātī haiṅ*). The same work does refer to *gālī*s sung at other moments in the wedding process, consistently calling them "sweet" (*madhur*) and "melodious" (*surīlī*) as if thus to deny any abrasive import (Samskarta 1968:87–88).

mode of analysis.[50] I have noted that their major sources are largely male-authored (in the case of texts) or from the male viewpoint (in the case of ethnography). By thus contrasting their sources (male) with mine (female), I have not posed a "his" and a "hers" theory of separate worlds and worldviews. Rather, both visions coexist and are available to both sexes. Men can and do partake at times of the kinds of female-generated visions explored here, even as women often articulate perfectly and subscribe behaviorally to the prevalent set of values I have heuristically described as having male orientations and origins.[51]

In sum, this chapter presents a construction of female gender in South Asia that is accessible to all, if performed by women. I have characterized this construction as more unified than split, more auspicious than dangerous, more creative than destructive. Rather than opposing murderous, sexual females to nurturing, protective mothers, as in Kakar's and O'Flaherty's schematizations, songs like the "*Gālī* of the Small Husband" reveal a merged anticipation of sexual pleasure and motherhood from the bride's viewpoint. Distinctions between fertile mother and erotic, nonfertile whore dissolve both in the seductive new mother of the childbirth songs and the fertile adulteress of the *gālī*s. If a hint of the mother's incestuous desire remains, it is tender rather than frightening. I have seen grandmothers gently play with a baby's penis while happily joking about the great works it will someday accomplish.

Nor do these songs sustain Bennett's opposition of sexual and by implication degraded wives to asexual, pure, and sacred

50. Kakar's most recent work does analyze some folktales in which he finds confirmation for his familiar dichotomies. However, he makes generalizations about Indian folk traditions that clearly do not take into account women's storytelling. For example, he writes that Indian folk traditions do not have the "animal groom tales" common in Western lore, where a "maiden's devotion to her animal-lover . . . disenchants him and gives him back his human form" (1990:59). On the contrary, in Ghatiyali alone I recorded several tales of women married to snakes and one of a sword-husband in all of which the happy transformation to a handsome lover comes about through the wife's devotion. Moreover, all of these tales stressed a wife enjoying great intimacy and pleasure with her spouse—a possibility alien to Kakar's views.

51. For a complex approach from Western feminist literary criticism, see Jardine, who writes that the assumption that "the two sexes and their imaginations can somehow be separated" is incompatible with "the major challenges of modernity's fictions. If we all remain divided between the two, it is because they cannot be separated in any culture" (1985:40–41).

sisters. The husband's sister makes a nasty sexual joke in the "Song of Pea Pods," and in the *banā*, or songs of the bridegroom-prince, the sexual eagerness of wives is evidently auspicious. Were it not, such songs would surely not be heard at celebrations of the birth and marriage of sons—events crucial to the male householder's all-consuming goal of continuing his line.

Rajasthani women celebrate, loudly and in chorused song and graceful dance, the positive energies inherent in female bodies and enhanced by their adornment. The veil attracts as much as it blockades the amorous eye; if only for a few stolen or borrowed moments, the wrap is eminently unwrappable; a husband's elder brother, to whom one turns one's back in acute shame, is a potential lover and impregnator. The image of adulterous love play on the hilltop pleases a goddess protective of children and fertility. Rather than perilous to persons and society, women's emerging beauty and vital sexual engagement bring pleasure and new life to family and community.

3

On the Uses of Irony and Ambiguity: Shifting Perspectives on Patriliny and Women's Ties to Natal Kin

In rural Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, ideas about sexuality are linked in important ways to kinship ideologies and relations of power within the family. Women's sexuality may be viewed as dangerous and destructive in male expressive traditions and in many ordinary conversations partly because of the perceived threat that sexual bonds between men and women pose to the solidarity of males within the patrilineal household. Throughout her life in her husband's home, a woman may continue to be viewed as an outsider who poses a potent threat to the unity of that household. The same devaluations of female sexuality that are found in so many textual traditions may be used, in everyday speech, to limit the effects that strong conjugal bonds would have on the power of senior over junior men, the power of men over women, and the power of older women over younger brides. As women sing, as they do both in Rajasthan and in Uttar Pradesh, of the powers and pleasures of sexuality, and of a felicitous merging of eroticism and fertility, they are at least implicitly challenging those lines of power within North Indian kinship.

Powerful sexual and conjugal bonds may be viewed as dangerous, and wives may be seen as potentially disruptive of male solidarity, yet women are also said to become irrevocably "other" and "alien" (*parāyī*) to their natal kin as they marry and move, often at a great distance, to the villages of their husbands. The words of women's songs frequently reflect on this fact, that there may be no place that women may truly call "one's own home" (*apnā ghar*). But as they speak of this conundrum, they do so not in a unified, monolithic, or homogeneous female voice, but from the varied positionings of sister, daughter, and wife. Women speaking as