

## ↪ When Marriage Is War

The “meaning” of this or any other epic is not purely or even primarily determined by the text. Meaning, significance and especially the power to reproduce social groupings are a function not of text but of context—that is, of culture and history.

WILLIAM S. SAX, *DANCING THE SELF*, 95

Today, dowry, gifts, conspicuous consumption, and the enormous expenditure bride-givers incur are understood as the hallmarks of north Indian marriage celebrations. How can we supplement a gendered understanding of marriage, both its logic and celebratory aspects, with sociological insights obtained through folk narratives? In what ways do oral narratives serve to balance our undue reliance on scriptural and textual evidence when seeking to explain the nature of marriage as a form of exchange (Dumont 1966, 1970; Trautmann 1982; Inden and Nicholas 2005)?

Among north Indian ballads, the *Lorikāyan*, known for its rich descriptions of the various aspects of marriage and articulating the values, aspirations, and motifs of dominance and subordination, offers extraordinarily rich insights into this rite of passage. One of the most popular *gāthā* (ballads) of the Bhojpuri-speaking region, as a mas-

culine performance tradition it complements the feminine song genres I have analyzed so far.

The Lorikāyan's martial, masculine focus and hero-centered narrative, concerned predominantly with the nature of power and physical prowess in a geographically vast and socially complex universe, is the context within which we explore how gender is socially constructed by caste patriarchies (see Flueckiger 1996). Here, masculinity is delineated as a public social status striven for and maintained in specific social contexts, rather than as an innately present quality (O'Hanlon 1997, 3). In addition to marriage, this chapter also seeks clarity on other themes and issues of contemporary relevance raised by the text—for example, the consolidation of caste patriarchies and mechanisms for establishing and maintaining control over women.

The Yadavas, a broad caste group comprising several allied subcastes that are historically concerned with issues of identity and seeking upward mobility and together constitute one-tenth of India's total population, claim the ballad as their own, and as such it offers insights into processes relating to intermediate castes (Rao 1979, 123–241). Specifically, the Yadava category comprises cognate castes such as Ahirs, Gopas, Goalas, and Abhiras, all of whom claim descent from the Yadus, the dynasty to which Krishna is said to belong (124). While Yadavas occupy several regions, they are concentrated in the Ganges plains, where they account for 10 percent of the population. They form one of the largest caste groups in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, respectively constituting 8.7 and 11 percent of the population according to the 1931 census<sup>1</sup> (Rao 1979; Jaffrelot 2003, 188). The assertiveness of the Yadava caste, which constitutes the upper crust of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, in the Bhojpuri-speaking belt after Independence heighten the significance of the ballad, which reflects the aspirations and values of this large and upwardly mobile caste group. Since the 1980s, the Yadavas have been rapidly replacing Brahmins and Kshatriyas as the dominant caste in the countryside.<sup>2</sup> Since Independence, the caste has doubled the amount of land it controls by systematically investing the wealth it gained from dairying and government service in land. The post-Independence land reforms, which benefited mid-level castes in particular, helped the Yadavas consolidate their economic and political base (Jaffrelot 2003). The rise to power of

the Samajwadi party in Uttar Pradesh and of the Janata Dal in Bihar are representative of this trend. The consolidation of Yadava strength is reflected not only in the power structure but also at various levels of administration, including the district, *tehsil* (block), and village levels. Owing to a state policy that supports both reservations and affirmative action, the Yadavas are now recognized as an educated class often employed in government and police bureaucracies (field notes; Jaffrelot 2003). Details provided in an article published in Patna's newspaper, the *Telegraph*, on 2 October 2002 contextualizes the contemporary appeal of the hero, Lorik, claimed by the Yadavas as belonging to the Yadava caste.<sup>3</sup>

According to the popular understanding, the wealth of the Yadava caste is attributable in part to the industrious nature of Yadava women, who in the past contributed their share of labor to the caste's dairying as well as agrarian production. Today, however, the withdrawal of women from work in the fields for the purpose of "status-production" is a distinctive feature of Yadava upward mobility (Papanek 1989; Srinivas 1962). Upwardly mobile groups' typical undervaluation of women's labor and their consequent "hiring in" of labor for agricultural tasks are trends that also characterize the Yadavas (Jassal 2001, 49–63). We find a graduated scale of women's work, with women's complete withdrawal from agriculture, in imitation of the Kshatriya model, being the approved norm. For women, these trends translate into other kinds of seclusion as well, such as restricted mobility and visibility in public spaces, in conformity with the veiling norms for Kshatriya women.

This chapter is divided into four sections: The first section identifies the features of the *birahā* singing tradition to which the ballad belongs for the purpose of appreciating how the epic reproduces, and is in turn reproduced by, the Yadava caste. The second section provides a broad outline of the ballad's plot, followed by a discussion of its treatment of marriage and how it imagines this rite of passage as a battle that ends in the redressing of power between two opposing groups. The third section focuses on the ballad's construction of gender, exploring specific caste patriarchies, followed by a discussion of women's agency. The last section attempts to locate the ballad within historical processes that concern the Yadavas, such as their ongoing struggles to achieve Sanskritization<sup>4</sup> and greater power and visibility.

## THE PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

The Lorikāyan is sung at celebrations ranging from betrothals (*Tilak*) to festivals and, as the renowned professional birahā singer Hiralal Yadav of Benaras points out, “this is the singular and typical form of entertainment among Yadavas.” Hiralal Yadav says that he rarely performs the entire epic from beginning to end and usually sings only the most popular segments, such as the episodes dealing with Lorik’s marriage. His comments confirm Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger’s observation that Indian oral epics are “performed episodically, with popular episodes being performed most frequently and sometimes, with considerable interaction from audiences that are likely to have a general knowledge of the epic” (Flueckiger 1989b, 428). Such audiences are also more likely to seek connections with the epic’s emotional or devotional content rather than with developments in its narrative per se. Flueckiger found in Chattisgarh, for instance, that men are also more likely than women to “identify genres with the wider communities of which they are a part, such as village or region, rather than with the more limited group of performers only,” likely because women enjoy a comparative lack of mobility (Flueckiger 1996, 181).

When asked to explain the meaning of birahā, Hiralal Yadav waxes lyrical: “To simply sing out the cry of separation is birahā: the separation that the cowherdesses experienced when they were separated from Lord Kirshna; the agony Sita experienced when separated from Ram. Birahā emerges from *virah* (separation). To experience a defeat is birahā, to be abducted is birahā; pining for god, for one’s guru, the music that emerges from all these separations is birahā” (Hiralal Yadav). At the invitation of Hiralal Yadav, in 2001 I attended a birahā performance at Tengra Mor on the outskirts of Varanasi, where I first heard him sing an excerpt from the Lorikāyan. The audience at this particular performance was largely working-class or self-employed. Many were petty traders, rickshaw pullers, drivers, and sundry other specialists employed in the city of Varanasi. As a guest of this noted birahā singer, I was delighted to be seated right in front, but I soon found that I was the only woman present and therefore extremely conspicuous! However, a few hours into the concert, my host politely asked me to leave, as the audience was becoming restive in anticipation of the bawdy and sexually explicit singing to follow. I was reluctant to leave since the music was so delightful and entertaining,

but I could see that the audience around me was getting dangerously tipsy, and upon realizing that my informant and escort for the evening was also high, my maestro host called an auto-rickshaw and summarily had me packed off home!

Luckily, this was not before I had heard at least four of the teams competing that night, each representing a distinct *akharā* or musical style associated with a particular guru. The singing took the form of a challenge to the rival group, which in turn had to respond musically. Like those of women, men's singing traditions forge strong community ties. The popularity of men's wrestling *akharās* has been documented, but these were modeled upon and drew inspiration from the musical *akharās* that promoted the growth of distinct musical traditions and styles under the direction of accomplished gurus (Marcus 1989). Through *akharās* and their affiliation with a common teacher and his teachings, groups of men were bound to each other.

The audience at Tengra Mor repeatedly interrupted the performance as individuals approached the stage with small offerings of money between Rs.5 and Rs.10. The protocol of the concert demanded that the singer recognize the patrons as they made their offerings. This meant that the singer was forced to stop singing in order to call out the individual's name and often also the sum he had offered. While the format allowed not only for the expression of appreciation but also for the recognition of the audience in the public arena and for the momentary basking of the patrons in the singer's glory, the interruptions were frustrating to me. Unlike in radio song request programs, where the names of those requesting the song are announced before or after the song, these steady interruptions came during the singing itself, which tested my patience and prolonged the entire show interminably. However, the audience hardly seemed to mind and appeared to be prepared to camp out for the entire night.

The singers sang standing up, sometimes resting on a *lāthi* (staff), a feature of the biraha Yadava tradition.<sup>5</sup> The most thrilling aspect of the event was that the lyricists, who were seated on stage along with the musical orchestra as part of the team, composed the stanzas on the spot. The singing involved a vast amount of theatrical expression, and the singer sometimes stepped forward, practically enacting the mood and character of the song, much like one would see in a Western opera. The

many percussionists kept the beat very lively and entertaining, and the entire team maintained their steady improvisation in response to the mood of the audience.

Hiralal Yadav explained that the Lorikāyan is an integral part of this birahā singing tradition of the Yadavas. He points out that the conventions of the tradition are a legacy of nineteenth-century musical duels that appear to have been significant in the socialization of male youth. Evoking the spirit of the duel and competitive wrestling matches between contesting teams, belonging to an akharā appears to be an important, though under-researched, aspect of masculine folk singing in north India. Affiliation with an akharā ensured the continuity of singing traditions (*paramparā*) as well as the teachings of the guru on which the akharā was centered, yet, as the ballad delineates, it also appears to have forged ties and sensibilities that were in opposition to ascriptive, hierarchical, caste-based ones (Brass 2003; Marcus 1989).

During my fieldwork in the region, I found that the notion that musical challenges could help to deflect real conflicts was something of a popular wisdom. The following section outlines the main plot of the Lorikāyan, which I variously refer to as an *epic*, *ballad*, and *chronicle*.

#### THE PLOT: TWO WEDDINGS AND AN ELOPEMENT

First, I must stress that there is no single text that can be called the Lorikāyan, since “living epic traditions are not static but continue to change and respond to the communities in which they are performed” (Blackburn et al. 1989, 7). Indeed, in some regions the epic is known as the Chanaini, after its heroine, and it was also the inspiration for Maulana Daud’s Chandayan, a medieval Sufi literary text (Hines 2007). For the purposes of this chapter, I draw on the translated and written Bhojpuri version of the ballad recorded by S. M. Pandey in the 1970s and 80s (Pandey 1987). This version is based on the recordings of the singer Sivnath Chaudhuri, made in 1966 and constituting 48 hours of audiotape.<sup>6</sup>

The Lorikāyan gāthā, or chronicle, traces the main events of the life of its hero, Lorik, who undertook extraordinary travel adventures, at least three romantic interludes and marriages, and innumerable feats of heroism on the battlefield. Lorik’s divinity is hinted at; he is understood as a godly incarnation tasked with rooting out evil, and hence his lore paral-

lels that of the mythical Krishna, who was also a Yadava. The personification of bravery, Lorik gained his superhuman qualities and extraordinary battle prowess as gifts from the goddess Durga who appears to assist the hero, her devotee, at every turn.

The ballad begins when the young Manjari, inspired by a divine intervention, announces that her marriage must be settled with none other than brave Lorik, the cow-herder from Gaura. In fact, she goes on a *satyāgraha* or hunger strike until her marriage is arranged. In foretelling her marriage, Manjari proclaims the name of the hero who will liberate her caste of cowherds from the tyrannical king of Agori, according to whose ruling all young women of the territory are to be handed over to him for his harem. The narrative establishes early on that the hero has been incarnated to save the honor of this herding and dairying caste. By extension, and as processes of Sanskritization have illustrated in other contexts and periods, it comes as no surprise that Lorik will achieve this in part by preserving the honor of the women of the caste, as well as establishing stricter controls on them.

When the Nai (caste of barber) and the Brahmin priest (in accordance with folk traditions) arrive at Gaura carrying the marriage proposal sent by Manjari's father, we meet Chanaini, the femme fatale of the ballad. Chanaini tricks them and leads them to her home to settle Manjari's marriage with her brother in place of Lorik. The raja of Gaura then threatens to kill all those who participate in Lorik's marriage to Manjari. After innumerable hurdles and the crossing of many rivers, mountains, and forests, the *savā lākḥ* (huge) marriage party, comprising 360 *carvāhas* (herders) clad in battle attire and joined by increasing numbers, arrive at Agori to solemnize the marriage. The marriage party, encamped in the surrounding thorny fields, resembles an army at war.

The hero marries Manjari, and the bride and the groom both receive elaborate gifts and prestations. The last and final hurdle before the newlyweds can leave is the war that must be fought with the king of Agori and his numerous Kshatriya allies. This is a righteous war fought by Lorik and his enormous army and, ultimately, an emancipatory one as the oppressive king is killed. The episode ends with the newlyweds and the entire marriage party moving to Gaura. A second marriage is celebrated shortly after, that of Lorik's elder brother to Satiya, the daughter of a Kshatriya king.

The central character in the next episode is Chanaini, the daughter of the Ahir king of Gaura, Lorik's native village, and the woman who attempted to divert Lorik's marriage proposal to her own brother. In this episode, Chanaini shows even more pluck and resilience as she manages to escape from her impotent husband. Traveling alone, she is pursued by Bathwa, a lower-caste Chamar, who attempts to seduce her. After she rejects his advances, the wily Chamar then attempts to terrorize all the inhabitants of her village by polluting the village wells. Lorik is summoned to fight Bathwa and defeats and kills him, but he is filled with remorse when he discovers that Bathwa was his *gurubhaī* as they shared the same guru at their akharā. The episode raises interesting questions about the ability of akharā affiliation to transcend caste rigidities.

Chanaini is now desperate to meet Lorik, and her chance soon comes at a banquet her father hosts and to which he invites all Yadavas.<sup>7</sup> The seduction of Chanaini by Lorik is a fascinating tale involving the construction of a sturdy rope by which Lorik gains entry into her chamber, Manjari's eventual discovery of the clandestine affair, and the circumstances surrounding Chanaini and Lorik's elopement. The lovers escape to far-off lands and have innumerable adventures on the way. Manjari, Lorik's chaste wife, forgotten and abandoned by her husband, falls on hard times. This episode offers a tantalizing glimpse of the agency of women. The episodes that narrate the elopement and the couple's flight from Gaura offer a robust, entertaining tale in which the hero and the heroine are well matched.

In the last section of the ballad, Lorik learns that the Kols, the Chandals, the Turks of Gajangarh, and the people of Paranpur have mounted a four-pronged attack on Gaura and made off with his family's cattle and wealth, after killing Lorik's brother. Saddened, Lorik returns to Gaura and reunites with the now impoverished Manjari. In the final episodes of the ballad, Lorik's mother and wife, robbed of their cattle, are reduced to selling yoghurt in the bazaar. In the last episode, Lorik commits suicide, and while there is no victory or kingdom to be won, Lorik's dignity and honor are restored. In the section below, we sidestep several of the epic's important themes and issues to focus on what it might have to teach about marriage. In subsequent sections, I tease out the significance of sociological elements and motifs relating to the construction of gender by caste patriarchies.



The genius of the folk epic lies in its operation as a prototype for contemporary marriage celebrations in north India. Upwardly mobile groups appear to model their marriages after the one laid out in the ballad. The destabilization of power between opposing groups, which is at the heart of all north Indian marriages, is a significant insight that emerges from the opening sections of the *gathā*. We learn about the struggles and strategies wife givers and wife takers use to achieve a state of equilibrium between their parties, given the powerful shift in the usual status of these groups that has transpired. In the ballad, once the groups have collectively agreed to the marriage, profound shifts begin to occur in the physical and social universe, shifts that require immediate resolution through the deployment of a range of resources, both economic and noneconomic—for example, wealth, clan, caste, and village support—as well as other virtues such as physical strength, fearlessness, and intangibles such as wisdom, wit, and the ability to make decisions. It would appear that marriage provides the singular occasion to test the strength of the economic, social, and cultural capital of each member of the two groups arrayed against each other in the transaction. The orchestrated way in which the destabilizing as well as the constructive aspects of marriage are worked out and resolved in the folk imaginary call for layered understandings of this rite of passage.

It is necessary, here, to revisit the precise moment—in the chain of events from which the symbolic significance of the action may be inferred—that Lorik accepts the proposal of marriage to Manjari, brought to him by the barber and Brahmin from the bride's natal home in Agori. To complicate matters, there are other contenders for the groom's hand, lacing the situation with heartache and conflict from the very start. Lorik turns down each of these proposals. In retaliation, the rejected parties, in this case the powerful king Sehdev of Lorik's own village, who had offered Lorik his daughter's hand, prevents Lorik's *barat* from leaving the village to solemnize the wedding. Lorik rightly laments, "we've only begun and here is the first hurdle." But in the epic as in life, every restriction is ultimately an opportunity to be seized headlong, and in this as in others of such magnitude, we find Lorik's father literally rising to the occasion with a leap and declaring, "now you have a chance to see my masculinity."

The *barāt*, comprising *savā lākh* members, is like an army charging into battle that "runs by day and walks by night." After two days of

grueling struggle, they rest, staking out, it would seem, territories of support as well as planning their subjugation of resisting kings. On reaching the territory of a powerful king, the groom's father, Kathait, devises a strategy calculated to disrupt and provoke fear in the local populace and stir in the local ruling king speculation about the comparative strength and power of this unknown visiting army. The motif of the Ahirs/Yadavas challenging Kshatriya dominance is introduced here. Faced with his next hurdle, the groom prepares for battle with his "electrifying" sword while the king aims his arrows. In a series of dazzling sword fights, the hero cuts down the enemy like "peasants threshing wheat," the *barāt* (army) moves on to its next challenge: crossing the Son River, on whose banks the enemy forces are positioned to prevent their passing into Agori. A friendly boatman of the Mallah caste (one of the many lower castes who prove worthy allies) defies his orders and ferries the army across the river while Kathait, the groom's aged father, demonstrates his agility and masculinity yet again by rowing himself across.

On arriving in Agori, the *barāt* is met by the bride's mother's brother who plays an excellent go-between, carrying messages between the groom and the bride with great efficiency. The first message he delivers is an inquiry from the bride's mother about where the party is to set up camp. Now comes the moment for the bride's mother to show her power, and she does so by suggesting they camp in a thorny field filled with overgrown vegetation. Far from the subservience one would expect from the bride's mother in contemporary times, here in the folk imaginary we find a stunning example of an ingenious and powerful shrew who takes every opportunity to humble her opponents, the bride-takers, daring them to beat a retreat should they find themselves outwitted by the challenges she hurls their way. What ensues next is a battle of wits, rather like a chess game in which each move is undercut by a countermove. When offered the thorny field, for instance, the groom's inveterate father slashes away the thorny growth, clearing the field in no time.

The battle of wits continues as the bride's mother then sends the *barāt* a ration large enough to feed an army, with the condition that not a grain of rice must be left behind. The bride-takers eat what they can and dump the remaining provisions into the Son River, evoking the conspicuous consumption of today's wedding celebrations. The bride's mother then sends her daughter's future father-in-law some chaff with which to fash-

ion a rope, which proves to be a key prop in her next elaborate bid to embarrass the groom's party, but Kathait counters this request by demanding an inverted sieve with which hold the water for moistening the rope. These highly symbolic games continue long after the marriage ritual has been completed. Among these games is the groom's mother's fashioning of a golden water goblet for the *barāt*—a goblet she then orders stolen with a view to causing uproar among the guests. How the hero and his brother, disguised as yogis who carrying on a symbolic conversation with the galaxies, cross even this hurdle constitutes another layer of this fantastic tale.

These episodes highlight the ingenuity of women and their own battles for power. From the start, the epic celebrates the strength and ingeniousness of women and their demonstrations of power, much of which would likely remain unknown, were it not for such ballads. Even the minor female characters in the ballad of Lorik are towers of strength, imaginative and enterprising and ready to challenge the male order. For instance, the series of traps that the bride's mother lays to embarrass Lorik's marriage party are devices through which she conducts an elaborate symbolic conversation with the groom's father, who rises to meet all the challenges and contests she throws his way, with great aplomb. That the bride's mother is the initiator of these mind games is itself remarkable; that she is also the one who judges their handling of these challenges raises interesting questions about gender expectations among peasants.

*Āju bhāi dhani dhani na paniyāh, paun tīrath kai*  
*Jehavān k hovai maradvā ba budhī re mān*  
*Āju bhāi bār bār na argar hamre dālī*  
*Samadhiy kātiya karat bārein khay re kār*  
*Ohī din sunah re haliyā Kathait ke*  
*Bolt banāh laramvāh, kai re boleu*  
*Āju bhāi bār bār aygarvā je samdhi dālen*  
*Kāti keni hambyun na kailīn khay re kāur*

The bride's mother said, "Glory to the waters of that sacred land  
 Where the men are so intelligent.  
 Ever so many obstacles and riddles I laid out,  
 Yet the groom's father found solutions to all."  
 Now listen to what happened next with Kathait.

He said, "Grave and important problems were raised by the bride's mother  
And now I have a riddle of my own for you."

PANDEY 1987, 60

Lorik's father, displaying ready wit, presence of mind, and foresight, is able to skillfully outwit the bride's mother and emerges victorious on behalf of the marriage party. The episodes, like knots or riddles that must be untied before transformations can occur, serve as hurdles the party must overcome before it can move on to the next stage (see Hasan-Rokem and Shulman 1996). Just as Yudhishtira, at the end of the Mahabharata war, was called upon to answer Yama's questions, the bridegroom's party is subjected to tests of wit before the prize, the bride Manjari, can be claimed. Handelman, describing these ritual games as "Traps of Transformation," has highlighted the ritual aspect of these exchanges at rites of passage, their purpose being to effect changes and transformations in the results by introducing paradoxes into the predictable course of action (Handelman 1996, 37–61).

These episodes resonate with insights into marriage transactions; the heightened sense of rivalry between and solidarity within groups the marriage context engenders; and the need to manage the potential conflicts and conflagrations that the close proximity of, and extended period of interactions between, the two rival groups might engender. We see that, as in warfare, both sides must be as well matched as the couple entering into matrimony. This insight is significant, owing precisely to the nature of the interactions. The ballad details these exchanges with a precision reminiscent of a cricket match commentary.

The sense of spectacle, theatrics, and high drama culminates in the bride's seemingly bizarre, last-minute requests, which the members of her natal clan must fulfill before she condescends to mount the bridal carriage and depart for the groom's home. This moment in the proceedings appears to be a potentially rich one for the bride, who can demand the fulfillment of otherwise impossible requests. It is the bride who, at this moment, strongly demands her dowry. If this scene is representative of ongoing traditions, then the sanction and legitimacy that the bride's demands appear to receive raises questions about women's rights to the wealth and property of their natal homes, a right they would have had to forgo, especially if their marital homes were geographically far from their natal ones.

We know from the sociology of upper-caste marriage networks that the logic behind arranging upper-caste marriages between geographically distant households was in part aimed at thwarting any claims outmarrying brides might have over their natal property (Jassal 2001; Berreman 1993). Lorik's brother explains this convention using a simpler logic.

*Aju bhāi karab bibahvā na hamare gaunvā  
Dinvāh din kai hoi re kal re kaunau  
Kaunau gharī khātire āpdhva hoī re jaiheun  
Selahiya dhāngai duarvā re hamāur  
Ohi din marab bhuvanvā je hoi re jaiheun*

I shall not marry within the village,  
For any day, on some pretext or other,  
At any time, should a misunderstanding occur,  
My mother-in-law might cross over my threshold,  
And that would spell doom in my own home.

PANDEY 1987, 34

It is interesting that the Lorikāyan, a folk text concerned with the aspirations of upwardly mobile groups seeking affirmation of the Kshatriya lifestyle, emphasizes the enormity of this distance by asserting that it took the marriage party three months and nine days to cover the distance between the bride's natal and marital homes.<sup>8</sup>

*Biti gayal tīniya mahinvah, ter re rojai  
Tesarke ailī na handaiyā, re pahunci  
Ohi ghari nauāh babhanvān je bel re vai kai  
Cauk kannan na thikvāh, hoi re gainau*

When three months and thirteen days had passed,  
On the thirteenth day, the wedding palanquin returned.  
At that moment, the Barber and Brahmin were sent for,  
And the courtyard anointed and cleaned.

PANDEY 1987, 34

While this description evokes the metaphor of the battle and the return of the victorious army with its spoils, it also subtly draws attention to another fact asserted at different points in the text, namely, the unlikelihood that the bridal couple will ever return to the bride's natal home.

In chapter 3 and elsewhere, I have explored the implications of this severance from the bride's natal homes in terms of its implications for women's land rights (Jassal 2001, 22–25).

In his analysis of martial epics, David Shulman provides a highly abstract but convincing argument about the “battlefield [as] an arena in which life is dissolved back into the chaos from which it emerged. The battle also reproduces the originally agonistic structure of the sacrifice as a contest in which two parties vie for the life won from death” (Shulman 1986, 124). Shulman develops the twin ideas of marriage as sacrifice and of battle as marriage based on Tamil myths. He points out, “Again, there is a creative side to the destruction wrought in both these forums: the chaotic forces released in sexual union, on the one hand, and in battle, on the other, ultimately serve to replenish and sustain the ever-vulnerable forces of life” (Shulman 1986, 124).

If indeed, as Shulman so persuasively suggests, the disorder of the battlefield is a metaphor for life, the battle itself represents the opportunity to restore order to chaos and to secure the triumph of virtue, purity, limitation, and control (124). In the wars Lorik fought, the central drive appears to be the will to assert the new reality of Yadava supremacy over the prevailing Kshatriya dominant order. While the success of the wars Lorik fights in terms of achieving these aims is inconclusive, the search for order, control, and limitation emerge conclusively as goals. For instance, it is possible to argue that through Lorik's marriage to Manjari, who personifies upper-caste values, the ballad seeks to reconcile the released chaotic energies and harness them in the service of greater patriarchal order, restriction, and control. Also, Lorik's own death, staged as an act of sacrifice, suggests transformation and renewal.

As I pointed out above, and perhaps reflective of the nature of medieval wars, an extraordinary feature of Lorik's biography is that marriages become the pretext as well as the occasion and site for the conduct of warfare in the interests of caste mobility. The groom's marriage preparations and *barāt* processions resemble those of armies marching into war, and, invariably, the marriage sites are transformed into battlefields complete with bloodshed, the clash of steel, and the separation of the victors from the vanquished. The ballad confirms D. D. Kosambi's observation that women and wealth were the two main causes of war (Kosambi 1975).

However, in the context of the ballad, another reason acquires equal validity. By defeating the ruling dynasties, the Yadavas, under the direction of Lorik, subjugate and lay claim to the kingdoms of the wife-givers, thus re-enacting an original sociological truth—the *anuloma* axiom that wife-takers are superior to wife-givers. According to this rule, daughters must marry up, and, since in this case the wife-takers are of a lower caste than the wife-givers, it is possible to restore social equilibrium only by vanquishing the bride's people. Hence, the superiority of the wife-takers can only be demonstrated in battle and can only be established by winning that battle. The structural inequality between wife-givers and wife-takers thus provides a convenient rationale for the ensuing warfare, though the text also provides a host of other more convincing reasons. Victory in such wars, then, serves as the means for a group to assert and proclaim its status as well as to establish alternate centers of rule. If a group's claim to rulership had to be preceded by its earning the right to claim kshatriya status, then proof of victory through war might have been only the first step in that direction.

#### WOMEN'S AGENCY IN A MALE BALLAD

The extraordinary illustration of women's agency in the opening chapters of the ballad, namely, the young Manjari's announcement of the name of the person she has decided to marry and her undertaking of a hunger strike to underscore her decision, elevates personal action to the realm of the political. This politicization derives from the fact that, although her insistence is based on a metaphysical revelation, the husband she is demanding to take in marriage has been incarnated as the savior of the entire caste. In today's rural context, where scarcely any young women have even the remotest say in this matter, this lends a fantastic element to the ballad and also parallels Sita's *svayamvar* (self-decision in marriage).<sup>9</sup> The feminine power whose ubiquitous and significant presence easily identifies this ballad as a warrior epic is the power of Durga, which, used in the service of male warriors, "ironically denies to women the very sense of embodied power that the male ideology asserts they possess" (Caldwell 1999, 31).

The resourcefulness of the bride's mother is another example of female power. Yet another is Chanaini's flight from her impotent husband. As

she approaches the forest near her natal home, she encounters Bathwa Chamar, who tries to seduce her. Her response is to evoke her chastity, through which she hoodwinks the Chamar and escapes. At the expiatory feast given by her father, Chanaini, also referred to as Chanva or Chanda, flirts with Lorik, initiating a clandestine affair that eventually becomes public, and the two plan to elope.

*Jharokhvā se Canvāh ankariyāh bāi re phenkat  
 Ahirā ke girtī patilvāh par re banī  
 Jauno dhari lotāh na leikahu, bir re Lorikāh  
 Sojhai piyat Caniyāh, re nirikhī  
 Canvāh kholi kai ancharvāh, bai dekhāvat  
 Ahire ke carhal na citvāh, bai re jāteu*

From the window, Chanva threw pebbles  
 That landed on the Ahir's leaf-dish.  
 While he drank from his water-pot, the brave Lorik  
 Gazed at her nonstop.  
 Chanva was slowly unveiling herself.  
 She was entering into the Ahir's heart.

PANDEY 1987, 251

The ballad struggles to reconcile the willful, enterprising character of Chanaini, who is prone to breaking societal rules, with the demands of caste patriarchy in which women are not only strictly controlled by men but also wholly lack spunk or sexual initiative, except to demonstrate their chastity. Meanwhile, Manjari, owing to her extraordinary and exemplary quality of *sat*, the form of women's chastity that holds the husband as divine and worthy of worship, has a premonition of the impending elopement, but is unable to prevent the elopers from setting off for the town of Hardi. On the way, Lorik has other minor adventures and battles but the lovers finally settle in Hardi, where the hero rises to the position of a "Raja."

Since women's agency might be perceived as potentially disruptive to the social order, it comes as no surprise that at different points in the narrative we encounter various references to women's agency and the need to fear, denigrate, channel, and control it. The incestuous nature of the relationship between Lorik and Chanaini is also hinted at, given they



are from the same village and their relationship is therefore a prohibited one, which provides another rationale for their elopement. Throughout the ballad, Chanaini's wayward ways are also occasionally seen as spelling havoc for the societal order. As the couple is eloping, even the trees pass judgment.

*Avarāh pharal na pervā je dekh re bāy  
Aju kahen beseh na jatiyā je hau Canaini. Bessā havvāh sakhārav je pali re vāur,  
Ibe bhai biyahā na bijri me chori re dehlen  
Urharī leiaku Hardiya je bāi re jāt,  
Āj pheri bolal avara je puni re bāi  
Ohī din bol na besva je ba Canaini  
Saiyyāh manbāh, kahanvāh re hamārAwārāh ke debāh, na jariyā tu dahli re āi  
Ohī din bolal Ahirvā ba bir re Lorika, Āju kāhaen sunbeh n dhanvā je tū biyahaiyā  
Deh deh toi jhagarvā re chali macāval, kaha laban Lorikah gaihei na tar revāri*

The avla tree was flowering.

The tree said, "Chanaini is by caste a Vaishya, her entire clan is of Vaishyas.

She has left her wedded husband.

With the man of another, she is on her way to Hardi."

The tree again repeated these words.

Vaishya Chanaini said to Lorik,

"Listen to me love, take out your sharp sword and strike that tree to the ground."

Brave Lorik chided, "Dear, you go about picking quarrels on the wayside.

Why should Lorik have to pick up his sword again and again?"

PANDEY 1987, 285

It is possible that in the attempt to establish full-bodied marital traditions, caste mores that were less restrictive for women were denounced, which also contributed to the attempts to control women's inherently disruptive tendencies in judgments such as those voiced by the Awla tree in the above lines. Further, in accordance with upper-caste patriarchies, it is the women who must be controlled in order to assert a high status. Toward the end, Chanaini emerges as an example of the havoc that can be let loose in society when women have the freedom of choice or the ability to voice their own preferences, especially in the realm of marriage and the choice of marriage partners.

As the character of Chanaini embodies the relative freedom available to women of her background and their lack of dependence on the male order, the ballad cannot refrain comment, lest it seem to endorse women's freedom of choice. From time to time, the text appears to manage and control the threat to the patriarchal social order suggested by the freedoms Chanaini represents. Further, as Flueckiger points out, elopement implies a freedom of choice for both individuals, made on the basis of their personal feelings. And since such freedom threatens both caste endogamy and the maintenance of strict caste boundaries, it also threatens the idea of the social control of women that is to follow in later episodes (Flueckiger 1989a, 46).

Chanaini's wholly earthy, unpredictable, fun-loving, and erotic persona serves, in the ballad, as a good match for the hero and as a foil to Manjari's controlled, long-suffering one. For instance, she is the first to intercept Manjari's marriage proposal to Lorik and bring it to her own brother. In addition, apart from her exercise of agency in escaping a problematic marriage, Chanaini, keeping herself well hidden, attempts to catch the attention of the hero by throwing pebbles at him during a banquet. Ever watchful, she also intervenes just in time to save Lorik from mistakenly consuming poison. She scarcely forgoes an opportunity to tease, even in seemingly tense moments such as when the hero is clandestinely poised to climb the rope to her chamber. By playfully refusing to catch the rope he throws up, she risks embarrassing and exposing him. Likewise, during the tense moments leading up to the lovers' point of rendezvous before their elopement, she heightens the sense of expectation and adventure by hiding behind a tree and prolonging the hero's anxiety, emerging from her hideout only when Lorik is on the verge of giving up and turning back. She also confronts Manjari in the bazaar, where after picking a fight with her, she settles down to eat some greens, recovers her strength, dusts herself off, and then heads home.

In striking relief are Chanaini's ingenuity, resourcefulness, and capacity to adequately protect herself. However, as pointed out above, practical commonsense is no match for the virtue of chastity in terms of serving the interests of patriarchy. The ballad also presents another alternate femininity in addition to the intermediate-caste persona of Chanaini. The very Manjari who, we are told, changes her apparel many times a day, is now dressed in tatters.

*Ab parī gailī bipaityā Manjari ke  
 Ohī jau nagar Gaurva lei re gānvau  
 Ab kabain javāni Majariya cal re kbete  
 Ghantāh ghantāh kaparvā re badauli  
 Dhiyavā ke aiseya bipatiya pari re gaileen  
 Uhnva bhayal na dasiyā re harāmau  
 Tab kahahin dburvā na dburvā ka dekh re lattā  
 Jori jori paharati pevanvāh, dhan re bāy*

Now such misfortune struck Manjari  
 In village Gaura;  
 Where once that Manjari had walked the fields,  
 Changing her clothes hour by hour,  
 Such misfortune struck the wife,  
 Such was her state,  
 That the clothes she wore were tattered and torn.  
 She darned and wore them, did the wife.

PANDEY 1987, 324

Manjari and her friends, not knowing that Lorik has returned, go to sell yoghurt at a bazaar Lorik has set up outside Gaura's city walls. However, the river is too high for them to cross to reach the site. Manjari then appeals to the river to part, and the river miraculously obeys, owing to Manjari's *sat*—once again, her penance and vows of austerity.

*Javan bahiā sattai dharamvā je bāncal hoihen  
 Ā phuni hoi jāh na nadiyā aihi re pārāu  
 Ohī din pargat durugvā je hoi gailīn  
 Bīceh deileni na dalvāh dūi kankarī  
 Āju banhi gayal na dharāv je dunon ballī, bīceh radki kankalī na may re dān  
 Ab chali gali na Bohva je dhani Majariya*

If sat and righteousness still flow within me,  
 Then may I cross the river to the other side.  
 That moment Durga appeared.  
 She erected two sets of stones.  
 On either side the flow of the river came to a halt.  
 Manjari crossed over to Boha with her basket.

PANDEY 1987, 348

This episode is preceded by one in which Manjari must prove to her mother-in-law, and lay to rest all suspicions, that her seemingly sudden wealth was not ill gotten. To prove that she did not obtain the wealth in her basket through unchaste, illicit means, Manjari is called upon to take the test of chastity, which involves putting her hand into a heated vat. These episodes evoke the numerous examples of the sati and Sita motifs featured in women's songs, particularly those examined in chapters 1 and 4.

*Jo ham aikei na bapvā se hob na bitiyā  
Ke pher aikei purusvā bai re yārei  
Jab okre satei dharamvā par re hobai  
Pher carhi lebei rupiyā ho nikālī  
Ohi dhari dālai hathavā dhan Majariya  
Kari bani rupiyā eik re tohi  
Onkeu tanih na dagiyā nahin re lāgal  
Sabhani gayal re manvā re baith*

If I am that worthy daughter of that father  
And chaste, known only to one man.  
If sat and righteousness are within me,  
Then I shall take out the coins from the fire.  
Then she put her hand in, that great Manjari.  
She felt the rupiya with her hand.  
Not a stain was on her hand.  
Everyone's heart was deflated.

PANDEY 1987B, 347

Scarcely is this episode over that Manjari, believing Lorik is dead, prepares a funeral pyre to commit sati. From a distance, Lorik and Chanaini, in disguise, watch paralyzed by growing disbelief. The scene forces Chanaini to reflect for the first time on her own position as the other woman, the eloper. Just as Lorik has reason to regret his actions, this scene provides Chanaini with an opportunity to reflect.

*Ā jekri biyahiyā je janghvā ke jarlī  
Ā keke tanikav daradiyā je nāhi re bāye  
Āju bhāi orhi orhariyā ke kavan re gintī  
Haman keliye pachtavā je deib re bai*

*Uhvan se dankal ahirvā je bir re Lorikva*  
*Jiakeni cecur dhailvā je dekh re bai*  
*Manjari ke dhaike ceculvā ja khince re lehlen*  
*Thokare se marlini na agiyā je gai cchitarāi*

The one whose wedded wife is burning,  
 He feels not the slightest pain or remorse.  
 Then why would he value the one he eloped with?  
 For me, why should he care?  
 But lo, from there leapt the Ahir, the brave Lorik,  
 Caught the wrist of Manjari  
 And holding her thus dragged her away.  
 Kicked the pyre and scattered the fire.

PANDEY 1987B, 351

Despite the fact that Manjari is saved so valiantly by the brave Lorik and thereby spared from death, her attempted sati elevates her status and, by association, that of her entire caste. By thus enacting an upper-caste Kshatriya norm, Manjari not only reminds us of the restrictive practices that constitute upper-caste women's identities but also fulfills the aspirations of the entire caste. As Yadavas claim the epic, the women of the caste adopt Manjari's actions as their own code of behavior, perfectly in line with Kshatriya norms.

The relative ease with which Manjari subjects herself to not one but a series of trials in quick succession underline her elevated divine status, thus lending luster not only to her caste but also to the hero Lorik, who, by saving her, has the opportunity to once again act heroically. It seems to matter little that Lorik had abandoned Manjari; what is underlined here is his return. In keeping with the requirements of patriarchy, it is the hero who must be convinced of his wife's chastity before he decides to return, never mind that by then he is on to his third wife. Indeed, as "for a married woman, this power derives from her faithfulness to her husband, and, hence, in part from male control and protection" (Fleuckiger 1989a, 44–48), Manjari's quality of sat refers back to and glorifies the heroism of the hero who controls her.

In the end it is Manjari's particular brand of sat and chastity that somehow saves the day, assuring the return of the chastened hero, marked by due remorse and regret. But it is the other woman, the eloper (*uraharī*)

Chanaini, who must take the blame. Hence, despite her being so irresistible to the hero, when hard days come round, it is only the lowest status and condemnation that is reserved for her. In denigrating Chanaini and her insistence that he leave Gaura without considering the needs of his caste brethren, Lorik is able to place his misfortunes squarely and conveniently at the doorstep of the other woman. The very agency of women like Chanaini, who can be branded as elopers and thus of easy virtue, serves to absolve the hero of excess blame.<sup>10</sup> Freedom, agency, and uncontrolled action here represent danger and deserve only condemnation in women, even as they are celebrated and extolled as virtues in the hero.

Toward the end of the ballad, the women's agency we observed in the opening episodes—with the young Manjari demanding to be married to none other than Lorik and with the robust character and escapades of Manjari's mother and then Chanaini—dissipates into familiar patterns of conformity to strict upper-caste norms and standards of behavior. The promise of women's agency as embodied by Manjari dwindles to dependence and conformity, and instead it is her chastity and *sat*, loosely defined as the "truth of one's being," that is valorized. In the last episodes of the ballad, we witness the valorization of the passive instead of the active woman, as well as a shift from endorsement of defiance, as represented by Chanaini and even Manjari's mother, to the more compliant traits represented by Manjari.

Since in the early sections we are afforded insights into a universe of extraordinary gender parity, it is disconcerting to find that toward the end of the ballad the feminine strength that is valorized is of a qualitatively different kind, deriving from the quality of *sat* or chastity. This is the chaste wife that has been described as "an empowered figure in (Hindu) myth who functions as a means of taming or domesticating the more fearful aspects of woman's sexual appetite" (John and Nair 1998, 17). However, the Lorikāyan's genius lies in its willingness to both explore and absorb the polarities represented by the two female characters, Manjari and Chanaini. Finally, by showing how the characters perceive the world and their places within it, the ballad raises questions about its social milieu. The concepts, values, and problems the ballad addresses are significant, since they not only refer back to the social milieu that gave rise to them but also anticipate contemporary trends in north India.

## LORIKĀYAN AND YADAVA MOBILITY

In contextualizing the epic within a specific historical and sociocultural milieu, we see that the Lorikāyan serves as important source material for the values and concerns the Yadava caste has about upward mobility. To what extent, then, is it possible to connect the singing of the Lorikāyan, on the one hand, and documentary evidence of Yadava values and efforts to achieve social mobility over the course of the last century, on the other? If the nineteenth century was characterized by efforts of various castes occupying the middle rungs of the caste order to achieve social mobility, to what extent were the values the ballad projects, especially those regarding women, actively endorsed by pastoral and cattleherding castes of the Shudra varna who claimed Kshatriya status and sought to adopt Kshatriya practices? While it has not yet been possible to establish the exact relation between a particular group's singing and claiming of the ballad and their social practices, do the ballad's motifs nevertheless suggest a blueprint for action and practice? In this section, I seek answers to some of these puzzles in the contemporary social history of the Yadavas.

It is worth beginning this attempt to locate the ballad within the society that produced it with a note by the nineteenth-century colonial administrator, Colonel Oldham, who described the “martial races” of the Bhojpuri region, particularly the Bhojpuri Ahir caste, as “predisposed” to turbulence. Oldham writes:

The Bhojpuri Ahirs (the cowherd caste) are specially noted for their daring and skill as thieves and burglars, the more law-abiding people in other parts regarding them with terror. . . . During widespread disturbances in 1917, which broke out without previous warning in the district, and threatened to involve the neighboring districts in grave communal strife, I had to call in a large force of military and armed police (about a thousand in all) to quell promptly and effectively the lawlessness abroad.

Raheja quotes Oldham:

Several proverbial sayings might be cited as exemplifying these characteristics. For instance, there are some very popular verses in praise of their favorite weapon, commonly called the “Song of the lathi,” telling of its uses in crossing a stream or a ditch, in dealing with human or canine enemies, and how necessary it is to carry

one, even if you have a sword hanging by your side. There is a well-known proverb that says, “Don’t go into Bhojpur; if you go, don’t stay; if you stay, don’t eat; if you eat, don’t go to sleep; if you sleep, don’t feel for your purse; if you should feel for your purse, don’t weep!” (i.e., you will not find it!). . . . Then we have a proverb that means, “if hit, hit back and don’t stop to consider whether you are committing a sin or virtue.” And there is a delightfully terse and suggestive saying, especially quoted of the Bhojpuri as representing his attitude toward others. The words mean simply “is the dish thine or mine?” A Bhojpuri is supposed to ask this question. If the person addressed answers, “Mine,” a blow of the lathi at once settles the proprietorship, the clenched fist for an enemy; “the powerful man’s lathi hits the very middle of the forehead,” and so on. So much for the mere joy of fighting. (1930, 323–24, quoted in Raheja 1996, 502)

In these ways, the colonial state appears to have naturalized the Yadavas’ rebellious spirit. The communal strife referred to above appears to have been a consequence of the severe dislocation of social and economic relations of colonialism and a move on the part of the caste to secure higher status in the 1901 census by asserting Hindu orthodoxy. What is left out of Oldham’s account is the organized struggle against colonial government, zamindars and moneylenders. In other words, Oldham seems to be providing a justification to quell the “naturally” violent caste instead of the revenue demands that prompted the unrest in the first place (*ibid.*). Raheja explains that people’s own proverbial speech was deployed to essentialize caste characteristics, and to reinforce notions about the necessity of colonial rule, in turn providing the foundation for much of the anthropological and historical understandings of the region. The extent to which a ballad such as the Lorikāyan would have served to reinforce these very notions, is an important question that needs further investigation.

While the ballad’s motif of the resemblance between marriage and warfare immediately springs to mind, evidence suggests that the colonial state naturalized the Yadavas’ rebellious and martial spirit in diverse ways. Gloria Goodwin Raheja has shown that from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, “proverbs were repeatedly wrenched from the social practices in which they figured, and interpreted not as situated commentaries but as abstract and literal renderings of caste proclivities” (Raheja 1996, 508). If, as Raheja explains, the Yadavas’ proverbial speech



was deployed to essentialize characteristics of the caste and to reinforce notions about the necessity of colonial rule, then, like so many proverbs about the Yadavas, the Lorikāyan appears to have provided abundant source material for the colonial construction of caste. Hence, popular ballads are likely to have provided ballast for much of the prevailing anthropological and historical understandings of the region. However, as colonial accounts were always selective, it pays to attend to what they leave out, in this case, the abundant evidence the Lorikāyan presents about caste parity in the middle reaches of the caste order.

The historical evidence on the colonial period suggests that in emulating Kshatriya practices and claiming Kshatriyahood as Yadava Kshatriyas, Yadavas faced considerable opposition and conflict with upper castes through the 1920s. Their efforts to claim Kshatriyahood have been documented in numerous accounts (Pinch 1996, 111; Frankel 1989). We learn, for instance, that Yadava caste reformers were attempting to reconfigure an upper-caste patriarchal vocabulary within the new grid of hierarchical norms and possibilities that the colonial context offered. By the 1920s, caste *sabhās* (councils), which persistently pressed for caste claims to higher status, had emerged. These caste councils focused on social reform and on developing political agendas to organize caste members to assert the caste's economic and political demands. Caste members' involvement with processes of redefining community equipped them with a new language of politics. Here were sown the seeds for what came to be known in the postcolonial era as identity politics.

In the nineteenth century, the Yadava movement emerged as an extremely successful response to the opportunities the census provided to upgrade caste status. The Yadava movement had a wide inter-regional spread and attempted to merge regional caste identities, such as those represented by the Goala, Ahir, Ahar, Gopa, and so on, in favor of the generic term *Yadava* (Rao 1979). Thus a number of pastoral castes were subsumed under the Yadava category in accordance with decisions made by caste councils at the regional and national levels. The Yadava caste, comprising a number of subcastes known locally by various names, became the first among shudras to gain the right to wear the *janeu* (the sacred thread), a case of successful Sanskritization that continues. The success of the Yadava movement also lies in the fact that among the *jati sabhās*, the Yadava sabhā was likely the strongest and its journal, *Ahir*

*Samachar*, acquired a national spread. As an epic claimed by the Yadavas, then, it is worth exploring the extent to which the Lorikāyan played a role in this reimagination.

Certain themes suggest themselves for further inquiry. For instance, E. A. Gait, the census commissioner, noted as early as 1911 that “the Goals of Bihar have resolved inter alia to give up infant marriage and to prevent their women from selling milk or going to market” (Gait 1913, 392). As outlined in the preceding pages, the Lorikāyan associates declining fortunes with women’s peddling of milk products in the marketplace, a practice seen as humiliating for the entire caste. By the nineteenth century, among those practices recognized as markers of lower status were the sale of milk and cowdung cakes by women, and upwardly mobile Yadava women were debarred from frequenting bazaars (*hāts* and *ganjs*). Similarly, attempts were made to curb women’s productive labor in the fields. The injunction against women working in the fields stemmed from the assumption that the women of cultivating castes who labored were liable to be exploited or abused. Such vulnerability was seen as making laboring women less chaste than upper-caste ones.

Caste patriarchies considered women in general to be unsafe in public spaces, a fear fuelled by the engineering of a horror of fairs. In the north Indian rural context, village fairs or *melās* have always been associated with legends, saints, pilgrimages, and festivals. Particularly for women and irrespective of caste, fairs were occasions for periodic, seasonal recreation and leisure. From the nineteenth century onward, however, a number of tracts appeared suggesting that danger lurked in fairs, where women might easily be molested or abducted (Gupta 2001, 96). A tract popular in the nineteenth century, *Melā Ghumnī*, went so far as to suggest that women who visited fairs were “prostitutes and sensuous creatures with no qualms or morals” (96). By devaluing women’s forms of entertainment and cultural expression, reformers sought to reorder culture and leisure while also achieving respectability for certain castes.

Further, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marketplaces such as *hāt* (a local periodic market), *bajār* (a permanent market for general merchandise), and *ganj* (the wholesale market for bulk goods) “were seen as central knot(s) in the social fabric, closely tied to both political, economic and religious interests” (Urban 2001, 1086). At this time, the marketplace served as a microcosm for the world of power as a

whole, since the material, religious, and social exchanges that occurred there were inextricably intertwined. Marketplaces that began by selling ritual commodities attached to religious or sacred sites were often supported by political establishments and came to signify both political authority and material clout. These spaces were a “metaphor for the worldly authority of the ruling elite” (1088). It is in this capacity that the caste reformers’ prohibitions against upwardly mobile women trading in marketplaces tie in with the restrictive norms for women outlined in the later sections of the *Lorikāyan*.

Moreover, as the marketplace also functioned as a potential space for the subversion and critique of the dominant order (Urban 2001, 1088), this particular restriction on Yadava women would also have implied a lack of freedom to speak frankly and critically. And all the more so, since, as Bakhtin has argued, performances in the marketplace rendered these spaces potentially threatening to the ruling powers, especially since the lower classes could express themselves openly there and circulate subversive discourses among themselves (Bakhtin quoted in Urban 2001).

Furthermore, since the songs and plays composed and performed by women were largely popular events that took place out in the open in the streets, marketplaces, fairs, and festivals, the “moral police” of caste patriarchies stepped up their campaign against these forms of female expression as well (Banerjee 1989, 157). Given the growing ominous and even subversive connotations that circulated around marketplaces and periodic fairs of all kinds, it appeared in the nineteenth century that women, as custodians of the honor and purity of entire caste groups, would need to be protected from such spaces. The reformers’ anxiety about the women’s folksongs addressed in chapter 1 of this volume thus went hand in hand with the alarm about women’s use of public spaces and the campaign to restrict their access to them in the interest of protecting them.

In addition to drawing on proverbs and ballads to construct its understanding of Yadavas, the colonial state likely drew on, and fuelled its anxieties with, the *Lorikāyan*, particularly the ballad’s representation of wedding celebrations, a central concern of this book. The colonial state’s concerns about the upper castes phenomenal expenditure on wedding celebrations, a practice common among the Kshatriyas and other landed groups, dovetails with the *Lorikāyan*’s themes. If colonial anxieties indeed originated, at least in part, in the people’s own oral texts, then it is con-

ceivable that the colonial state drew much of their understanding of, and anxiety about, wedding celebrations from the Lorikāyan.

Again, it is not possible to directly relate the singing of the Lorikāyan to the actual evidence of conspicuous consumption observed among upwardly mobile peasant castes in the nineteenth century. However, the archival evidence points to the immense anxiety this consumption generated within the colonial state, which was concerned that its own revenue demands might not be met. These revenue concerns alarmed the colonial state and prompted its concerted moves to curb such consumption among the landed gentry, among whom excessive expenditure at weddings was the norm. In the twelve districts of Awadh, for instance, the British India Association (BIA) appears to have persuaded the local ruling elites to put these curbs into effect. The following excerpt from a letter on the subject, written by the Secretary of the BIA to Chief Commissioner Oudh on 25 March 1963, spells out the logic behind the intervention: “It is astonishing that taluqdars should consider the fame and dignity of their houses prompted by a prodigality that must bring ruin to them. Another such celebration of marriage as has just taken place at Dera will be the ruin of that noble and loyal family, an event that would cause the government deep regret. The example set by the taluqdars is imitated by their humbler Kurmies, small proprietors driven to mortgage and sell their properties to provide funds for a marriage, and it is truly sad that a Rajput will throw away his birthright to celebrate a marriage” (Jassal 1989). This letter explicitly cites the tendency of upwardly mobile castes such as the Kurmis (and, no doubt, the Yadavas, as the predominant cultivating caste) to emulate Kshatriya marriage practices. The document appears to confirm efforts among the cultivating castes to emulate the marriage practices of the Kshatriyas in order to advance their claims on a higher status.<sup>11</sup> How much of the colonial state’s understanding of marriage practices derived from folk forms such as the Lorikāyan needs to be explored further in light of the arguments made in this chapter about the social construction of gender. As the Lorikāyan illustrates, upwardly mobile groups routinely emulated upper-caste practices and Kshatriya codes of honor for women, which provided familiar models and a blueprint for those who aspired to rulership. The ballad’s illustration of how these norms were upheld to regulate the lives and attitudes of women

continues to be relevant to our understanding of similar processes not only in colonial times but also into the present day.

While the Lorikāyan could be read as a text about caste identity and its evolution, possibly from medieval times, its contemporary relevance lies both in its continued function as a defining text for the assertion of an overarching Yadava identity in north India and in its significance for this community's vision of its past. The ballad's sociological motifs, though associated with the upwardly mobile caste of the Yadavas, are also relevant to other upwardly mobile caste groups.

This chapter focused on a masculine ballad to show that the gendered musical world is separated not only spatially but also by genre, narrative texts, performance styles, and concerns (see Sax 2002; Schechner 1977; Blackburn and Ramanujan 1986). Beyond the gender-exclusive, caste-inclusive nature of musical akharas and their potential for forging community, containing conflicts, and bridging caste, communal, and religious divides, we can also question the akharas' demarcation from women's musical traditions and the continued efforts to safeguard these spaces from feminine influence. We find that in the nineteenth century the popularity of akharas coincided with the withdrawal of women from public spaces such as fairs and markets and the attempt to suppress women's folk music traditions such as the wedding *gālīs* (abusive songs) explored in earlier chapters, which reformers and upwardly mobile caste patriarchies considered obscene. The social universe of caste cooperation glimpsed in the Lorikāyan delineated the akharā as an alternative to the milieu of caste separation.

The epic's conflation of marriage with warfare provided a point of entry for apprehending the influence of caste patriarchies in the construction of gender. In place of hypergamy, the anuloma custom of maintaining the structural inequality between wife-givers and wife-takers accepted as an axiomatic characteristic of upper-caste marriage patterns, the Lorikāyan brings to light a lesser-known, perhaps more widely practiced, norm among the intermediate castes, that of parity and equilibrium. Through the wit and innovations of the bride's mother, the Lorikāyan underscores the strength of the wife-givers, far removed from their posited inferiority. In fact the text takes great pains to highlight the unique

mettle and strength both of women and of the wife-givers, who, if not superior to the wife-takers, at least balance the structural inequality the marriage transaction effects. In providing such details, the *Lorikāyan* serves as a rich account of the sociology of the intermediate caste order. A gendered reading of the text suggests the subjugation of lower-caste norms in the process of consolidating and forging a ruling class ethos.

While the hero's interactions with the other female characters add depth and dimension to his character, leading him to embark on adventures and challenges and to develop a fleshed-out, robust masculinity both in the battlefield and in life, in the end, these risk-taking women are chastised and must lose out to the upper-caste norms of chastity, which are prioritized.

It is only against the ample evidence of the power and skill possessed by women from a range of servicing castes that the disappointingly limiting upper-caste qualities of *sat* and *pativrata* emerge triumphant, to the exclusion of all other traits. The many episodes that highlight the wit, wisdom, skills, and extraordinary prowess of women force one to reflect on the sociological and historical eclipse of these very qualities in women, as the values of chastity take over and women's dependence on men is valorized. The helpless, dependent woman who is reduced to tatters when her male protector abandons her reinforces the values of saintly inaction and women's waiting in piety and grief for her protector to return. The practical life skills of resourceful women are condemned as threatening. It is clear therefore that upward mobility has meant the eclipse of a range of women's skills. Thus the construction of a new masculine identity deriving from the control of land and territory requires that women become men's property. Finally, while the *Yadava* past outlined in the text is posited as an age of glory, the ballad also illustrates that women were crucial to, if ultimately sidelined by, the processes of forging a new caste identity and refurbishing patriarchy. These inherent paradoxes and ambiguities, however, make it possible to argue for the multiple perspectives the ballad presents.