

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION: THE UNSUNG SING

1. Vermilion (*sindūr*) is the auspicious orange and red powder in a woman's hair part that symbolizes her married status. The groom's ritual application of this powder in the bride's hair part marks the conclusion of the marriage ceremony.
2. A Launda-nach (*nāc*) is a male-only company of itinerant singers, percussionists, and performers that entertains rural audiences with skits, plays, dancing, and music. Cross-dressing is a key feature of these performances as men perform female roles.
3. In this nirgun song, Sakhī (women's female friend) could just as well refer to a male worshipper who has assumed the identity of one of Sita's girlfriends, the persona adopted by the Rasik branch of the Ramnandi sect to serve Ram and Sita. Van der Veer writes that in an attempt to bring about a radical transformation of their masculinity in the ritual theatre of temple worship, Rasiks dress as women (Van der Veer 1987, 691).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1: THE DAILY GRIND

1. Another example is the ropni songs. See chapter 2.
2. Vaughan (1987, 119) notes that in Malawi "the distinctive feature of women's songs and stories about the 1949 famine is the emphasis they place on the role of marital relations in shaping the pattern of suffering. When asked about fam-

ine, women tell about family, marriage, divorce and children. In their pounding songs they sing about the role of husbands in famine—either praising them for their exemplary behaviour or (much more frequently) berating them for their neglect.” As in the Bhojpuri songs, in Malawi “pounding songs composed and sung in normal times are frequently critical of men and deeply concerned with family and marital relations. Sung by one or more women as they pound maize in the courtyards of hut complexes, they can be timed to provoke the maximum amount of embarrassment to the passing male villager, whose misdemeanours or inadequacies sound out across the village to the rhythm of the pestle” (Vaughan 1987, 121).

3. As in Malawi, there are songs in rural India that describe the impact of famine. Verrier Elwin (1946, 167), who collected folksongs in the Chhattisgarh region of the Central provinces between 1932 and 1944, recorded one about the collapse of a “subsistence guarantee” during the famine of 1886, a situation not unlike the one Vaughan outlined for the Malawi famine of 1949.
4. In this region the cadence with which *jatsārs* are sung makes them easily recognizable, even to the untrained listener. In the songs sung by the women in Chhattisgarh during the 1930s (Elwin 1946, 119), the grinding action of the two millstones on the grain caught between them symbolized the plight of the daughter-in-law caught between her affinal and consanguineal kin (“Grindstone is my mother-in-law/grinding peg my brother”). Like the corn, therefore, the daughter-in-law is trapped between the proverbial rock and a hard place, the two sources of intrakin group social control, and gradually ground down.
5. The tension between affines is a constant theme in Indian rural folklore. Numerous stories collected by ethnographers at the start of the twentieth century from the Santal Parganas, a large ethnic group in Bihar, for example, recount how a family fortune is saved or restored by the timely and wise actions of a daughter-in-law, and how a female—also a daughter-in-law—died for grieving the death of a Chamar, thereby breaking caste rules (Bompas 1909, 39–40, 194–96). The subtext to such folkloric accounts appears to be that daughters-in-law ought to be cherished, either because of their contributions to the well-being of the family into which they marry or because of their humanity, a discourse that hints at underlying tensions between affines in this context.
6. It is easy to forget the violence that can be inflicted on transgressors of existing social boundaries. Gough (1981, 322–23), for example, describes a case in south India of a cowherd who had sexual relations with the wife of an elderly bedridden Brahmin. The cowherd, as a consequence, was beaten, castrated, and murdered by other Brahmins in the village, his mutilated body left to hang from the rafters of a house as a warning to others. In many respects, both the discourse about purity and the symbolic murder of the

transgressor in this example mirror those involved in the lynchings of blacks by whites in the U.S. South.

7. Netua and Netuin refer, respectively, to the males and females of the caste of performers and acrobats.
8. Such nonviolent solutions in fact reinforce the role of violent sanctions, an everpresent threat.
9. The Saur is an expensive variety of fish.
10. A Bengalin is a female inhabitant of Bengal.
11. A kos is a measure of distance equal to approximately two miles.
12. Derived from the loaded concept of “sat” as a married woman’s virtue, chastity and single-minded devotion to her husband (discussed in chapter 5) as well as evocative of the mythic goddess Sati, who committed suicide by immolating herself on her father, Daksha’s, sacrificial fire to assuage an insult to her husband Shiva, (see chapter 4) “sati” has several layered connotations. The term implies the religiously sanctioned practice of widow immolation at the funeral pyres of their husbands. The voluntary as well as coercive nature of this controversial practice has generated immense debate, besides being on the agenda of social reformers through the ages, as well as contemporary feminists, especially since it signifies the cessation of a woman’s social persona at the death of her husband. The practice, particularly associated with upper-caste pretensions, came to symbolize one of the hallmarks of upper caste “purity” and status. For a comprehensive discussion of the theme, see Courtright 2007.
13. Dom is a caste of funerary ritualists, an occupation regarded as low in the caste hierarchy because of the pollution associated with death. However, in many regions, particularly Benaras, the caste is known to be very wealthy because of the high fees they charge for their ritual services as well as the propensity of people to donate large sums to these specialists on the occasion of a funeral.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2: SINGING BARGAINS

1. For debates on the voice of the subaltern, see Spivak 1993.
2. While on the surface male songs about migration tend to celebrate the heroism of the migrating men, they also reflect a deep anxiety about the uncontrolled sexuality of the women they left behind. The folk bard Bhikhari Thakur, for instance, engages the theme of migration in his popular musical Bidesiya. See Kumar 2001. Songs about migration sung by men and composed by male bards tend to differ in focus and mood from songs sung and composed by women.
3. *Meherin* meaning “householder.”
4. “Status production,” a term used by Hanna Papanek (1989, 97–116), refers to

the tendency among upwardly mobile castes to withdraw their women from working in the fields for the purpose of indicating the group's higher status. This is a form of Sanskritization, a phenomenon first theorized by M. N. Srinivas as the attempt of upwardly mobile castes to emulate the practices and norms of the upper castes, and refers to the process by which castes low in the caste hierarchy seek to emulate the practices of the higher castes and thus claim a higher status. This form of upward mobility is the feature of entire subcaste groups, rather than individuals, and is ongoing. As upper-caste women do not work in the fields but rather hire in labor for agricultural tasks, rural communities and castes that withdraw their women from agricultural work do so to assert their higher social status and engage in "status production."

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3: EMOTIONS IN A RITE OF PASSAGE

1. The words *Biyāh* and *Birabā* share etymological roots with the Sanskrit words *Vivaha* (marriage or unity) and *Viraha* (separation).
2. Kanyadān is the ritual gifting of a virgin daughter by the parents to her husband
3. The giving of these gifts serves as a ritual of appeasement for restoring the cosmic order and returning peace to the heavens and purity to the earth. This ritual prescribes the giving of alms to outcastes such as Doms and Bhangis, who are seen as mediators with the power to induce the demons to release the moon. Through their gifts, the upper castes effectively bribe the ritually polluting lowest castes to worship the demons and thereby restore order. Since such gifts represent the conversion of material into spiritual wealth, upper-caste patrons are doing themselves a favor. By responding charitably to the outcaste beggars, upper-caste patrons "managed thereby to sidestep the sin of interrupting the reciprocal flow of asking and receiving which is what constitutes dana" (Guha 1985, 17), that is, the reciprocal act in which asking must be matched by giving (18).
4. See song 8 below, sung by Bhagirathi Devi, wherein the human soul's final journey to meet the Creator is likened to the bride's ritual send off. Thus, in folk registers, the poignancy of a bride's departure also evokes the soul's final journey, contributing an additional element of pathos to the bride's ritual leave-taking.
5. Oldenburg shows that in Punjab, the growth of private property in land eroded women's economic power and social worth. However, it was women's wealth and dowry, that is, women's safety nets, that could be deployed to restore the failing fortunes of entire families in the nineteenth century. High demands for revenue and chronic indebtedness appear to have necessitated the conversion of women's resources and jewelry into cash for the purchase of land and other items (Oldenburg 2002, 47). Historically, therefore, the new

perception of land as property radically altered woman's rights. Land went up in value, as did other kinds of property, and the bride's dowry was no longer the equivalent of receiving a fair share in her natal family's holdings. Further, as ownership rights over landed property were definitively placed in the names of sons of the patrilineage, brothers came to view the return of an unhappily married sister to her natal home as "an unrightful" one (171).

6. The song refers to the erection of a leafy canopy, supported by four bamboo poles and decorated with leaves of the auspicious green mango, in the courtyard of the bride's house where the wedding rites are to be performed.
7. "Head ornament" is the literal translation, but what is suggested is something with which to hold the head high—an ornament or even a state of mind—so that the bride would not have to bow her head in submission or hang her head in shame.
8. Dumont drew attention to this term of abuse when applied to a person other than the speaker's wife's brother. Along with the term *mama* for mother's brother or maternal uncle, which also has abusive connotations, these two terms belong to the category of affines (Dumont 1966, 102). As in many other parts of north India, wife-givers and wife-takers, whose relationship is inherently asymmetrical and nonreciprocal, must be kept apart, a norm accomplished structurally through village exogamy (102).
9. In Agrahari's printed version of the love story, Gobind visits Maina and their meeting is reported to Maina's husband who kills her with his sword. It is the husband's sister who is the spy. Gobind takes Maina's body for cremation but on the way offers prayers to Shiva who, impressed with Gobind's devotion, revives Maina. Gobind returns to his home with Maina and asks his mother to shower her blessings on his bride.
10. The magic number seven also appears in Western fairytales such as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."
11. On 17 August 2005 *The Hindustan Times* reported that on 16 August 2005, the Rajya Sabha passed the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill of 2004, granting Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist women equal rights in property inheritance. According to this bill:
 - i. Daughters have share by virtue of birth
 - ii. Daughters will now get coequal share with sons
 - iii. Daughters will now be subject to all liabilities and disabilities, including debt, mortgage, etc.
 - iv. Since they have a share, daughters can dispose of their share
 - v. Daughters can press for partition.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4: SITA'S TRIALS

1. About the Ramnagar Ramlila, Linda Hess writes, "using a grand and varied outdoor environment that includes town, village, buildings, lakes and

groves, it sets up a microcosm of the sacred Ramāyanā geography in an area of fifteen or twenty square miles. Actors and audience move together from place to place, often walking several miles in an evening to get from one scene to another. Even on the least popular nights it is common for more than 5,000 people to assemble for the event. An average audience might be 20,000, while on the most spectacular nights the crowds approach 10,000” (Hess 1988, 237).

2. Paul Courtright writes: “Pativrata-dharma may be interpretively translated as those morally significant actions, duties, and attitudes that are appropriate to the status of a married woman, the central focus of which is the welfare of her husband and all that adheres to him: household, reputation, kin, ancestors, descendants, deities, and life circumstances. Etymologically, the term means moral action (*dharmā*) that is rooted in vows (*vrata*, from the Sanskrit *vr*, ‘turn’) undertaken for the protection and well-being of the husband or lord (*pati*). These duties, and orientations that frame them, are presented formally in classical treatises on morality (*dharmashastras*) and informally through patterns of behavior and expectations regarding married life passed through generations, encoded in rituals, and celebrated in mythology and folklore” (2007, 185–87).

Usha Zacharias defines a *pativrata* as a woman selflessly dedicated to her husband to the point of ascetic renunciation (2001) while Uma Chakravarti lists the *pativrata*’s virtues as feminine self-sacrifice, virtue, fidelity, and chastity (1990). In nationalist discourse, through these very qualities “Sita embodies the purity, power of sacrifice, and spiritual authority of the upper-caste Hindu woman who can form the well-spring of sustenance for the Kashtriya Brhmanical male’s battle against Ravana-like invaders, British or Muslim” (Zacharias 2001).

3. *Kaliyuga* refers to the present age of degeneration and corruption within the cyclical four consecutive ages.
4. In the folk imaginary, Sita embodies the generic but ideal peasant woman.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5: WHEN MARRIAGE IS WAR

1. Caste census data is not available for post-independence India due to a policy adopted by the post-Independence state of not collecting data on any but Dalit (scheduled castes), which was needed for the implementation of affirmative action programs. Thus, one must refer back to the colonial census of 1931, the last time when such information was gathered, and seek to project current figures based on population increases. Over the past decade, state efforts to collect census data on caste remain mired in controversy.
2. Srinivas first identified the nature of caste dominance in his seminal work on the village Rampura in Mysore. Oliver Mendelsohn has refined the concept in recent years.

3. The newspaper reported that Dadan Yadav, a local Patna *pehalvān* (champion wrestler) and minister in the Rabri Devi government, had entered the political fray and sought to win votes by invoking the caste icon Vir Lorik through the installation of a gigantic statue of the hero Mahabali Vir Lorik Ahir (Powerful Brave Lorik, the Ahir). Given that, in the 1970s a private militia was also established in Lorik's name, the ruling party in Bihar was reluctant to broaden the party's caste base by means of this invocation. The brass statue, the paper reported, was massive, weighing 50,000 kilograms and reaching twenty-one meters, and would occupy 1,000 feet of the park in which it was slated to be installed. Rs.3 crores had already been spent on it and, if installed, its dimensions would have assured it a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. The report quoted Dadan Yadav as saying that the country needs a *pehalvān* like Vir (brave) Lorik to protect the poor and backward castes from the wily, exploitative feudalists (*The Telegraph*, 2 October 2002, Patna).
4. "Sanskritization" is a term coined by the sociologist M. N. Srinivas. See chapter 2 for further discussion.
5. *Biraha* (separation) is a song genre associated with the caste of Yadavas. Cattle herders and milk vendors are said to have developed the genre while minding their cattle. *Biraha* concerts by specialist *biraha* singers associated with distinct teachers (*gurus*) are popular in the region. Each *Biraha* singer claims the lineage of a particular *guru*.
6. Another version is that of Dadai Kewat, a farmer belonging to the river-faring caste who claims to have learned it from an Ahir (now Yadava) *guru* over three years while grazing cattle. The latter text comprises approximately 14,000 lines and a Hindi translation of a summary of the text alone runs 120 pages. Despite the fact that enormous variations exist in oral renderings of the ballad across north India, I rely on these versions largely because of their accessibility to the reading public.
7. As an aside, the banquet occasions an expiatory feast given by Chanaini's father to publically redress his daughter's association with a Chamar, the breaking of an intercaste commensal taboo against interaction with a lower-caste male. The tenor of the episode suggests the caste's displeasure with Chanaini's action. The scene is therefore set for the forbidden love between Chanaini and Lorik, for whom the only solution appears to be elopement.
8. The anthropological literature on caste endogamy and village exogamy is pertinent here. For example, in Sherupur, Harold Gould found that upper castes such as Brahmins and Rajputs tend to marry their daughters into villages far from Sherupur. The intermediate castes such as Murao, Kurmi, and Ahir, on the other hand, tend to marry within close range of their villages. The lowest castes occupy an intermediate position between these two groups. With regard to the Brahmin and Kshatriya, Gould finds that only 12 percent of marriages were held within their own *pargana* (i.e., a

group of proximate districts lumped together for administrative purposes), here Haveli-Awadh, whereas 65 percent of marriages were held outside the three parganas west of Awadh, namely, Haveli-Awadh, Pacchimrath, and Amsin. In case of the intermediate castes, 72 percent of marriages were held within their own pargana and only 2 percent were held outside western Faizabad. The lowest castes held 59 percent of marriages within pargana Haveli-Awadh and only 1 percent outside western Faizabad (Gould 1960).

9. This episode also evokes Gandhi's use of fasting as a political tool and more recently, in 2011, the fasts undertaken by Anna Hazare and Baba Ramdev for the introduction of the Lokpal Bill received immense media coverage. It is worth remembering that Gandhi himself acknowledged having learned the political uses of fasting from the women in his family, who went on hunger strikes to make visible their sense of grievance within the family circle. The wide symbolic appeal of fasting and the presence of this motif in a prominent masculine ballad of the region underlines Gandhi's genius in adapting political tools and symbols that the masses would immediately recognize and resonate with.
10. Shahid Amin, in his fascinating introduction to the reprinted *Concise Encyclopedia of North Indian Peasant Life*, prepared by the late-nineteenth-century British officials Crooke, Reid, and Grierson, draws attention to the series of terms that describe women's experiences out of wedlock. *Dolkarhi* refers to a woman who had been taken to a bridegroom who did not take her a barat. *Gharkaili*, *Dhenmani*, and *Urhari* all refer to a woman who lives with a man outside of marriage (Amin 2005, 47). In a footnote, *Urhari* is further defined as "one for whom it would be foolish for a 'man' to shed tears"! Its occurrence in a proverb attributed to the legendary peasant poet Ghagh, suggests that losing one's "stri to a parpurush" (wife to another) was not all that uncommon. Crooke, in his printed alphabetical Glossary (1888), quotes the following proverb, "Urar" or "Urhari": *Mue cham pe cham katave / Bhui pe sakra sove, / Ghagh kahan ye teeno bhakuwa, / Urar gayi ko rove* (Ghagh says there are three fools in the world: / he who lets the skin of his feet be cut by hard shoes; / he who sleeps curled up on the ground; and / he who weeps for his wife when she has "bolted") (Amin 2005, 47).
11. The immediate provocation for the BIA pledge was provided by the lavish expenditure of the landlord of the large Dera estate of Awadh on the wedding of his niece, where he fed thirty-five thousand people for six days. The colonial account delineates a four-pronged resolution adopted by the BIA in February 1864. This resolution allows me to assess the extent to which upper-caste marriage practices were causing anxiety within the administration. The association resolved the following:
 - i. That no Kshatriya would borrow superfluous paraphernalia such as camels, elephants, horses for the marriage ceremony.

- ii. That the bridegroom's father should take no more money from the bride's father than that required to entertain the wedding guests.
- iii. That Kshatriyas would marry their daughters to none but men of equal rank.
- iv. That the marriage expenses should not exceed half the individual's annual income.

Interestingly, the landowners of Awadh were seldom able to abide by these rules because marriages in taluqdari families were arranged in neighboring North West Provinces and Rajputana, where the writ of the BIA did not run (Jassal 1989, unpublished).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6: TAKING LIBERTIES

1. Satua is a nourishing mixture of food ground into a paste for easy traveling, consumed by dissolving it in water.
2. Rasiya is also associated with the dance form 'Rās, popular in the region of Krishna's birthplace.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION: COMMUNITY HARMONIES

1. Jyotiba Phule (1827–1890), one of most influential social reformers of Maharashtra, founded the Satyashodhak Samaj to liberate lower caste shudras and dalits from exploitation by Brahmins. Phule worked tirelessly for social reform, women's education, and against the evils of the caste system. He is known as Mahatma or great soul.