

 Biyah/Biraha

EMOTIONS IN A RITE OF PASSAGE

Feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell.

MICHELLE ROSALDO, "TOWARD AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF SELF AND FEELING," 143

Anthropological evidence from many parts of the Indian subcontinent points to structural reasons such as village exogamy as the chief causative factors in women's feelings of vulnerability and dependence in their marital homes. However, the emotions associated with marriage and generated at this rite of passage deserve greater attention than the anthropological literature has hitherto accorded them (Macwan et al. 2000; Trawick 1990, 1991; Raheja 1994; 2003; Narayan 1986; Gold 1992; Ramanujan 1986). The principle of village exogamy ensures that while daughters are permanently transferred to other households at marriage, sons remain in their natal homes to carry on the patriline. This arrangement gives rise to a logical question: does the relative residential advantage sons enjoy induce a corresponding emotion in daughters? As the ideology of son preference permeates all castes and classes in north India, the question is a significant one for learning about the emotions of those

implicated in these structural arrangements; nevertheless, the tendency to impute emotions to others is common in ethnographic writing, and researchers may sometimes project their unstated assumptions onto the fieldwork situation (Leavitt 1996, 514–17). Since the disciplinary emphasis on structure has, at least until recently, kept the realm of emotions hidden, this chapter explores folksongs as potential forms of cultural production that will allow us to unearth these emotions. The chapter investigates what songs associated with marriage celebrations in particular might teach us about emotions.

Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz have emphasized the discursive, performative, and social character of emotions. Since people deploy emotional talk for various purposes, the analysis of discourse reveals much about social life in different societal contexts. Hence, Abu-Lughod and Lutz emphasize the need to “examine discourses on emotions and emotional discourses as social practices within diverse ethnographic contexts” (1990, 14). Highlighting how emotions are manipulated in power hierarchies, the authors show that emotional discourses establish, assert, challenge, or reinforce power or differences in status (14). This chapter treats songs as discourses of emotion in hopes of gaining insights into the purposes they serve. By adopting this approach in her analysis of Bedouin love poetry, for instance, Abu-Lughod and Lutz find that this poetry serves as a discourse of defiance. Thus, since “emotion can be said to be created in, rather than shaped by, speech” (12), this approach also supports the examination of how appropriate emotions are generated through singing that is specific to certain ritual or seasonal contexts. As emotions are socially and culturally produced, it is possible to translate meaning through feeling and thereby to suggest alternative ways of feeling. I therefore proceed by searching folksongs for affective associations in order to track the shades of feeling and emotional nuances these songs produce (Leavitt 1996, 529).

Since several genres of song relate to marriage, this subject allows for the widest possible range of emotions, both at the level of the collective and of the individual. In Van Gennep’s theory of life-cycle rituals, *samskārās* serve to mark the passage from one stage or status to another, that is, the culturally defined transitions that first separate the individual from their previous status, next put them through a symbolic transition or passage, and finally, incorporate them into their new status (Van Gennep

1960, 3–11). However, as *samskārās* affect every aspect, and not just the spiritual life, of the individual undergoing the transition, they have an impact on the individual's physical as well as mental states, altering and affecting the outer and the inner, the visible and the invisible (Inden and Nicholas 1977, 35). Within the sequence of *samskārās*, this chapter is concerned with *biyāh-vivāha* (marriage),¹ and the impending rupture village exogamy causes—a parent's separation anxiety at losing a daughter to strangers.

DAUGHTERS DEPART

When, during my field visits, I attended weddings or participated in wedding preparations, I observed that a range of moods characterized the emotional disposition of the bride-givers. Fathers usually looked careworn and weighed down with worry, and not only because of the expense of the wedding. In upper-caste households and among the upwardly mobile who have adopted the practice of *kanyadān*,² fathers are also physically weak by the time their daughter's weddings are performed as this ceremony must be carried out in the ritually pure state achieved by fasting. In this context of these heightened apprehensions, the wedding as “eclipse” offers an unexpected, though culturally apt, metaphor through which to frame a daughter's marriage ceremony, as seen in the song below. It underlines the extremely destabilizing effect of the marriage both on the daughter and on her immediate kin.

I

Dhiyavā garhanvā bābā mandvani lāgelā

Kabbdoni ugrah hoī e?

Hamrā he bābā ka sone thāriyavā ho

Chūvat jhanjhanī hoī e

Ūhe thariyā bābā damāde ke dīhito ho

Tab rauvā ugrah hoī e

The daughter's eclipse begins in the wedding space.

When does that eclipse pass?

My own father had a golden plate

That resounded at just a touch.

That very plate father gifted to his son-in-law.

That's when the eclipse passed.

UPADHYAYA 1990B, 43

In this song, the metaphor of an eclipse, which is a threat to the cosmic order that requires the giving of alms in exchange for the return of peace in the heavens and purity on earth, serves to naturalize and make acceptable the fact that the rite of a daughter's marriage involves gift giving (Guha 1985, 16). Those who must be appeased are the bride-takers, who depart not only with the daughter, the most precious and purest of gifts, but also with large dowries and any additional material goods they may demand. In one eclipse myth, when the malevolent planet Rahu blocks out the sun, only by giving alms to outcastes is the cosmic order restored. Here, the lower castes serve as the mediators who have the power to induce the demons to release the moon (16), allowing them to ask for their due, while the upper castes are equally obliged to share their resources and match the lowest castes' requests for alms with generous gifts.³ Hence, gift giving on the part of the bride-givers is likened to the giving of alms at the time of an eclipse.

The eclipse metaphor is effective at other levels, too. For the parents of a daughter, while the wedding is a cause for celebration, it is also fraught with complex and contradictory emotions, since it signifies the permanent departure of their daughter from the home of her birth. Bittersweet and paradoxical, the joyous celebrations are accompanied by sadness since the daughter is departing on an unknown journey and will henceforth return to the natal home only as a guest. The combination of village exogamy with virilocality (i.e., the relocation of a bride at marriage to reside with her husband and his family in patrilineal societies) mandates that the daughter be ritually severed from her natal home, and, in most cases, subject to greater restrictions and controls in her new one. Even on the lowest rungs of the hierarchies of caste and class, where spatial distance between natal and marital households may not be vast, an internalization of loss of the natal home dominates, for "a woman belongs to the caste of her father at birth and then that of her husband" (Oldenburg 2002, 37). The notion of *biyāh-vivāha*, or separation from the natal home and its nurturing environment, underscores this rite of passage in north India, making it not only irreversible but also the universal experience of

women across social divides. Typical of the financial anxieties associated with the daughter's wedding is the following song.

2

Bhaile bīyāh parelā sir senūr
Nau lakh mānge re dabej re
Ghar me ke ba bhārā āngan dei patkelī
Saturū ke dhiyā janī hoī re

The wedding over, *sindur* (vermilion) ceremony completed,
 They asked for a 9 lakh dowry.
 In despair Mother threw out the cooking pots into the courtyard.
 One should not wish the birth of daughters even to enemies.

SRIVASTAV 1991, 112

As the song articulates, a critical source of this anxiety is the gifts the bride-givers must make to their daughter and her in-laws, and here its articulation appears to prepare mothers for another related, though traumatic, eventuality. The song evokes last minute demands for dowry and the embarrassment a daughter's parents could face were the groom's wedding party to stage a walkout, either without solemnizing the marriage or just after the nuptials and before the formal send-off. The song suggests anxieties a family may have about their daughter being thus left stranded and eventually abandoned by the bride-takers.

Despite the unsettling imagery of the eclipse song, both historical and contemporary evidence from rural settings suggest that efforts are made to promote the participation of the bride-givers' entire village in the wedding. The notion of shared responsibility can still be observed in villages in eastern Uttar Pradesh where each household, particularly those within the same caste and often, class, offers a quantity of grain or rice to the celebrating household to build up adequate food resources for the forthcoming ritual banquets. While this practice ensures that debt incurred by the already overburdened bridal household remains within manageable limits, in Jaunpur I found that women from the village also volunteer their time in the grinding of grain and spices. Their contribution toward the processing and preparation of food required to feed the *barāt* (the groom's party) are a necessary component of the festivities. Such institutionalized arrangements appear to have evolved over time,

precisely to ease the kinds of uncertainties associated with the daughter's departure that the song about the eclipse alludes to.

Dube cites an example from central India where mothers of departing daughters wail that had their daughters been sons, they could have ploughed the fields, instead of being sent off like a corpse (Dube 2001).⁴ Similarly, among Yadavas in Bihar, a mother's ritual lament includes the placement of a stone on her heart as her daughter departs (A. Kumar, personal communication). Indeed wedding rituals appear to enact the logic of the separation, while also making the separation both bearable and unbearable for the departing daughter.

3

Bāsavā ke jariyā sunrī eik re jamli, sagare Ayodhyā ke anjor re
Sunrī dhiyavā caukvā carhī re baithē, Ama kamaravā dhaile thār re
Chati cūhuvāile betī nayan dher loravā, ab sunrī bhailū parāi re
Jāhu ham janatī dhiyavā kokho re janamihen, pihintī mai miricī jharāi
Miricī ke jhāke jhuke dhiyavā mari re jaihen, chūti jaiti garuvā santāp re
Dāslī sejīyā urasi bālu re dihitī, sāmīji ke rahrī chapāi re
Bāral diyanā bujhāi bālu re dihitī, harījī se rahitī chapāi re.
Būkali sonthiyā dhūrā ho phānki lihatin, sāmī jī se rahitī chapāi re

Near the bamboo, a beauty took birth, the light of all Ayodhya.
 The beauty mounts the wedding space as her mother looks on.
 Breasts overflowing, eyes tearful, now my beauty belongs to another.
 Were a daughter's birth foretold, a concoction of chilies I'd have consumed.
 Or smoked chilies to abort and escape the unbearable sadness.
 Given up the decorated bedchamber, hidden from the husband in the *arhar* field.
 I could have extinguished the flame, concealed from my husband.
 Dried ginger powder I could have gulped, behind his back.

UPADHYAYA 1990B, 130

The above song, like the metaphor of the eclipse, introduces dark and disconcerting notes. It lists some of the strategies women adopt to both avoid and abort pregnancies, such as the consumption of dried ginger and chilies. In this case, however, it is the daughter's departure that induces the mother's agonized cry, which contradicts the popular contemporary understanding of daughters as economic burdens; rather, the song seems to suggest that it is the daughter's transfer to her marital home that evokes

the deepest despair. In folk consciousness the dense and long branches of the arhar lentil crops are understood to provide the ideal hideout for lovers and the perfect cover for extramarital sex (see Kumar 2001; field interviews 2000). In a surprising reversal, the very arhar field that should have served as the ideal hideout for a love tryst here figures as the perfect place to hide from a husband.

I heard a version of this song on the occasion of the ritual of *cumāvan*, a performance context that served to highlight the altogether paradoxical and contradictory nature of the daughter's wedding. One of several meaningful ceremonies associated with minimizing the pain of the daughter's transition, the *cumāvan* (offering of kisses) is by far the most moving. In an intermediate-caste household in Atara village in 2002, I witnessed the performance of the ceremony, which involved the bride's ritual massage with a concoction of turmeric and oils by her mother and female kin, the day before the wedding. Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas's account of this *samskāra* in exceptionally dry, mechanical terms captures none of the rite's emotional charge (Inden and Nicholas 1977, 41). From the songs, and from my own experience of the ceremony in Atara, I would suggest that something more than a massage transpires, something at the emotive level. Here, I transcribe from fieldnotes recorded in 2002 my response to what I observed.

One by one, pairs of married women from the bride's extended family anointed the bride's joints and limbs with sprigs of *dūb* grass, sprouted just for this purpose. Crossing their hands and dipping the grass into the turmeric and milk, they brought it first to the feet, knees and shoulders and forehead of the bride and then to their own lips, while the surrounding women sang out their blessings. One married woman after another thus bestowed blessings on the bride. At the completion of the blessings, close female kin continued with the bride's herbal oil massage, foregrounding the abundantly tactile nature of the ceremony and its nurturing aspects. The ritual appears to underline the care and adoration showered on the bride in her natal household and, perhaps, to contain the grief of her departure. (fieldnotes, Atara, May 2002)

4

Apāne mān k dhīr dharāvai ke calī

Jahān māi bāp sag bhaiyā nahī

Huvān naihar ke tej dikhāvai ke calī

Apne man k na dhīr dharāvai ke calī
Jahān hāt bajār dukān nahī
Huvān niti bhojan banāvai ke cāhī
āpan man ke na dhīr dharāvai ke calī
Jahān Ganga Jamun Tirbeni bahī
Huvān niti tirth karāi ke cāhī.

With a stoic heart she goes
 Where there's no father no mother, no real brother.
 There, to show the glory of the natal home she goes.
 With a stoic heart she goes.
 Where there isn't a shop, a market or bazaar,
 There too, the daily meal must be prepared.
 With a stoic heart she goes,
 Where Ganga, Jamuna, and the Triveni flow.
 There, everyday is a pilgrimage to be made.

SHANTI TEWARI, ATARA, JAUNPUR

In carefully listening to the song, we hear that its predominant notes are ones of trepidation, rendered even more so because at stake is the good name of the bride's natal home, which will be judged by her behavior, under even the most trying of circumstances. Subjected to intense scrutiny and yet deprived of emotional support, a bride finds her fears of criticism heightened. The song effectively captures the uncertainty of the next stage the young bride is entering. From the bride's point of view, then, the predominant emotion associated with this rite of passage is fear of the unknown. The songs in the following section, which address women's shares in their natal property, are more reflective in mood, as women contemplate all that they are leaving behind. These songs also suggest a highly evolved interrogative consciousness on the part of the bride.

DAUGHTERS VOICE THEIR LOSS

As women give voice to their vision of gifts and of their ties to brothers and to husbands, their words undermine the north Indian ideology of the *pativrata*, the ideal wife who moves silently and submissively from natal to conjugal kin and makes no claims of her own. GLORIA GOODWIN RAHEJA, "CRYING WHEN SHE'S BORN, AND CRYING WHEN SHE GOES AWAY," 38

Since the 1970s, rising dowry-related violence has given rise to an anti-dowry discourse that has effectively sidelined the primary functions of a dowry as a bride's safety-net and personal insurance voluntarily put together by her natal family in accordance with the means at its disposal and as an index of a bride's emotional bonds with her natal village. Oldenburg's analysis of historical data from Punjab links the emphasis on dowry with the growth of private property in land under colonialism.⁵ The songs below serve as the proverbial "nail in the coffin" as they articulate the anxiety of the daughter, the very individual whose life is to be transformed. In the final analysis, the wedding is about a fundamental change in the status of the daughter, and it is her anxiety that is likely to be most pronounced and that rituals occasionally strive to resolve. The songs focus on what precisely women might lose through the virilocal residential arrangements. While many marriage songs grapple primarily with the emotive issue of women's sense of displacement at being severed from their natal homes, they also regularly include, if only peripherally, brides' concomitant anxieties about being deprived of a gamut of rights. While the songs reference a bride's demand for her share of the natal home, in practice brides "have little control over the way in which dowry is given and received" (Sharma 1993, 342).

The following song articulates a bride's demand for a share in her father's property, if not in his ancestral property, then at least in all that he has acquired and earned during his lifetime. Through these songs it is possible to find links between the demands of contemporary feminists and the women's movement, on the one hand, and what peasant women have been demanding in their songs through the ages, on the other.

5

Uttarī caitvā ho bābā, carhī baisākh
Des paisī khojahaun bābā, nanuā damād
Ban paisī kañihun ho bābā, khamhavā pacās
Cār khamavā garihaun ho bābā, cāru je kon
Mānik khamavā gārhihū ho bābā bediyā ke bīc
Dhūrat dhūrat ho betī baithe bābā jāngh
Je kuch arājihau ho bābā, se kuch adhiā hamār
Adhiyā kārn ho betī, sarabe tohār
Citukī ke senurvā ho betī, bhailū parāi.

The month of caīt over, Father, then spring comes along.
 All over the land, Father's search for a little groom is on.
 In the forest father cut fifty logs of wood.
 Four poles for the home, Father, for the corners four.
 In the canopy's center, Father erects the jeweled ritual pole.
 Tumbling along comes daughter, sits on father's knee.
 "Of whatever you earned, Father, half belongs to me."
 "Why just ask for half daughter, all of it is yours.
 A pinch of vermilion, daughter, to another you belong."

TEWARI AND SHARMA 2000, 308

Here, a daughter's request for her share in her father's property triggers an ambivalent response. One hears in the father's response a note of relief that his daughter will be gone before he actually has to give her her share. Hence, it is possible for the father of the song to make the grand gesture of offering her his entire property. Here is the articulation of a structural conundrum whereby the social order can flourish only by denying daughters their share in the landed property. That a marriage song posed the puzzle so effectively was startling, given that in north India the denial of land rights to women is axiomatic. Where this denial is so taken for granted, even daring to raise the question could be perceived as potentially threatening. Hence, the request must come from the mouth of a mere child, presumably innocent and utterly unaware of the implications of posing it. While such songs hint at the systemic logic at the heart of the denial of land rights to women, they also reflect on the question of the balance of power. As I have shown elsewhere, rural women's access to and control over land is arguably the single most empowering strategy they have at their disposal in their fight to achieve gender parity and redress existing power imbalances (Jassal 2001).

The song below continues our exploration of the relief fathers experience when their daughters are to wed. The song seems to suggest that the marriage rite also marks a girl's passage into womanhood, with its accompanying responsibilities.

6

Bābā ham pahirab līle rang cunariyā
Līle rang cunariyā re betī gorī tor badaniyā
Larhi jaihen na, betī chailan se najariyā

Chailan se najariyā dūi cāri dinavā
Larhi jaihen na
Cali jaibe betī apane sasurvān
Chailan se najariyā dūi cāri dinavā
Calī jaihen na

“Father, I would like a blue stole to wear.”
 “Blue stole, daughter, your body so fair
 Will attract the gaze of the lads out there.
 The gaze of lads, for just two to four days,
 The meeting of glances and stares.
 Then off you go, daughter, to your marital home.
 Glances exchanged for just two to four days.
 Then you’ll be off and away.”

FIELD RECORDING, ROBERTSGANJ, MIRZAPUR

Here, a daughter’s request for appealing clothes raises anxieties in the father about the unwanted male attention the clothing would trigger. Yet the song also expresses the father’s relief that such a period would be brief and would end with the daughter’s final departure to her conjugal home. Here, while the father’s relief arises from not having to manage the sexuality of a growing daughter, the mood is very similar to that of the previous song where the father is relieved at not having to actually partition the property. In both songs, therefore, we encounter fathers relieved at being absolved of their responsibilities toward their daughters—and the earlier the better!

Songs that, like the one above, present the bride’s point of view were relatively rare, yet the few that do so flesh out a critical dimension, namely, that of the bride’s state of mind. The song below is a classic within the genre. It questions the culture of gifting material goods to daughters, goods that in any case can never make up for the loss of the daughters’ real rights or power.

7

Har har basavā katāyo more Bābā, āngan tamuā tanāyo re
Aaj ki rāyin rakh le re Bābul mai to pahunī terī re
Sonvā tū diha Bābā, rūpavā tū dīha
Aur diha ratnā jarāyo re

Ghorvā tū diha Bābā, hathiyā tū dīha
Eik nāhin diha Bābā sar kī kangahiyā
Sās nanad bolī bolein re.

“The young bamboo⁶ felled Father, you got the canopy erected in the courtyard.

For this night let me stay, Father, I am at your beck and call.

You gave me gold, Father, you gave me silver.

You gave me precious stones crafted and set.

You gave me horses, elephants you gave.

One thing you didn’t give, Father, is the head ornament.⁷

Mother-in-law and sister-in-law jeer and mock.”

KHATUN, JAUNPUR CITY

Hovering over the excitement and preparations for the daughter’s wedding and the father’s proud installation of the wedding canopy are a daughter’s disconcerting and unanswered questions. Foretold are the bride’s loss of status and eroding self-confidence that no amount of gifts can restore. Here women rightly perceive that the gifts they receive are more “display of status rather than a parallel fund of wealth” (Basu 1999, 225) and while a bride’s dowry may bring her self-respect and prestige in the household (and indeed in the community) if her parents have been particularly generous, it will not of itself bring her economic power (Sharma 1993, 347).

The head ornament may be read as a euphemism for the ability to hold one’s head high, an ability the departing daughter, so much at the mercy of others, experiences as singularly missing. The daughter naturally worries that despite the transfer of moveable wealth, without any real rights, she may nevertheless be the subject of ridicule, even contempt, in her conjugal home.

Indeed such songs also appear to protest the fact that while gifts to the bride, such as cash, jewelry, and even horses and elephants, constitute *strīdhan* (woman’s property), they also reflect women’s “concomitant exclusion from a formal share in the patrimony, especially land” (Tambiah and Goody 1973, 93). The songs also appear to endorse the argument that “contrary to the dominant ideology and the terminology of traditional Hindu law, dowry property is not women’s wealth, but wealth that *goes*

with women. Women are the vehicles by which it is transmitted rather than its owners” (Sharma 1993, 352; italics mine).

Finally, while the daughters in each of the three songs of this section address their fathers directly, the strategies they deploy vary, from the pointed and confrontational to the more common pliant and cajoling. These daughters are not interested in seriously challenging or unsettling the patriarchal order as much as asserting their awareness of its inherent injustices. Through the songs, then, departing daughters come to terms with their exclusion. In the following section, we see how daughters perceive the advantages their brothers enjoy relative to their own exclusion.

QUESTIONING THE PRIVILEGES OF BROTHERS

Wedding songs serve both to explain the action taking place during the ceremony and, more significantly, to induce the appropriate emotional responses to this action. As “harmonized multivocality” in situations charged with tension, the songs offer “verbalized expressions of misunderstandings and debates, conflicts and confusions” since, by and large, these sung conversations would be unlikely to take place in real life (Gold and Raheja 1994, 42). Thus, “songs imagine rather than replicate human interactions, making speakers forthright in unlikely contexts, and at times, making women articulate and assertive where they would probably be tongue-tied and acquiescing” (42).

The songs highlight the temporary nature of the daughter’s position relative to the son’s and reveal the remarkably explicit privileges brothers enjoy vis-à-vis their sisters. Leela Dube and Prem Chowdhry (1994) have argued that the “contrasting fortunes of daughters and sons is a common theme in the wailings at the send off of a bride from her natal home and also in subsequent visits and departures of a married daughter” (Dube 2001, 93). A bride’s ritual act of throwing grains of rice over the threshold as she departs her natal home can signify differently; while for brides in Punjab, the act signifies their wish that their natal homes prosper, in Orissa the same act signifies the return of all the rice the bride has consumed to absolve herself of her debt to her natal home. Such logic might also explain why the wedding ritual in our region, Uttar Pradesh, is

termed *lāvā parachhnā* (the scattering of parched rice) or, simply, *lāvā* (parched rice). Gloria Goodwin Raheja's graphic account of a postwedding ceremony among the landed Gujars of Saharanpur, in which the groom, before his ritual departure with the bride, plants rice seedlings on his wife's natal homestead, enacts the same logic (Raheja 1988). Yet, despite the songs' seeming acceptance of these structural inequalities, the songs also provide a legitimate space to question them, and in this capacity they deserve a closer look.

8

Gamkai bājā bājai naihar ke nagariyā, ho gujariā

Sāsurariyā ko calī

Are bhaiyā pāpī bhaiyā pāpī, chorain sunvā

Kai ohariyā ho gujariyā

Sasurariya kai calī

Are bhaujī pāpini hamke dehlīn ankvariā, ho gujariā

The music of sorrow plays in the streets of the natal home, beloved.

She leaves for her conjugal home.

O Brother sinner, she leaves, listen.

To the other side, O beloved.

For the conjugal home.

O brother's wife, the sinner, gave a warm embrace, beloved.

BHAGIRATHI DEVI, CHACHAKPUR, JAUNPUR

Here, the bride's departure for her marital home is likened to the soul's final journey to meet with the divine. Bhagirathi Devi explained that the song also evokes the "urs" (wedding) of the souls of Muslim saints with god. In the Jaunpur region, where Sufi shrines dot the landscape, the Islamic influence is pervasive enough for the physical death of saints to be understood as a moment of joyous union with the Beloved (Ernst and Lawrence 2002, 91). The song is a stunning example of the spiritual and mystical dimensions of subaltern consciousness that I encountered repeatedly throughout my fieldwork. A deep understanding of the inherent divinity of humanity emerges through such songs (see Urban 2001; Dube 1998; Hardiman 1995).

When I asked Bhagirathi Devi why the brother is referred to as "sinner" in this song, she offered this simple explanation: "Bhaiyā pāpī hain

jo āpan bahin k pare hānth saunpat hain” (We often refer to a brother as a sinner because he is someone who willingly gives away his own sister) (Bhagirathi Devi, Chachakpur, Jaunpur). Prof. Rakesh Pandey, who guided me to some important sources in Benaras adds: “*Bhaiyā* (brother) is often referred to as a *pāpī*, ‘sinner,’ because he parts with a sister and for the same reason, the brother’s wife (*bhaujī*) is also a sinner since she ousts the daughter from her own home and even replaces the sister in the brother’s affections” (Rakesh Pandey, Benaras, October 2008).

Bhagirathi Devi’s and Pandey’s reasoning endorses similar approaches in north India, where the terms *sar*, *sālā*, *sarau* for a wife’s brother are known terms of abuse. In Punjab, a brother, by giving his sister in marriage to another man, “not only makes a gift of that which he most jealously guarded but also exposes himself to the possibility of personal dishonor.” Here, *sālā* is a taunting abuse, carrying the emotive power of one who gives his sister to another to violate (Hershman 1981, 191).⁸ Yet another song about daughters’ disadvantages further emphasizes the relative privileges their brothers enjoy.

9

Hamahi bhaiyā ho eko kokī janmīlen
Dudhvā piyālā daphdor
Bhaiyā ke likhal bābā caupariyā ho
Hamke likhal dur deus

Brother and I born from the same womb,
 Raised on the same mother’s milk.
 Brother’s destiny is father’s inheritance,
 While mine, exile far away.

ATARA, JAUNPUR: SRIVASTAV 1991, 30

The song expresses women’s envy at the fate of their brothers in patriliney, contradicting Kakar’s assertion that in spite of the preference for sons, there is little evidence in the psychology of Indian women of male envy (Kakar 1988, 48). In these songs, however, women voice and confront deep-seated feelings of envy, which underlines the enormous value of such songs. They emphasize the poignancy of women’s lack of rights in their natal homes, accepting the system even as they harbor strong undercurrents of protest. These articulations and the ritual injunctions about

singing them only at appropriate moments during the wedding ritual are significant. Indeed, if these rituals were not in place, such songs would have long been expunged from marriage repertoires.

10

Kekar hain bāri phulvariṃ
Kekar hans cunai phulvari Rama
Bābā ke hai bāri phulvariṃ ho
Bhaiyā ke hans cune phulvāri Rama
Phūl gaye phūl, kachnār bhain pāti
Birnā ke hans cunai ho phulvarī
Phalan gaye phulvā, jhurāi gayin pāti
Biran ke hans cale ho sasurārī Rama.

Whose is the lovely garden?
 Whose swans play in the garden?
 Father's is the lovely garden.
 Brother's swans play in the garden.
 Flowers bloom, the kacnār tree is green.
 Brother's swans in the garden.
 The flowers droop, leaves shrivel up.
 Brother's swans leave for their marital home.

SHANTI TEWARI AND FRIENDS, ATARA, JAUNPUR

The numerous approaches to this theme these songs adopt signal a bride's need to understand the paradoxes she must nevertheless accept. Shanti, one of the singers of the above song, explained that the swans in the brother's garden signify the sister who must eventually leave the garden, here, the natal home, causing the leaves and flowers to shrivel and droop. The imagery of loss contrasts with the bounty and prosperity of the natal home. The pathos of the sister's departure seemingly impacts the entire universe, which mourns in sympathy for the brother's garden bereft of its swans. In this song, brides are made to realize that indeed they will be missed in their natal homes. The songs serve to contain the emotions associated with women's structural exclusion from their natal homes, a fact perceived so starkly at marriages when women begin to imagine what it will be like to return merely as guests, as well as provide relief and psychological succor. However, women

have strong reasons besides emotional ones for maintaining contact with their brothers.

As Shanti explained, while brides do experience sorrow at leaving their natal homes, which will henceforth belong only to their brothers, other songs emphasize the comings and goings and periodic gift giving that make the bride's exclusion bearable, at least in the early years. To illustrate, Shanti sang out her version of the first grinding song of chapter 1, "Brother Don't Tell Them," which narrates the ritual visit of a brother to his married sister, who hopes to count on her brother's support in the natal home when conditions in the conjugal one are hostile. Citing the song, Shanti drew my attention to another important dimension—that of the *keluwa*, the symbolic ritual gift that brothers bring to sisters.

Jevan baithen hain sār bahmoiṃyā
Sarvā ke cuvein hain ānsuiyā ho Ram
Kiyā mor bhaiyā tiriyā sudhiya āin
Kiyā samjhayā maiyā ke kaleuvā ho Ram?

Seated for a meal, a brother and brother-in-law.
 The wife's brother dripping tears O Ram!
 What bothers you brother, is it your wife you miss,
 Or is it about the ritual gift mother was to send?

Shanti explained that the ritual gifts brothers brought to their sisters were a source of great comfort and that "women looked forward to receiving them as symbols of love and appreciation from their natal homes." Indeed since women experience leaving their natal homes as traumatic, it is easy to appreciate the extent to which brothers' ritual visits were loaded with emotional and symbolic significance.

Further, were the marital household to discourage these visits, isolating the bride even more, as we see play out in the same grinding song, then we might read a bride's efforts to maintain a close connection with her brother against all odds as a form of minor resistance on her part. In fact, through continued ties to natal kin, especially brothers, women often try to resist the authority of the husband's kin (Jeffrey et al. 1989, 34–36). As Veena Talwar Oldenburg notes, such visits from the natal home are routinely discouraged: "Virilocality, this common feature of

north Indian Hindu society, created for women and men vastly different destinies and vastly different experiences . . . isolat[ing] married women even further, robbing them of the company of siblings, friends, confidantes, and partisans” (2002, 187).

The circumstances under which women’s contact with their natal homes was policed are poignantly invoked in the ballad of Gobind and Maina, well-known in rural homes across eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This grinding song stresses the isolation of brides but also prepares them for it. I heard numerous versions of the ballad about the young Maina, who is betrothed and sent off to her conjugal home, leaving her childhood sweetheart disconsolate.

II

Cah re mabinā Maina sasurā me rahelī ho
Bansiyā bajāvat Gobinā gailan re ki
Nāhi morā āve sāsū, bhāi re bhatijvā ho
Nāhi more jorī ke milanvā hūve re ki
Hamrā bābājī ke rahelī dhenū gāiyā ho
Ham Gobina bachrū carāvale bāni ki
Kholi d na āve re Bahuvā, lahangā patorvā ho
Calī jā na Gobina ke sāthūn re ki.

For six months Maina lived in her conjugal home.

Then playing the flute, Gobina landed up.

“It is not, mother-in-law, my brother or nephew

Nor is it simply a companion.

My father had a herd of cows

Gobina and I used to graze them together.”

“Then, daughter-in-law, undo your fancy skirt and top

And leave with your Gobina.”

MEENA DEVI AND MOTHER-IN-LAW, MISRAULIA, CHHAPRA

In this upper-caste version of the ballad, which I heard in a Brahmin household, Maina’s meeting with her childhood sweetheart is thwarted and Maina remains concerned with preserving her natal family’s honor; in other versions, however, she pays for the meeting with her life.⁹ Nevertheless, the song underlines the isolation new brides experienced, given that visits from members of their natal villages were as equally discour-

aged as visits from their brothers. As the system is concerned with ensuring that a bride assimilates into her conjugal home, minimizing her reliance on her brothers and severing her relations with her natal home serves to solidify the authority and influence of the husband's kin. In many folksongs, a "fortunate" girl is understood to be the sister of as many as seven brothers, as seen in the grinding song of Satmal.¹⁰ Yet, in keeping with folksongs' often contradictory messages, the following fragment questions the very reliability of brothers.

12

*Ek din gailīn naihar**Koī kare na kadar**Bhaujī naihare me tāne carpāi piyā**Âvelā rovāi piyā**Bābā rahelin hamār**Âne āve bār bār**Bhaiyā kabahūn na sudhi mori leyī piyā**Âvelā rovāi piyā**Māi jo hotin, daurī sāj jāti**Bhaujī dīhi gatharī banvarī ho**Māi jo hotin cauparat pahuncavatīn**Bhaujī devaiyā duāre nīhārīn banvārī ho**Māi jo hotin, karejā nikār bheñtīn**Bhaujī dihin akvārī ho*

Once, on a visit to my natal home,

Not a soul cared.

In the natal home, brother's wife stayed in bed.

Overcome with tears am I.

When father was there,

I was invited again and again.

Brother never once inquired about my welfare.

Overcome with tears am I.

Were it mother, she would have decorated a gift basket.

Brother's wife just gave a bundle, my dear.

Had mother been around, she would have seen me off at least until the village center.

Brother's wife left me at the door.

Had mother been around, she would have done anything, given her heart.

Brother's wife just gave a formal embrace.

SHANTI TEWARI, ATARA, JAUNPUR

The song bemoans the gradual distancing of a bride from her natal home that comes with the passing of her parents. We learn about the indifference of the brother's wife and the bride's growing disappointment at her sister-in-law's inability to replicate the warmth and hospitality of past visits when her parents were alive. The song references the appropriate gestures and rituals (or codes) for leave-taking, so that the desired emotions related to parting are adequately expressed. These codes allow the sister to effectively read the intensity of her sister-in-law's emotions, or the lack thereof. In a diachronic way, the song succeeds in explaining the gradual weakening of the brother-sister bond, allowing women to imagine the waning intensity of their emotional ties with their natal homes.

The song reminds us that since a brother's wife must, eventually and in time, as the senior female of the household, fulfill her duties as wife of the householder, including the maintenance of relations with her husband's kin, women might be forced by circumstance to reevaluate their expectations of their natal homes. However, as the song indicates, tensions between women and their brothers' wives loom large in this reevaluation.

The weakening of the brother-sister bond has crucial implications for the question of women's rights to land. A key finding of recent research on this subject is that even among castes and classes where there is immovable property to be shared and where daughters' legal entitlements to equal shares in that property are clear, women are uniformly reluctant to claim their shares for fear of antagonizing their brothers. Ursula Sharma found, for instance, "that a sister who claimed her share of the land would seem greedy and might risk forfeiting her brother's goodwill. Had she not already received her share of the family property at marriage?" (Sharma 1993, 351). Srimati Basu further explains that "while most women were unable to alter extant property relations, they strongly contested dominant notions that marriage ended their ties with the natal family, both by helping and taking help from the families in some cases, and more prevalently, by claiming to forego property shares in order to keep the natal connection alive" (1999, 226).

As the songs reveal, the environment of the marital home is often a hostile one, and the maintenance of cordial relations with brothers, the sublimation and sacrifice of claims to equal shares in the natal home, and even the acceptance of gender inequality as a given in the natal home are all necessary to buttress a bride's badly needed sense of security. Over the last decade, research on women's land rights has shown that daughters hardly ever use ideas about gender equality to seek their rightful inheritance shares in their natal homes, despite being aware of recent enabling legislation.¹¹ It seems clear that the reason women forego their claims is the potentially high cost of doing so, including the loss of their brothers' support.

Anthropological literature on the importance of the ritual role of brothers (Agarwal 1995; Vatuk 1975; Wadley 1976) has underlined the considerations that prevent women from taking such a bold step. A number of studies support Basu's findings that many women actually gave up their shares in the natal property to avoid "angering their brothers and sisters-in-law and to preserve the natal home as a space of emotional wealth contrasting with the quotidian realm of work, duty and abnegation in married life" (Basu 1999, 227). My fieldwork suggests that while women would prefer the equitable distribution of property between sisters and brothers, for the reasons the songs articulate, they are reluctant to initiate legal action against their brothers. On the other hand, men in north India rarely have to tell their sisters that they would break off all contact should they demand their ancestral shares; indeed, the men can do so at low economic and social cost to themselves (Agarwal 1997, 7). It is against the layered emotional and cultural backdrop I have described above that the brother emerges as the symbolic link between the natal and marital household, as Bina Agarwal concludes: "What we therefore see in the sister-brother relationship is an idealized and complex construction of roles and expectations—ceremonially ritualized, culturally elaborated, economically necessitated, and ideologically reinforced" (1995, 266).

GALI: ABUSIVE WEDDING SONGS

Folksongs have declined in popularity in some areas and are undergoing transformations in others, yet many genres, such as the *gālīs* or songs of abuse integral to wedding celebrations, not only survive but also continue

to be sung and performed at appropriate occasions. Anthropological explanations for the survival of abusive songs point to their symbolic function in restoring the power balance between groups linked together by marriage, namely, the “wife-givers” and the “wife-takers.” According to the north Indian marriage rule of hypergamy, a daughter must only be given in marriage to a group higher in status than her own, making the occasion of a daughter’s marriage one marked by a momentary loss in status that must be restored. The ritual abuses directed at the wife-taking group effectively accomplish this restoration at the symbolic level by containing potential rivalries and animosities.

Underlining the natal family’s affection and love for its departing daughter and emphasizing its reluctance to part with her, *gālīs* provide much-needed assurance to brides. But since the daughter is also severed from her natal home, the tensions associated with being uprooted demand immediate resolution. When songs address these tensions humorously, they also serve to defuse a potentially explosive situation. Abusive songs sung at the bride’s departure, then, address the bride’s two main anxieties—the loss of her natal home and the uncertainty of establishing a home among relative strangers, features that testify to the structural logic of the customary singing and hence to the continued relevance of these songs.

13

Are mai to thāri duariyā ke oat, hamen to nanadoiyā bulāvain na re

Sasurū hamāre caudhari re, sās mughal harjāi

Hamen to sāri duniyā lajāvai na re

Jethvā hamāre moulvī re, hamen to pānc vaktā parhāven na re

Mai to thāri duariyā ke oat, hamen to nanadoiyā bulāvain na re

Devarā hamrā hijrā re, hijr nikal ta ta thaiyā nacavāi na re

Hamen to sāri duniyā lajāvai na re

Thāri pakariyā ke oat, hamen to nanadoiyā bolāvain na re

Nanadī hamārī bijūlī re, giren kauno chailā ke ūpar na re

Thārī dūariyā ke oat, hamen to nanadoiyā bulāvain na re

Behind the door I hide, do not call me brother-in-law.

My father-in-law a Chief, mother-in-law a Mughal Tax Collector.

The whole world is embarrassing me.

Elder brother-in-law, a priest, makes sure I pray five times.

Behind the door I hide, just do not call me brother-in-law.
 Younger brother-in-law, a eunuch, breaks into dance at the sight of the full moon.
 The whole world is embarrassing me.
 I stand at the corner of the door, do not call.
 My husband's sister a streak of lightning, what if she were to fall upon a
 young man!
 Behind the door I hide . . .

KHATUN, JAUNPUR CITY

The song above, sung by Khatun, a Muslim singer from the city of Jaunpur with a wide-ranging repertoire, illustrates other subtle goals *gālīs* fulfill, most importantly, the immense psychological support they offer the young bride. The shy young bride of the song acutely observes each of her husband's relatives from her hiding place, relatives to whom she has probably only been introduced at her wedding. The situation of the song is significant as it is likely to be sung by her natal relatives in earshot of the *bārāt*, members of the wedding party who will, in due course, depart with her for her marital home. For the bride, these last moments as a daughter in her natal home are likely to be full of mixed emotions, and the funny but acute observations the song makes about her new relatives help to make her transition into the new household less overwhelming. The lighthearted mood of the songs serves to lessen the blow for the bride, who in all likelihood feels that she is being handed over to rank strangers. The above song, while it evokes a Muslim social universe, parallels similar *gālīs* sung at Hindu weddings. In fact, Khatun is a popular singer at weddings in Jaunpur city's Hindu households, owing to her rich voice and repertoire.

When the loss of a beloved daughter is imminent, the more humorous and hard-hitting the lyrics, the better they serve as an emotional outlet. Hence, while the emotional state of the bride-givers may be somber and tearful, the songs we hear, at once absurd and funny, belie this fact. They cause a shift in perspective and mitigate the mood of despair and separation that has no doubt been building up. It is possible to imagine this mood reaching a crescendo on the morning of the bride's departure. The belting out of jocular songs, then, serves to defuse the tension, effectively containing and releasing it. The songs the bride's relatives sing reassuringly propose improbable and unlikely scenarios that may never actu-

ally transpire. In helping the powerless bride to imagine and enact a script of power over her new relatives, such songs have the potential to be profoundly morale-boosting. Not only does the bride's community of close relatives express its emotional bonds with the bride who will soon depart, but by humorously identifying, for her benefit, each of her new kin, they render them familiar and less threatening. Many *gālīs* force the bride to reflect on potential sources of conflict with her new kin, thus both preparing and cautioning her.

While *gālīs* are sung at marriages, other songs that likewise explore interkin tensions and conflicts are sung throughout women's lives. A typical example of relations that need management through women's life cycles are those between a woman and her husband's sister. In the song below, the brother's wife reveals her grudging attitude. The *gālī* is also a form of anticipatory socialization, through which young girls are able to imagine themselves as adult women.

14

Darjī bulāu Patane se
Kasak Coliyā nanadī ke siehen
Dono dehein lagāi, morhavā
Apane nanadiyā ka karbai gavanvā
Duno daehein dahej, morhavā
Jab nanadoiyā kothariyā me jaihen
Morhavā, duno hasen khakhāi, morhavā
Jab nanadoiyā coliband kholihen
Duno karain guhār, morhavā
Kahiyā ke bairī, rāji ho nanadī
Morhavā, duno delā dahej, morhavā.

Call the tailor from Patna
 To sew a tight blouse for husband's sister.
 With peacocks designed on both breasts,
 Sister-in-law to her marital home, I'll send,
 And two peacocks will be her dowry.
 When the groom entered the nuptial chamber,
 The peacocks burst into laughter.
 When the groom undid the blouse-ties,
 The peacocks set up wails and cries.

For the longest time, this enemy of mine,
Two peacocks for her dowry are just fine.

DALIT SINGERS, ROBERTSGANJ, MIRZAPUR

In this funny and ironic song, the simmering and often unstated conflict between the two sisters-in-law is made explicit as the brother's wife succeeds in playing a dirty trick on the husband's sister on the occasion of her marriage. When heard alongside song II of the previous section, an ongoing war between these rivals is evoked in which this trick is possibly the sister-in-law's retaliation for similar provocations in the past. In any case, the enmity stems from the emotional demands of the two women linked to each other by marriage, demands so engrained that the tension between them remains unresolved. It is worth recalling, however, that sometimes these kinswomen do act as allies as in the grinding song entitled "Pregnant Solutions: Disguise," of chapter I. The songs in the next section describe the conjugal ties that develop as the bride finally moves to her marital home.

GLIMPSES OF CONJUGALITY

15

BRIDES' TEARS

Jab ham rahlei ho bālī kunvārī ho na
Are Rama tabhei bābā kailen morā biyahavā ho na
Jab ham bhailī das barisivā ho na
Are Rama tabhai mai kailī mora bidaiyā ho na
Kailīn bidaiyā bhāi bābā ke gharavā ho na
Are Rama ham to khelalī sapulī mahuniyā ho na
Jab ham rahelien bāri kunvārī ho na
Are Rama tabain sāsū paniyā bharvāvai ho na
Paniyā ham bharī bharī dhailī karavā ho na
Are Rama tabhai sāsū māren hamai hucvā ho na
Paniyā ham bharī bharī ailīn jab gharavā ho na
Are Rama gore mūre tānālī cadariyā ho na
Haravā jotai āilen, kudariyā gorai āilen
'Māi nāhī dekhālīn tirīyavā ho na.'
'Tobrī tirīyavā bhaiyā garvā gumānin ho na

Bhaiyā, jāike kothāriyā me sūtai ho na
Itanā bacan bhaiyā sune to na pāvalenī ho na
Bhaiyā basavā paithī sutukunī kātilinī ho na
Eik sutukun mārlin, dūsar sutukun mārlinī ho na
Bhāi mārili tiriyā marāvavlieu ho na.

When I was a little maiden,
 O Rama, that's when Father had me married off.
 When I was 12 years old,
 O Rama, that's when mother bid me farewell.
 Sent me off from my father's home.
 O Rama, I played Sipuli Mahuniya
 When I lived in Baba's home
 I used to play Mahuniya.
 When I was just a little girl,
 O Rama, mother-in-law made me fetch loads of water.
 And just as I had some respite from that,
 Mother-in-law dealt me a punch.
 When I had fetched the water,
 O Rama, I lay down covered from head to toe.
 With the plough and sickle he came home.
 "Mother, I don't see my wife anywhere?"
 "Your wife, son, swollen with pride
 Is in the room asleep."
 He barely heard the words, wouldn't hear more.
 He cut the bamboo and fashioned a stick.
 One stick he dealt and then another,
 That beaten down wife, he then just killed her.

BHAGIRATHI DEVI, CHACHAKPUR, JAUNPUR

When Bhagirathi Devi, a woman in her late 70s of the caste of vegetable growers and market gardeners, sang this song in Jaunpur's Chachakpur village in 2002, a hushed silence fell in the courtyard. Those who had gathered to remember and record songs and discuss the nature of women's lives and struggles slipped into a reflective mood. Since we had already heard many songs of pathos, such as the grinding songs, this song was by no means the first to grapple with the troubling emotions that attend domestic violence within the home. While the audience was visi-

bly moved, Bhagirathi Devi's own emotional state as she sang the song was not immediately apparent.

This song highlights the vulnerabilities of brides sent off to the homes of virtual strangers owing to the principle of village exogamy. The vulnerabilities are likely compounded when daughters are married at a very young age or when the spatial distance separating the natal from marital kin is great. The following songs were recorded in a single sitting over an afternoon in April 2002 and serve to examine the frequency with which the motifs of violence and women's vulnerabilities in the conjugal home occur. They were heard interspersed with a number of other songs addressing a variety of subjects and concerns. The singers who had assembled for the recording were from upper and intermediate castes such as Brahmin, Baniya, Kayasth, Yadava, and Thakur, highlighting Atara's multicasite composition. In contrast to Bhagirathi Devi's song, these songs were heard in the relatively prosperous neighborhood and inner courtyard of the household that Shanti, an upper-caste Brahmin woman, belongs to. As the songs unfold, we see why the departure to one's marital home might require the cultivation of a stoic heart, as song 4 (121–22) describes.

16

Sāsū marlī mahenvā kaise saporī
Jab dekhlin sāsū hamrā ta kahin hamse ki choti ho
Caukā belenā na sambhrai, to povai hānth se rotī
Gīlā sān ke pisanvā kaise saporī
Ham kahlīn apānī sāsū se dher dharā mahranī ho
Ganga jī mein dūbi ke marbain abkī barhai d pāni
āpan taj debai parānvā, kaise saporī
Atano sun ke sāsū hamrī kailīn khūb badhaiyā ho
Jauno din tu mar jaibū, apāne betvā ke karab dūsar sagaiyā
Mārlīn tān ke belānvā, kaise saporī
'Ham cat pat kailin apāne betvā ke dūsar sādī ho'
Būrhā kahain kalakh ke sabse, bhail mor barbādī
Aguvā milal baimānvā, kaise saporī

Mother-in-law's taunts, how are they to be endured?

When she saw me, she said I'm too little.

"If you cannot manage the rolling pin, use your hands."

But how to manage when the dough is sticky?
 “Mother-in-law,” I said, “Be patient, queen!
 This time when the waters rise, wait and see, I’ll drown myself in the Ganges.”
 Give up my life, how else to endure all this?
 Mother-in-law heaped her congratulations.
 “The day you die, I’ll have my son betrothed again.”
 How are beatings with the rolling pin, to be endured?
 “I’ll soon get my son remarried!”
 The old woman tells everyone she’s been destroyed,
 That the matchmaker deceived her, oh how to endure!

SHANTI’S COURTYARD, ATARA, JAUNPUR

This song identifies the nature of the young bride’s anxieties. We learn that the apprehensions of young women as they depart for their marital homes, articulated in the songs of earlier sections, are not unfounded. While the song evokes a bygone era, the persistent violence it describes resonates with the singers. The reality of the marital home turns out to be more grim and unnerving than expected. The repeated taunts of the mother-in-law, punctuated by her threats and acts of physical violence, are not merely intolerable but also induce alarming suicidal thoughts in this young bride. Here, it seems that the threat of a husband’s remarriage served to control women. The song hints at the reserves of inner strength a bride would need not only to endure but also to survive repeated abuse.

As young women grow up hearing at least some such songs, their socialization likely conditions them to be prepared for the worst, as outlined in the grinding songs. The singers, especially the older women who connected with the note of despair in the song, affirmed the relevance of the song’s simple message for women today. For feminists who continue to struggle with questions of ongoing violence against women in the domestic sphere, the song is a reminder of the persistent, ubiquitous, and hidden nature of domestic violence. Despite its prevalence across caste and class divides, the problem of domestic violence was not collectively confronted until the 1980s.

17

Likhen angurī se khunvā nikār citthiyā

Māi siyahiu ke tarase tohār bitiyā

Sāsū kahen beci āyi tohain hatiyā

Kahen kulbornī, pukārain dīn ratiyā
Aisan garībin se kāhe bhai sadiyā
Dubiyā ke charī na chuāyo morī dehiyā
Tobre anganvā atab kahiyā
Hamri jinigī me nāhī sukh nindiyā
Māngiyā ke sindūrā aur mathvā ke bindiyā
Khāi soyī jaharvā ke tikiyā
Tab to kahat rahī sunā morī dheyiā
Tohke mangāibe lagate joriyā
Cithiyā na bheje bitī gayī tithiyā
Beci dārā abkī tū sagaro phasaliyā
De dārā inkā tū motorcykiliyā
Nahin phir paibū hamār lasiyā
Māi siyahiu ke tarase . . .

She writes a letter dipped in blood from her finger.
 Mother, your daughter yearns for ink.
 Father-in-law says we'll sell you in the market.
 They say it's their clan I destroyed,
 Rue the marriage with a girl so impoverished.
 All day long just one thought,
 Not a blade of *dūb* grass has touched my skin.
 Now mother, your daughter yearns for ink.
 When will I enter that courtyard of yours?
 In this life there's no sleep of peace for me,
 The *sindūr* of parting or the forehead *bindi*
 I could consume a poisoned pellet.
 Then you had said, "Listen my daughter,
 we shall send for you at the auspicious hour."
 You did not write, the date has now passed.
 This time, you must sell your harvest
 To purchase for him a motorcycle
 Or else, this corpse of mine is all you may find.

SHANTI'S COURTYARD, ATARA, JAUNPUR

This song communicates the searing emotion of a young woman's abandonment within her marital home. The nature of the violence appears to be compounded by structural conditions regarding the trans-

ference of brides. Without a single ally in the marital home and alienated from virtually all of its members including her husband, the bride in the song finds herself in an alarming scenario, and the suicidal thoughts she entertains signal a collective cry.

Referring to signs of matrimony such as the *bindī*, the young bride bemoans the fact that not only are her femininity and sexuality ignored but also that she is deprived of participation in rituals and ceremonies, as confirmed by the reference of the dub grass, an essential ingredient of ritual. As we have seen above, the customary maintenance of social distance between a daughter's natal and conjugal households precluded frequent visits from her parents. This fact prevented natal families from closely monitoring their daughter's welfare in her conjugal home, at least in the initial years of integration, which could have precluded such occurrences. The last straw in the song is the reference to a dowry demand (the motorcycle) and the language of threat in which this demand is couched, a feature of the north Indian social milieu since the 1980s, when dowry-related violence became the subject of heated public discourse and outcry. As potential sources of evidence, however, these songs likely remained hidden from mainstream discourses until the easing of conditions permitted such taboo subjects to be openly discussed. The importance of unearthing and documenting such songs can scarcely be overstressed.

18

Mathavā pe hathvā ke jhokelī tiriyavā

Piyā beci khāi ho gailen na

Hamre nāihar ke gahanvā piyā beci khāi gailen ho na

Karā chharā, painje challā imirti dār

Gūngī nindiyā sūtale me more dhīre se nitāle nissār

Ki jiyarā derai ho gaile na

Ham to cor cor goharaulīn

Ki jiyarā derai ho gailen na

Jāgī gayin morī sāsū nanadiyā

Ghar bakharū ke log

Bac gailen nahin to bahutai pitaiten, achā rahā sanjog

Ki jiyarā lajai ho gailen na

Dekhalin cor rahā ghar hi ke, ki jiyarā lajāi gailen na

Kamar kardhani dhīre se more le gailen uthāi

*Na jāne kaun saut ke dibalen na janī kā kihlen
Kī isko pachāi ho gailen na*

A wife holds her head in despair.
The husband has sold off, consumed her wealth.
“The jewels of my natal home, husband consumed them all,
Bracelets and necklaces, anklets and amulets.
During my silent half sleep he crept up stealthily,
Scaring me like that.
I cried out ‘thief thief.’
So scared was I then.
My mother- and sister-in-law awoke,
And the household too.
He was saved a thrashing, that’s lucky for him.
So ashamed I felt.
A thief within the family, how embarrassing!
Gingerly, he picked up my waist belt.
Who knows to which ‘other’ woman he gave them
Or finished off with them.”

SHANTI’S COURTYARD, ATARA, JAUNPUR

In this song we learn of the theft of the woman’s *strīdhan*, the jewelry and valuables that constitute a woman’s personal wealth. Unlike the previous song’s reference to dowry, this one introduces the notion of women’s rights to their *strīdhan*, the “wealth given with the daughter at her marriage to use as the nucleus of the conjugal estate” (Tambiah and Goody 1973, 63), as well as women’s rights to property and to receive gifts from their natal households. Since husbands and relatives-in-law acquire no interest in this wealth, the song voices a woman’s justifiable grievance where this prohibition is violated. Such violations could not have been uncommon, and the song suggests the unlikelihood of women receiving justice in situations where the “thief” is none other than their husband or member of their close kin. Here, the husband takes his claims on his wife’s jewels for granted, but the woman’s sense of outrage is compounded by her speculation about their whereabouts.

The inconstant husband is a recurring theme in songs of the region. These songs flesh out husbands’ wayward tendencies, as well as the ten-

dency for various pieces of their wives' jewelry to be distributed to other lovers. They capture the anxieties of wives bound by the sacred bond of matrimony, a bond that is, however, repeatedly violated by their husbands. Many such songs also idolize the wandering hero, and the folklore is replete with the charms and attractions of yogis and ascetics of all kinds—men whose appeal is enhanced because, as wanderers and travelers, they remain free of worldly ties.

Songs by women of various castes, therefore, affirm the presence of domestic violence expressed in Bhagirathi Devi's song. These songs provide windows on the ongoing violence in conjugal homes. However, the songs stress the fact that dowry is by no means the only cause of the domestic violence. This material evokes the 1980s, when the middle-class women's movement mounted antidowry agitations, highlighting atrocities against women and disturbing the glamorized notion of the Indian family as the bedrock of Indian society (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). It became clear that, far from being a deep-rooted Indian tradition, dowry had attended the spread of caste hierarchies and consumerism. Recent research has highlighted the many atrocities perpetrated against women, some of which were only tangentially linked to dowry but have tended to get lumped under the term. However, it is dowry-related violence that has received special attention, with the term *dowry murder* papering over a range of sins (Oldenburg 1998, 220). Either way, the songs confirm the finding that while dowry may be associated with upwardly mobile groups seeking to emulate the practices of upper castes, all castes and classes of women are subject to forms of violence that exploit their extreme vulnerability as a result of village exogamy.

AN ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

Are you coming from your *naihar* (natal home) or your *pīhar* (marital home)? QUESTION
ADDRESSED TO A FIELDWORKER

Lest these disturbing songs suggest that only tragedy, trauma, and violence characterize conjugality, women's repertoires also feature playful songs that convey joyful messages about conjugal life. To put the above songs into perspective, therefore, I present the following two alternative scenarios. These songs were sung in groups amid relaxed laughter and

teasing. However, since every recording session had its share of tragic and buoyant songs, a realistic assessment of the variety of women's emotions must draw on both. These songs highlight how joy and suffering are inextricably intertwined, with one emotion giving way to another and with experience existing in the shades of grey, within the interstices.

19

Dhīre dhīre āvā naiharavā me bātī

Sone ki thālī me jevanā banavalī

Dhīre dhīre āva kitchenvā me bātī

Jhājhare gervā, gangajal pānī

Dhīre dhīre āvā mashīnave pe bātī

Lavanga elaichī ke bīra banaulen

Dhīre dhīre āvā ham birvā lihe bātī

Cuni cuni kaliyā mai sej laḡāiyon

Dhīre dhīre āvā ham duarvā pe bātī

Dhīre dhīre āvā naiharve me bātī

Come gently, I am in my natal home.
 In a golden plate I served the meal.
 Come gently, I am in the kitchen.
 Cooling Ganga water in the mud pot.
 Come gently, I am at the refrigerator.
 Made a paan with cloves and cardamom.
 Come gently, I have the pān ready.
 Picked the buds to make the bed.
 Come gently, I am just at the door.
 Come gently, I am in my natal home.

SHANTI'S COURTYARD, ATARA, JAUNPUR

The flirtatious playfulness of this song is characteristic of the kajlī genre, which I discussed in chapter 2. Unlike the grim messages of the preceding songs, the playful hide-and-seek motif here conveys both the joys and strengths of the marital bond. In songs with amorous motifs, “swinging” signifies sexual play, and women recount their sexual frustration when their overtures are deliberately thwarted. In hundreds of such women's songs, water and delicious food elegantly served are invariably followed by an offering of fragrant *pān* and an enticing conjugal bed

brushed with petals, a recurring motif. Alas, the lovers in such songs refuse each of their women's offerings, and the successive denial of each delectable offering builds the mood of rejection and abandonment, underscoring women's sexual disappointments. Each motif follows the next in a formulaic way, perhaps underscoring both the sensual pleasures as well as the rejection and denial of them.

Like the reference to the motorcycle in the song above, the reference to the refrigerator as a symbol of consumerism serves to illustrate how contemporary motifs and concerns creep into songs. In the song below, women search for a standard against which to measure the qualities of a good husband.

20

Galiyā khari car sakhiyā batāvā sakhi kiske patī hain

Pahilī bolī more Rama patī hain

Sitin ke rachavaiyā, batavā sakhi hamrā patī hai

Galiyan khari caron sakhiyan batavā sakhi kiske pati hain

Dūsri bolī morā Lachman patī hai

Sajivan būti ke leivayān batāvā sakhi hamrā patī hai

Tīsrī bolī morā Bholā patī hai

Damarū ke bajavaiyā sakhi jī mere patī hain

Galiyān khari cāron sakhiyā bbatāvā sakhi kiske patī hain

Cauthi bolī morā Kānhā patī hai

Bansiyā ke bajavaiyā, batāvā sakhi merā patī hai

Four friends in the lane take a guess about their husbands.

“Mine is Rama,” the first said.

“He who wed Sita, friend, he’s my husband.”

“My husband is Laxman,” the second said.

“He who brought the life-giving herb Sanjeevini, that’s my husband.”

“My husband is Bholenath [Shiva],” the third said.

“The one who plays on the damaru drum.”

“My husband is Krishna,” the fourth said.

“The one who plays the flute, my friend, that’s my husband.”

MUNRAJI AND SUBHAVATI, BARSARA, JAUNPUR

In this lighthearted song, women playfully declare the standards against which husbands will be judged. One of the ways in which the marital

bond might be imagined as sacred is elaborated here. The song puts into perspective the contrast between ideal, even god-like, husbands and the traumatic reality of the marital home, as witnessed in the preceding songs. The gulf between women's imaginations and the realities they face could hardly be starker. The opposing moods and emotions in the two sets of songs allow us to see just how contradictory the experience of marriage is for women. The following section explores other strains in the conjugal bond and the incompatibilities arising from various causes.

STRAINS IN THE CONJUGAL BOND

Misalliance in marriage was thought to be disruptive of "the ideal continuity of the sequence of matrimonial conjunctions" in a manner not unlike the way an eclipse disturbed the order of planetary movement. GUHA, "THE CAREER OF AN ANTI-GOD IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH," 3

In the section below, the young maiden departing for her marital home has finally transitioned to the next phase. The difficulties inherent in this transition, however, are rendered even more complex when the couple is mismatched or incompatible. Early marriages and alliances with substantially older men or with those much younger, and the resulting sexual incompatibilities, are hinted at. Despite the fact that misalliances and inappropriate matches are universally frowned upon, the songs of the region testify to their not infrequent occurrence. As such, the songs provide insights into what women perceive as constituting an inappropriate match.

Songs enumerating mismatches are particularly poignant given that in north India there is clearly an economic imperative for families to arrange good matches for their daughters (Papanek 1989, 103–4). Derne points out, "A father knows that arranging a proper marriage for a daughter supports a family's prosperity by protecting its honor and expanding its network of social ties" (Derne 1994, 83). The three songs below provide a glimpse of the incompatibility arising from a marriage between a woman and a significantly younger male. The recurrence of this image in the folklore is noteworthy for highlighting not only this particular lack of marital fulfillment but also, perhaps, its functioning as a metaphor for women's perceptions of other, harder to voice, incompatibilities.

21

*Jhuruke pavan puruwaitiā**Balam mor sanjhvai se soye gaye ho**Apanan mein phane batlaiyā balam mor**Sanjhvai se soi gaye ho**Sāsū jethāni karein bolā-cālī**Na jānin ratiyai ki pavatīhi khālī*

Gusts of easterly winds blow.

My love asleep since early evening.

My love converses with himself alone.

Asleep since the early evening.

Mother-in-law and elder sister-in-law talk on.

They know not my nights are empty.

SHANTI TEWARI, ATRA, JAUNPUR

In this song about a woman's disappointment, long nights stretch out interminably as the husband retires to bed early. On the other hand, household members who stay awake are perhaps able to guess at the woman's dilemma. They are undoubtedly aware of the woman's frustration, which further fuels her embarrassment. Since the husband is also disinclined to engage his wife in conversation, the song suggests that the incompatibility exists on several levels. The fact that newlyweds are surrounded by household members that seek to hinder the emergence of close ties between them is the theme of many songs.

Another recurring theme in these songs is of women lying in wait for truant husbands who sometimes return in the wee hours of the morning just when their wives are about to rise and begin their household responsibilities. Hence, frustrations and unfulfilled longings remain unresolved and are simply carried forward into the next day. Since the bond between husband and wife must be kept from developing in a way that would threaten the interests of other family members in the marital home, the new bride also personifies the risk that the groom might transfer his loyalty and affection to her. Thus, signs of developing attachment between the newlyweds are jealously monitored, and "attempts are made to curb a too rapidly developing conjugal intimacy, in the interests of maintaining the solidarity of the husband's patrilineal kin" (Raheja 1994, 28).

A whole genre of songs captures the brevity, furtiveness, even clandestine nature of the meetings between the new bride and groom. Kakar cites Gore's study of men from the Agarwal community where "these constraints, masterminded by the older women, usually succeed in their aims" (Kakar 1988, 64).

Shanti Tewari and her friends sang this song with irony and good humor. When I asked Shanti about the meaning of the song for her, she explained, "women's songs are precisely about such disappointments as well as pleasures, both big and small." Shanti's song reminded me of the following song, which I heard often in the countryside, a version of which is presented below.

22

Banvāri ho, hamrā larikā bhatār
Larikā bhatār leke sutalī osaravā
Banvāri ho, rahrī me bolelā sīyār
Khole ke t colī-bandā, kholele kewār
Banvāri ho jari gaile airī se kapār
Rahrī me suni ke sīyariyā ke boliyā
Banvāri ho, rove lagale larikā bhatār
Anganā se māi ailīn, duarā se bahinā
Banvāri ho, ke māral babuā hamār?

Dear god, my husband is just a little boy.
 With my boy-husband on the roof I slept.
 Lord, the jackal calls in the field of *arhar*.
 Instead of my blouse ties, he opens the door.
 God, that burnt me up from heel to head.
 From the field, when the jackal calls he heard.
 Lord, the husband-boy just started to cry.
 From the courtyard came mother and sister next door.
 God, who's been beating our little one so?

UPADHYAYA 1990B, 122

The incompatibility arises from the immaturity of the husband. The song is a lighthearted commentary on incongruous situations that might arise from age disparities, such as when older brides marry younger grooms. The singers agreed that such songs served as warnings

against unnatural marriage alliances. Here, the reference to the “jackal in the field of *arhar*” hints at the likelihood of extramarital affairs developing in the face of such incompatibility. Since the fields of the long *arhar* plants are known to serve as the ideal hiding place for lovers, the reference to the *arhar* fields evokes clandestine meetings and infidelity, the lover being like the jackal, a treacherous animal that creeps into the fields in the dark. Songs that cast an ironic glance at social mores usually promoted great mirth and relaxed banter during our recording sessions.

23

Bārah baris sāsū naihare mein bītāvale

Tab le āye u gavanvā na

Bārah kisim ka sāsū jevanā banāveli

Pūt taharā na āiye bhavanvā na

Abahi t bahuver pūt larikā nadanvā

Mālin sange khele phūlgenvā na

Twelve years, mother-in-law, I spent in my natal home.

Then he brought me to my marital one.

Mother-in-law, I cooked twelve different dishes.

But your son does not visit me in the boudoir.

“Daughter-in-law, my son is yet a child immature

Plays flower balls with the gardener’s daughter.”

MUNRAJI, BARSARA, JAUNPUR

Elaborating on this theme of marital incompatibility, this fragment from a longer ballad voices the complaints of a young bride who has just joined her groom’s household. However, the groom, who, owing to a reference to a “palace,” is clearly upper caste, remains oblivious of her while sporting with the gardener’s daughter. The fragment is interesting for its pun on “play” or “sport,” which suggests that the upper-caste groom will engage in sexual play with the lower-caste gardener’s daughter once he has matured. These meditations on the nature of incompatibilities enrich our understanding of the complexity of the marital bond. However, it is not just the obvious age factor that contributes to sexual inadequacies and women’s perceptions of incompatibility. Women’s songs document other sources of conjugal dissatisfaction and

afford women a space within which to voice their anxieties and frustrations with their conjugal lives.

This chapter, though a focus on songs associated with marriage, aimed to analyze those emotions that cannot be apprehended by observing the ritual structure of the wedding ceremony alone. My concern with emotions also highlighted the structural ambivalences and contradictions that attend momentous phases in a woman's life cycle. For instance, the songs might reveal the presence of mixed emotions: anxiety with joy; affection with anger; feelings associated with the loss of rights with feelings of excitement. The tendency of prior research to refer exclusively to structural patterns while ignoring the rich emotional life that forms the backdrop to these patterns has left us with an understanding of marriage as a rite of passage that is at best partial and empty of its powerful emotive content. One could also argue that since the ritual action serves to disguise and contain the attendant emotional states, the songs alone hold the key to these emotions.

Moreover, since emotions cannot be rigidly controlled, they tend to spill over into successive phases of the life cycle. While the rites of passage seek to formalize and facilitate the transition from one phase to the next, the emotions associated with these transitions are not so easily contained. Thus, for women, unity symbolized by the *biyāh* also spells sorrow, separation (*birahā*), and uncertainty. Thus, throughout women's lives, the continuously mounting pressures may sometimes be alleviated and released through song or through other rituals in which singing plays a critical role. In this sense, I also sought in this chapter to advance Max Gluckman's (1965) theoretical insights into rites of passage that disguise, but ultimately cannot completely control, the uncertainty inherent in such transitions.

If one were to take seriously, as Gluckman and others do, the idea that rituals of rebellion function like valves that let off steam, then these songs allow us to imagine the process as a diachronic, sequential movement. However, these songs could just as well be seen as "letting in steam," especially given the affective quality of many of them. It is precisely the multidimensional, multilayered nature of such expressions that allows for complex, sometimes radically divergent and counter-intuitive, readings.

The songs not only reflect the social reality but also pose alternate

worlds for women who do not yet participate in them. They allow women to imagine their lives by creating the worlds they desire, thus giving meaning to their aspirations. These images, embedded deep within the collective consciousness, serve then to justify the anxiety produced in the bride and her kin at her departure. Moreover, despite the integrative impulse that seeks to incorporate the bride into her marital home, the immediate effect of separating her from her natal home is one of isolation. In fact, it is rare that such integration is achieved at all, and if it is, then only incompletely, gradually, and after considerable struggle.

A key insight that emerged from my conversations in the field was the paradoxical nature of weddings for brides. Indeed, in their specific ritual contexts, the songs serve to underline these contradictions: the heightened sense of tragedy combined with relief; repeated feasting followed by wrenching, prolonged farewells and leave-taking. It is the lack of resolution, the incomplete nature of the process that comes through in the songs. It is the loose, jagged edges of reality that are effectively captured therein. By presenting the context within which these songs are typically heard, I aimed in this chapter to highlight the power of the astonishingly candid articulation of women's lives as they apprehend them. The anxieties reflected in the songs are likely to ease with women marrying when they are older in years and with decreasing emphasis on village exogamy and virilocality, the alarming isolation of women is also bound to reduce.

Women's increasing familiarity with the Hindu Code bill promulgated in 1986 whereby women have a right to the self-acquired property of fathers and their increasing ability to sustain ties with their mothers, siblings, aunts, and other natal kin point to changes. Moreover, today sisters and brothers enjoy an equal share in their families' urban property, usually houses etc. rather than cultivable land (Basu 1999). Meanwhile, dowries have grown, as the value of agricultural land and urban property has increased exponentially and as the line between dowry and property has faded (Oldenburg 2002, 224). The songs alert us to the need for interventions at the policy level and for consciousness-raising to encourage women to think of their natal homes not as temporary shelters but as their anchors and birthrights (224). Finally, as women rebel and assert their rights, violence against women is expected to grow; therefore women must create their own institutions and organize not only for reform but also for social justice and rights (225).