

Khyal

Changing Yearnings in Rajasthani Women's Songs*

Ann Grodzins Gold

WHEN I first lived in Ghatiyali — a large village in Ajmer District, Rajasthan — in 1979-81, I recorded women's songs fairly intensively, although by no means systematically. As I have noted in earlier published work, the songs I recorded in 1979-81 were strongly linked with occasions: childbirth, weddings, festivals, rituals, pilgrimages. My research focus in those years had to do with religion, and women often assumed what I would want to hear would be songs of the *devi-devata* or "goddesses-and-gods". But I found that even explicitly sexual and subtly subversive songs, along with devotional ones, were determined and partially constrained by performance context.¹ In 1993, while spending another eight months in Ghatiyali, I bumped into what seemed to be a new genre of songs, not linked to any specific occasion or event. The singers referred to these, somewhat casually, as *khyal*.

Invention and innovation are perpetual processes within oral traditions, but new and bounded genres are tricky indeed to pin down in time, place or form. Of course, in the broader context of North Indian performance traditions, *khyal* as a genre label has been in use for at least two



Nath Women in Ghatiyali

hundred years, but the songs I encountered in Ghatiyali seem remote from *khyal* of the mid-eighteenth century.² Nowhere in my journals or transcripts from 1979-81 in Ghatiyali have I located a type of song either female singers or male scribes labeled with the term *khyal*. However, it is evident that present-day Rajasthani *khyal* share concerns and characteristics with a number of women's performance genres pervasive throughout India under various names.³

I certainly would not swear to the newness of *khyal* as a genre even in Ghatiyali, let alone beyond it. I can, however, describe

with some conviction what is new to me in the kinds of songs Rajasthani women identified as *khyal* in 1993. That is my focus in this article. I shall first briefly and anecdotally narrate my encounter with these songs, so as to put the recordings themselves in context. Then, I shall furnish some examples, and point out motifs, messages, and moods I found in 1993 that seem to distinguish *khyal* from any of the women's songs I heard over a decade earlier in the same place. I am convinced that these differences — not earthshaking but real — reflect changes in the economic

**Manushi* regrets that we were not able to include the author's diacritical marks as given her manuscript.

- 1 See Ann Grodzins Gold, "Sexuality, Fertility, and Erotic Imagination in Rajasthani Women's Songs," in *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*, Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 30-72.
- 2 See Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 65-70.
- 3 See Kirin Narayan's "Songs Lodged in Some Hearts: Displacements of Women's Knowledge in Kangra," in *Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identity*, ed. S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming), pp. 181-213 and her "Women's Songs, Women's Lives," *Manushi* (No. 81, 1994).

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and social contexts of their production, and speak of women's determination to find new footings for their own lives on the shifting sands of the late twentieth century.⁴

Just khyal

In 1993, I was trying to learn about nature, agriculture, geography, and history; I was walking the fields and hillsides rather than sitting in courtyards. Often I worked in the company of male assistants, talking to men. There were a few women with whom I had a comfortable companionship that I deeply relished. Relaxing with them, I often felt simultaneously that I was *not* doing my work, and that I was learning the most. And I wished I could remain in their company rather than going back either to the complications of my "research" or my own vexing family life.

About a week before Holi, in the festive month of Phalgun, when the weather was still lovely and the barley harvest had already begun, I had a rare chance to live for a couple of weeks with the family I knew best. In this household at the time were my long-time collaborator and friend, Bhoju Ram Gujar, his wife Bali and their two daughters, his sister's daughter, his mother and father. In addition to these residents, frequently on the scene were Bhoju's maternal cousin, Shivji, and his wife Arami — a still childless couple in their teens. Arami was Bali's most constant companion. I was totally free of my own family who were scattered in various comfortable places where I didn't have to worry about them.

I spent part of my days with Shambhu Nath, an unemployed, literate man in his thirties, learning the names of the local trees and plants. As we were discussing plant lore, Shambhu invited me to come to his place one evening to record his wife with her friends and neighbours, who — he promised — would perform many wonderful women's songs having to do with plants. This was kind of a "request" programme — organised around Shambhu's desire to please me, his new, if temporary, employer. I did not know these women well.

Most of the songs I recorded that night were devotional, while a few were associated with agricultural work (e.g.: a

song about Shiv in a garden with trees; a song about the sacred basil goddess, Tulsi Ma; a song about the tribulations of farming cumin — a temperamental but supremely lucrative crop). But once in the mood for singing, the women did not care to stop. And they sang a few more songs about husbands, loneliness, trouble with in-laws. Although I rarely grasp much more than half the meaning of a song heard for the first time, these aroused my curiosity. When I asked, "what kind of songs are they?" the women answered, "Oh nothing, just *khyal*."

Because of the slightly disparaging way this was put, I took the term *khyal* at face value — to carry its common referential meaning: thought, feeling, sentiment. As such, the women perhaps opposed it to songs of firmer purpose. Women often sing to render an occasion auspicious or to please a deity. Such performances, however pleasurable, are in a way part of women's obligatory work. But *khyal* are sung, by contrast, *yun hi*, like that, to express feelings. At the same time, it seemed to me I heard an intimacy and affection for the genre expressed in the voices and smiles of these hard-working women — most of whom spent their long days doing agricultural or herding work along with extensive household chores.



Nath women dancing, veiled, at first haircut ritual, Ghatiayali

4. While the influence of film songs is certainly apparent in *khyal*, their musical style remains *desi* (folk-based) as opposed to *filmi* (Hindi film style).

The very next day Bali, my friend and hostess who was in the last months of her third pregnancy, listened to and critiqued the tape I had made at Shambhu's house. Clearly feeling a little competitive with these women of a different neighbourhood, some of whom were of her own Gujar caste, Bali announced that she too would fill a tape for me that night. Now, my interest was piqued in *khyal*, and as Bali and her female kin were the women with whom I felt most comfortable, I was able to say, "Great, fill my tape, but you know, I have enough songs of the *devi-devata* [goddesses-and-gods]. Anyway, these devotional songs don't change; the ones I recorded in 1980 are the same today. I don't want more of them. Sing me something new, sing *khyal*."



Bali Gujar with her husband's sister and their children

Bali and Arami (sometimes with other neighbours and relatives joining them, but seldom making a group larger than four or five) filled up several tapes over the course of several evenings. And, in spite of my bossy attempt to establish control of their performance, they did sing many devotional songs: of the goddess, of Shiv and Parvati, of Radha and Krishna — many of which I had indeed recorded before. In truth, I loved hearing them, old friends with sweet emotions and familiar words. In one memorable session the two women teased me with hilarious insult songs about me, my husband and my (hypothetical) lovers. As I had urged, they also sang a few songs they called *khyal*. I believe there are far fewer *khyal* in any one woman's repertoire than there are devotional songs. This could be another testimony to "newness," but it is probably also due to the creative, expressive, personal character of these songs.

In the conversational flow of life, I had never asked any singers for a general "definition" of *khyal* as genre. From the United States, however, I mailed a letter begging Bhoju to ask Bali how she would define *khyal*. "Do not try to answer from your own knowledge, talk to your wife!" I wrote in a teasing but imperative tone. He consulted both Bali and Arami, and wrote back to me, transmitting their Rajasthani words in his own grammatical Hindi. I trust that he has not distorted them.

The first element of the definition is negative: *khyal*, they say, is a kind of song that is not "religious" (*dharmik*) and not "sheerly entertaining" (*manoranjak*). Bhoju goes on to write that, according to Bali and Arami, "the singer in this kind of song is just one" (*ek hi hoti hai*). I assume this

means that *khyal* describes one woman's feelings, because of course the songs are sung by small groups. This singer, they continue "... complains to her own husband, or of her own husband's habits, behaviour, and his character. Or, besides her husband, she may express her desire to make a connection with some other man." (... *apne pati ki adaton*,

***Gifts of adornment to wear or food to share
are at once tokens of the most intimate love,
and public signs of a devoted husband***

vyavahar va uske charitra ki shikayat karti hai ya phir apne pati ke alava kisi anya purush ke sath apna sambandh banane ki bhavana prakat karti hai).⁵

Within the broader category of *khyal*, Bali and Arami name several still more specialised genres such as *ratnarebari*, *ucchalya*, *gangya git*, and *nagar chalya* that involve actual dialogic singing between males and females. One definition the Rajasthani *Sabad Kos* gives for *khyal* is that it is a special kind of song in which there is a refrain and an answer. Such songs were formerly sung at festivals by groups of men and women, especially of the Gujar and Mina castes. Now male singers are absent — probably due to

⁵ See Hansen's discussion of a mid-eighteenth century performance where "... two opposing groups direct questions and answers to each other, using the song type *lavani* or *khyal*, ..." (Hansen, *Grounds*, p. 66). For a Maharashtrian genre called *lavni* described as "a highly rustic and erotic genre dating from the sixteenth century onwards ..." see Friedhelm Hardy, *The Religious Culture of India: Power, Love and Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 215.

modern insistence on greater propriety in terms of women's public behaviour — and today women's songs only imagine what the male voice speaks.

In my previous work on women's songs I had noted how many depicted husband and wife exchanges, whether to construct a fictional intimacy that strongly contradicted anything visible or permissible in public; or to reflect on the culturally enforced distance between spouses, and attempt in various ways to mend this state of affairs. Before leaving for India in 1992 I had completed a paper about husband/wife dialogues in Rajasthani songs, based solely on recordings made in 1979-81. Significantly, each of my

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examples for that paper is embedded in a genre-producing context. I use a song of Tij, a song of Gangaur, a song of childbirth, a song of Radha and Krishna recorded on Cow Worship day, and a *bana* or song of the bride-groom prince, proper to the days preceding a wedding. I write of these:

In women's songs addressed to husbands the central demands are for demonstrations and tokens of love — readily summed up as presence and presents. Women claim power over their husbands by summoning them to their sides — and their rivals are only occasionally other women. More often they must recall their men from the company of male companions, city jobs, war, and other distractions that seem to represent the whole cultural system of sex-role segregation that conspires to separate husbands from wives and make husbands pretend indifference to the “species of women.”...

In most songs the woman's yearning for private intimacy with her husband is fully mingled with her desires for gifts. Gifts breech, or bridge, the private/public distinction. Gifts of adornment to wear or food to share are at once tokens of the most intimate love, and public signs of a devoted husband. It seems women desire these signs as much as they desire their man...⁶

All *khyal* are also dialogues between wife and husband, or woman and amorous male. Let me suggest a few of the themes I find new and different in the early nineties.

First, the always complicated power configurations and emotional alliances of the extended family household are

further destabilised by economic and educational opportunities and pressures. While women's songs have always reflected on the stresses and tensions within the family, it was far less often that they envisioned alternative arrangements. Now they do. Thus, most strikingly, *khyal* may demand not “come home” but “take me with you”. In village society similar situations are currently taking place. For example, Bhoju's cousin was in the army and his wife desired strongly to join him in faraway Pune in spite of her relatives' disapproval.

The women's songs I wrote of in my earlier work seemed to appreciate male access to markets and desired goods, and the salaries men earned to purchase these goods, even if they resented the jobs that took husbands away to cities. But now, presents are not enough; jewellery is not enough. The threat of male education, unmatched by anything comparable for women, becomes a threat of abandonment. Women fear that men with lives more and more centered beyond the parameters of rural society may cease to come and go.

Intimacy is on new terms. In my earlier study I noted the profusion of words for husbands in Rajasthani women's songs, including some circumlocutions which we also find in *khyal*, and numerous poetic terms of respect. In the early eighties none of the songs I heard used the word *piya* — now the term of choice for the male addressed. I have translated it as “darling” (although it might, more accurately but formally, be rendered “beloved”). Bali and Arami told me it meant “husband” — smiling in that shy and mischievous way young women have when they must speak

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the word husband in ordinary conversation. But *piya* is ambiguous; nothing about it specifies that the relation in question is marriage. So it may also be a lover. Songs that use *piya* may play on that ambiguity; is the woman addressing her husband lovingly, or is she addressing a potential lover — someone with whom she wishes to “make a connection” as Bali and Arami's definition indicates she may. Among Gujars and other farming communities of the region, marriages are often arranged in childhood and may well dissolve by mutual consent in adulthood, as the woman

6 Ann Grodzins Gold, “Outspoken Women: Representations of Female Voices in a Rajasthani Folklore Community,” *Oral Traditions* (forthcoming).

or man finds someone more to their liking and negotiates a *nata* or second marriage. In sum, the words and import of *khyal* suggested not revolutionary upheavals, but offered some scattered, vivid commentary on the changes seeping gradually into women's lives. From the leader of a local women's group, however, I heard some definitively divergent compositions.

Smashed Jewels, Incredible Sorrow⁷

In the following *khyal*, the woman seems to begin by asking her spouse not to go away, and to bring her gifts, in the usual style. She even speaks of him with one of the elaborate circumlocutions that is common in more traditional women's songs. A few lines later, however, she calls him "piya". By the end of the song she has ceased to want even the nicest jewellery, and when he offers to bring it, she declares she'll smash it. It is as if she realises the extent of her misery, and begins to reject old solutions, in mid-song. Of all the *khyal* recorded, this one seems most powerfully to speak of changed circumstances and changed emotions. Initially it was simply shocking to me in its devaluation of the husband's promised gifts. But the more I struggled to understand it, the darker seemed its possible implications.

Singers repeat each line; in the interests of space I omit these repetitions except when the words are varied. Notes in brackets are my insertions.

My special sister-in-law's brother joined the army.

[Note the old-fashioned circumlocution for "husband".]

As he went I grabbed his knees, "Don't leave me alone!"

As he went I grabbed his wrist, "Have built for me a palace tall!

Darling, I never climb up to the palace, below I roll out bread."

[Here is the first sign that all is not well.]

As he went I grabbed his finger, "Have forged for me a silver bracelet."

As he went I grabbed his *dhoti*," Bring for me some ocean pearls."

While sleeping in the dark house, my pearl necklace broke...

"Don't argue with me, Husband, my fate is written with you. On my head's a load of fodder, my mother-in-law and sister-in-law have all the power."

"Pretty one, now I'll come home on vacation, and I'll bring an ornament for your forehead."

"I'll smash the ornament with a stone, I'll count and curse the days."



Young Gujar couple on their wedding day, Rampali village

[More literally "counting counting I shall break the days."]

"Pretty one, now I'll come home on vacation, and I'll bring a necklace for your neck, I'll bring a wrist watch for your hand."

"I'll smash the necklace with a stone, I'll count and curse the days.

I'll smash the wristwatch with a stone, I'll count and curse the days."

*mari sagi nanand ra vira ra palatan men bharti hogya
jata ro pakaryo godo man ekalari mat chhoro
jata ro pakaryo pucho man mail chunadyo uncho
piya mail kadya hi na charhti niche hi phalka poti
jata ri pakri anguli manai ek gharadyo bagari
jata ri pakri dhogati manai lajyo samadar moti
andherya ghar men soti mari lar motya vali tuti
mat lar ra sayaba masyu, mara lekh likhyora thasyu
mar mathra karab ko bharo, mar sasur nanand ro saro
gauri abki chhuttya me ghar aula
thar sir vali rakhari lyaula
rakhari na patthar se phoru, me gin gin dinara toru
gauri abki chhuttya me ghar aula
thar har gala ko lyaula
thar hatha ri ghariya lyaula
har na ji patthar se phoru me gin gin dinara toru
ghariya ji patthar se phoru me gin gin dinara toru*

7 Ghatiyali's local language is close to Marwari but not identical with it. As a non-native speaker, I offer the translations that follow to *Manushi's* readers with some trepidation, and beg in advance your forgiveness for inevitable errors. I include transliterations of the transcriptions made by male village assistants; these are also subject to error, as I have often learned, because men may misconstrue women's sung words not being themselves participants in female performance traditions.

This extraordinary song seems to rethink the usual patterns as it develops. A husband freely but infrequently comes and goes while his wife remains behind in his home. First she appears to take the attitude commonly expressed in many women's songs. She complains, implores, "don't go," and then demands that if he goes he must bring her the gifts she will cherish that will make her life worthwhile. However, the fantasy of what a well-employed man might give is posed against the woman's actual experience of loneliness, kitchen drudgery, and domestic subordination.

There are hints of still more profound causes for unhappiness. What happens in the dark when her necklace breaks? A broken necklace or string of pearls may carry general implications of inauspiciousness (though not as acute as broken bangles). As Vasudha Narayanan confirms, in Tamil literature at least, a broken necklace may often be construed as a sign of sexual violence because women

***One mood women have when singing khyal
may have just a whiff of something new
taking place between the sexes. Or perhaps
it is the same old story.***

would normally remove their necklaces in anticipation of consensual sex. Whatever is implied by the broken necklace, it moves the wife to declare her powerless situation ultimately unbearable. Desperate, rather than merely plaintive, she can no longer be placated with presents, however desirable.

Another similar song about an absent husband (from the same recording session at Shambhu Nath's) has less obscure poetics. It is too long to include here in full. In it, the wife begs her husband to return home. He approaches, and keeps asking her to tell him the "news". She beckons him, first to come nearer and nearer to her in space, progressing from outside to their private room; then, to eat, drink, lie down on the bed. It is only when she has him thus symbolically situated, in the place that most strongly signifies their marital union, that she reveals her problems and her desire:

Pretty one, now I have lain on the cot, so now tell me the news.

Darling, I'll tell you the true truth, my mother-in-law fights with me day and night

Darling, I'll tell you the true truth, my father-in-law fights with me day and night

Darling, I'll tell you the true truth, take me away with

you

*gauri ab to palangya sogyo ye man ab khaidyo
samachar*

piya sachi sachi khaidyu ji man sasuji lar din rat

piya sachi sachi khaidyu ji man susaraji lar din rat

piya sachi sachi khaidyu ji man le chalo ji sath

The message is not "stay here" but "take me with you".

A third absent-husband *khyal* is less mysterious, more straightforward, and perhaps still less hopeful. Each line is repeated in the recorded version.

Sold my nose ring and brought books,

Went and sat in the school,

Studied fine Hindi, and studied English,

Became a respected railway clerk.

Oh stifle my hiccups and stifle my soul!

"Just now I'll meet with my pretty one."

Mother is happy, my father is happy,

but in the bedchamber, pretty one's sad.

[literally, "in the colour palace," a poetic term often used for a nuptial chamber in Rajasthani oral traditions]

nathari ji bech kitaba lyaya

ja bethya askulya men



Bali and Arami dress up in traditional clothes

*hindi ji parh angreji pargya
rela ra babu bangya ji
dhabja ye hachki dhabja re jivara
bar malu mari gauri su
man sukhi maro bap sukhi
gauri dukhi rang mahala men*

The young wife is emotionally abandoned by her husband who has achieved success at her expense, selling her valued ornament, and no longer seems to care for her. Women joke and tease one another about hiccups: “It means your husband’s thinking of you.” According to exegesis given me in Ghatiyali, the wife here admonishes herself to cease hiccuping and to keep her soul patient — in other words, to repress her desires. Her husband casually promises his immediate presence, but evidently his words do not console much. He is just the kind of successful salaried husband her parents wanted, but for her there is no conjugal satisfaction.⁸ She is not making demands but only describing her unhappiness. With the husband’s voice confined to a single line, the usual dialogue is reduced almost to monologue here.

Although the *khyal* I have highlighted thus far are songs of sorrow, not all *khyal* by any means so dark and doleful. Many are playful. Here is my favorite, the sweetest and least troubled, recorded from Bali and Arami on March 9, after Holi, when I was still living at Bhoju Ram’s house. We had all gleefully smeared each other with red powder the very day before.

It may be my favourite because its translation, unlike the others, is quite unproblematic. It also epitomises one mood women may have when singing *khyal*, and it may, as do the sadder songs, have just a whiff of something new taking place between the sexes. Or perhaps it is the same old story.

Sit on my bicycle, pretty woman; sit on my bicycle, pretty woman.
On your bicycle I’ll get dizzy, darling, get dizzy, darling.
If you get dizzy we’ll stroll on foot, pretty woman; stroll on foot, pretty woman.
Strolling on foot I’ll step on pebbles, darling; step on pebbles, darling.
If you step on pebbles I’ll bring you sandals, pretty woman; bring you sandals, pretty woman.
If you bring sandals I might hurt my shawl, darling; hurt my shawl, darling.
If you hurt your shawl then wash your clothes, pretty woman; wash your clothes, pretty woman.
If I wash my clothes then I’ll get cold, darling; get cold,

darling.

If you get cold then cover up, pretty woman; cover up pretty woman.

[Note that the words used here are “*pardo rakho*”, literally “keep purdah” — that is, stay home secluded. This reference to purdah is certainly deliberate and ironic.]

Covered up I’ll get hot, darling; get hot, darling.

If you get hot I’ll bring a cooler, pretty woman; I’ll bring a fan, pretty woman.⁹

A fan will muss my braid, darling; muss my braid, darling.

If your braid gets mussed I’ll bring a barrette, pretty woman; a barrette, pretty woman.

A barrette could tear my sari, darling; tear my sari, darling.

If your sari tears what’s it matter to you, pretty woman?

What’s it matter to you, pretty woman?



Prem Bai at her home in Jaswantpura

*saikal baitho, ye gauri; saikal baitho, ye gauri
saikal baitha to chakkar ava, ra piya; chakkar ava, ji
piya
chakkar ava to paidal ghumo, ye gauri; paidal ghumo,
ye gauri
paidal ghuma to kankar gadgya, ji piya; kankar
gadgya, ji piya*

8 For another song in which a non-literate girl complains of her literate husband’s going astray, see Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, “Drawing Pictures in the Dust: Rajasthan Children’s Landscapes,” *Childhood* (vol. 2, 1994): pp. 73-91.

9 On husbands fanning as a frequent euphemism for sexual intercourse in women’s songs, see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, “‘Crying When She’s Born, and Crying When She Goes Away’: Marriage and the Idiom of the Gift in Pahansu Song Performance,” in *Hindu Marriage from the Margins*, ed. Lindsey Harlan and Paul Courtright (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 19-59.

kankar gadgya to chappal lyadyu, ye gauri; chappal lyadyu, ye gauri
chappal lyao to dupato lag, ji piya; dupato lag, ji piya
dupato lag to kapara dhaulyo, ye gauri; kapara dhaulyo, ye gauri,
kapara dhauva to sardi lag, ji piya; sardi lag, ji piya
sardi lag to pardo rakho, ye gauri; pardo rakho, ye gauri
pardo rakha to garmi lag, ji piya; garmi lag, ji piya
garmi lag to kular lyadyu, ye gauri; pankho lyadyu, ye gauri
pankho lyadyo to choti bagar, ji piya; choti bagar, ji piya
choti bagar to bakal lyadyu, ye gauri; bakal lyadyu ye gauri,
bakal lyao to sari phat, ji piya; sari phat, ji piya
sari phat to than kai matlab, ye gauri; than kai matlab, ye gauri?

Bali and Arami sang this song in slow duet as an exemplary *khyal* for my benefit. In fact, they sang every word twice, and then, when I asked them to explain what it was about, repeated it all slowly a third time, without the melody. This was the song they wanted to use to show me what *khyal* were all about, and Bhoju mentioned it again in his letter defining the genre.

The song has more English words than most: cycle, cooler, buckle (for barrette). Most Indian readers will know that a *kular* is somewhere between an electric fan and an air conditioner. No one in the village has one, but they are common among the affluent in the nearby market town. It also refers to a sari, when most Rajasthani village women including the singers wear the traditional skirt, blouse, and wrap. It seems firmly and casually to dismiss purdah with its squelching of woman's sexuality ("covered up I'll get hot"). However, it is not a song of surrender to seduction, either. Rather, its mood is one of enjoyable banter, and perhaps it celebrates the freedom to banter. The male has the last word, though, and he seems to be saying, "why not?"

In real life, no such freedom to engage in public displays of playful flirtation exists for young women. In one case I knew, which took place only a few days after I recorded this song, a Ghatiyali wife was beaten for taking part in an incident far more innocent than this imagined bicycle ride. Violence against women remains a reality against which they must struggle in Rajasthan, as in the United States. Although songs about absent husbands have been traditional, and

The songs presented here do not envision a world beyond husbands, but they do begin to imagine and construct a variety of alternatives to destructive domestic situations

are modulated to changing times in *khyal*, songs describing abusive husbands sound a more radically discordant note. The final text I transcribe here is sung in a local *mahila mandal* or women's group. It is definitively new, and no one ever called it *khyal*. It strikes me, though, that the vitality of a genre such as *khyal* defined as a mode of complaint about the husband's "habits, behaviour, and character" may enable activists more easily to compose songs such as this one expressing resistance to domestic violence.

The *mahila mandal* is led by a non-literate daughter of Ghatiyali named Prem Bai, also a Gujar. Prem Bai's marital home is a much smaller village, Jaswantpura, just a few kilometers down the road. Prem Bai introduced herself to me one day as I was passing through Jaswantpura, and we were drawn together by mutual curiosity. She was accustomed to public speaking, and loved to address the tape recorder. Although I visited her home several times, she sang this song for me unaccompanied, while sitting on my verandah and smoking American cigarettes, which she relished. Here we learn painfully that intimacy with a husband is not necessarily desired bliss; that in-laws may be refuge rather than tyrants.

I have happiness from all, O Lord, but incredible sorrow from my husband.

He takes a green stick and beats my back, incredible sorrow from my husband,

he takes a green kerchief and ties my hands, incredible sorrow from my husband

I have happiness from my brother-in-law, happiness from my brother-in-law's wife,

I have happiness from my mother-in-law, happiness from my father-in-law,

I have happiness from all, O Lord, but incredible sorrow from my husband.

He takes a green stick and beats my back, incredible sorrow from my husband,

he takes a green kerchief and ties my hands, incredible sorrow from my husband.

From my younger brother-in-law I have happiness, and from my younger brother-in-law's wife,

I have happiness from all, Oh lord, but incredible sorrow

from my husband.

He takes a green stick and beats my back, incredible
sorrow from my husband,

he takes a green kerchief and ties my hands, incredible
sorrow from my husband

*manai sab sukh hai vo bhagvan gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*ali kanmari syu jhurai mara mor, gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*hariya rumalya syu bandhya mara hath, gajab dukh
parnyan ko*

jeth ji ko sukh hai re manai, jaithyani ko sukh hai

sasu ji ko sukh hai re manai, susaraji ko sukh hai

*manai sab sukh hai vo bhagvan, gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*ali kanmari syu jhurai mara mor, gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*hariya rumalya syu bandhya mara hath, gajab dukh
parnyan ko*

lalji sukh hai re manai, doranyan ko sukh hai

*manai sab sukh hai vo bhagvan, gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*ali kanmari syu jhurai mara mor, gajab dukh parnyan
ko*

*hariya rumalya syu bandhya mara hath, gajab dukh
parnyan ko*

The man who transcribed this song commented disparagingly on its simplicity and senselessness. It clearly made him uncomfortable. Its message is painfully direct, unambiguous, nothing about necklaces breaking in the dark. The estrangement is neither distance, nor education, but the all too present spouse's habitually abusive behaviour.

In March 1995, Ruth Vanita gave a wonderful talk at Syracuse University where I teach. She began with reference to the Nicole Simpson case then gripping American minds, urging that feminist thought move beyond "cultural specificity". She said in her years with **Manushi** she found many women who wanted help in getting their husbands to stop beating them, but few who imagined a life without husbands. Her talk was about how to push towards new imaginings of human existence altogether, beyond the gendered limitations common to most societies. Certainly, the songs presented here do not envision a world beyond husbands, but they do begin to imagine and construct a variety of alternatives to destructive domestic situations. These may include a nuclear family household in the husband's workplace, a connection with a new and more attentive partner, or the bold voicing of choral complaints



Prem Bai, Jaswantpura

in the safer space of a *mahila mandal*. As expressions of feelings, *khyal* do not supply answers to women's problems. They do reveal women's acute awareness of changes at work in society, and their active search for effective means to claim control over matters affecting their hearts, minds, and lives. □

Notes

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All photographs by Ann Grodzins Gold except the one on p.17 which was taken by Bhoju Ram Gujar.

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