

Singing from Separation: Women's Voices in and about Kangra Folksongs

Kirin Narayan

“Women are always singing,” observed Brinda Devi Sud,¹ a middle-aged village woman in Kangra, North West India, in 1991. She had been leafing through a sheaf of Kangra women's song texts that I had transcribed, and now, speaking the local dialect, she paused to share her thoughts. “Whenever you go to a ritual gathering, women are singing,” she said. “Some songs you know, and some you just sing along with. Some songs attract you, they go sit inside your heart. That's how you learn songs.”

The relationship between songs (*gīt*) and hearts/minds (*dil*), a theme echoed by other female singers in Kangra, addresses an enduring issue in social theory. Expressive forms like folksongs and folk narratives have tended to be conceptualized as speaking unproblematically for all participants in the culture under study. Scholars have scrutinized such expressive forms, often cast as “texts” in order to discern the (singular) “native's point of view” or comprehend the mind of a (monolithic) “folk.” With the rise of a paradigm emphasizing performance, by the 1970s scholarly focus moved from texts alone to account also for the creativity of situated performers in a diversity of contexts (i.e. Bauman 1977, Finnegan 1977). However, performers have rarely been given a chance to explicate their own texts, artistry, or emotional response. Despite Alan Dundes' prescient call for “oral literary criticism” (1966), and despite the development of reader response and reception theory in literary studies, it remains rare to find scholarly texts in which singers are invited to comment on their songs (Abrahams 1970, Claus n.d., Narayan 1995).

The situation that holds generally applies also to India. In addition to the other essays in this collection, there is a vast and growing body of scholarship on women's songs from diverse regions of India now available

¹ Like all the names I use in this paper, this is a pseudonym.

in English.² Women's singing is usually associated with auspiciousness (cf. Henry 1988:110-11); particularly in rural areas, women assemble to sing for rites of passage and other occasions marking good fortune (for example the building of a new house, the acquisition of a job, and so on). Since women sing in groups, it is easy to understand why scholars might hear songs as speaking for women, collectively conceived. Indeed, scholars generally have interpreted song texts as representing the subjectivity and emotions of a generic (albeit sometimes caste-specific) Woman in a particular regional context. Songs thus become textual *objects* on which general theoretical statements about women can be based rather than the lived *practices* of reflective subjects (cf. Williams 1991:421-22). Ironically, in speaking for the collective woman's voice in songs, scholars have tended to bypass the voices of actual singers.

In Kangra, a favorite song genre among older women singers is *pakharu*, which describes the travails of married life. The separation of husband and wife is a recurrent theme in these songs. In this paper I focus on representations of absent husbands, complementing the texts of songs with commentaries from singers in whose memories the songs lodge. Methodologically, I wish to demonstrate the importance of thinking about oral traditions in terms of both text and commentary. Theoretically, I argue that the ethnographic generalizations that emerge from equating texts with collective points of view can be refined through attention to performers. Thus, male absence in Kangra songs is not just an ethnographic fact, but also a multivocal symbol on which women strategically draw in order to comment on a range of emotions and situations in their lives.

***Pakharu*: A Genre in Context**

"There are songs for all occasions," instructed Kanta Pandit, a primary school teacher in her fifties. With a long face and betel-stained teeth, she spoke Hindi as we sat out on a balcony among her female Brahman relatives whom I had been recording. "First," she said in her brisk, teacherly way, "there are *lok gīt* ('folk songs'): these are about husbands going away, and young women sing these songs to remember them."

² For some of the highlights in this growing literature on Indian women's folksongs, see Archer 1988; Bryce 1961; Claus 1991, n.d.; Henry 1988:25-113; Jacobson 1975; Karve 1939-40; Raheja and Gold 1994; Rao 1991; Sharma 1981; Tharu and Lalitha 1991:126-42; Trawick 1988, 1991.



Brahman women singing *pakharu* at a gathering for a son's birthday in Kangra

Gathering that Kanta Pandit was using this analytic category “folk song” for my benefit, I countered with my own understanding of locally defined genres: “Do you mean *pakharu*?” “This is *pakharu*,” Kanta Pandit affirmed with a roll of her head. She went on to describe what she discerned as two other broad categories of song: those obligatorily sung by women to accompany rituals, and those sung as a form of religious devotion. “Among these kinds of song, the most interesting is *pakharu*,” she continued. “In the past, men went off to work for the King. Once a man had gone, poor chap, it was uncertain as to whether he’d come back. So his wife would live by taking refuge in songs. Suppose he set off today, he might not be back for twelve years. So this is how she would be able to remember him.” As if to emphasize her preference, Kanta Pandit repeated, “*Pakharu* are the most interesting of all the different kinds of songs.”

This evaluation was one I was already familiar with from other older, upper caste women in Kangra. I had been documenting women’s songs in Kangra on and off since 1980, the year before I went to graduate school. Returning in 1990 for a year’s field research, I had intended to expand on an earlier graduate school project on wedding songs (Narayan 1986). But

when I told women of my interest in songs, they often set to filling my tapes with *pakharu*. In informal contexts, they chose to sing *pakharu* for me; also, during collective singing sessions, once the requisite genre of auspicious ritual songs were sung, they would turn to *pakharu*. As a female cousin once defined *pakharu* for the M.A.-educated daughter of Kanta Sharma who had asked what it meant, “You sing two or four songs that you’re supposed to, and then you move on to *pakharu*.”

In a locally published collection of Kangra songs, the folklorist Dr. Gautam Vyathit confirms the “filler” nature of *pakharu* as sung between sequences of songs of the genre required for a particular ritual event. He also links the word *pakharu* to *pakhari dai*, the daily worship of the doorstep, courtyard, and pathway that village women, particularly brides, perform with cow dung and sprinkled leaves. “In this context,” he writes (and I translate from Hindi) “*pakharu* as accusatory songs are like leaves that before giving birth to flowers have experienced sorrow and pain” (1973:129). *Pakharu* are about married life from a woman’s point of view, most often that of a bride who does not appear to have children. These songs tend to be set in a past era of difficult travel over long distances and strict codes of gender segregation. They describe an in-marrying bride’s longing for her family of birth; a bride’s mistreatment by in-laws in a joint family; and most centrally, a bride’s relationship with a husband who, more often than not, is absent. In this paper I selectively draw on songs that illustrate this last theme of male absence.

Indigenous genre categorizations often map onto social distinctions (Flueckiger 1991). In Kangra, the term *pakharu* borders two genres that overlap in themes even as they index social difference: *barsātī* (monsoon songs) and *ḍholru* (basket maker’s ballads). *Pakharu* is by definition a genre peculiar to upper caste women: Brahmans, Rajputs, and Mahajans or Suds. In these castes, women were traditionally restricted through practices of gender segregation and veiling (cf. Sharma 1978a, 1978b). These castes mostly forbade women’s participation in agriculture. While shifting intercaste relations have pushed some women of these castes into agriculture, upper caste women are generally from backgrounds in which women have leisure to gather together and sing. *Pakharu* are sung indoors or in enclosed courtyards apart from men, thus mirroring the conditions of gender segregation among high castes.

Barsātī, or monsoon songs, are on the other hand sung by women of lower castes, and of low-ranking high-castes (for example, some Rajputs) engaged in agricultural work. *Barsātī* are typically sung while working in groups, knee-deep in cold water, to transplant rice shoots. Also playing upon themes of marital difficulties and absent husbands, *barsātī* songs are

sung in a different style that emphasizes a prolonged final note: “oooooooo,” sang upper caste woman, caricaturing that note.

Dholru ballads are supposed to be performed by members of the basketmaker castes visiting the courtyards of upper caste patrons in the spring month of Chaitra. *Dholru* singers come in threes: two women and one man, who also serves as drummer. It is thought that by singing about this inauspicious month, citing its name in their songs, the basket makers are removing the month's inauspiciousness from upper castes. Like *pakharu* and *barsātī*, *dholru* also tell tales of women's suffering. Because of the public performance of these songs, women from castes other than basket makers also sometimes knew *dholru* by having heard them year after year. In addition, I taped a few *pakharu* that were clearly shorter adaptations of *dholru*. It was my impression during fieldwork that of all these genres, men of assorted castes were also most aware of the content of *dholru*.

Like most folklore forms, women's songs in Kangra are learned, shared, and transmitted within small groups, and thus are public. Both *pakharu* and *barsātī* are participatory genres, with no clear line between singer and audience. In performance, one or two women usually lead the singing while others who might be present blend in. Before plunging into a particular song, singers often confer in mutters and fragments of melody to plot out the words, the verse order, and the tune. Lines of text are often repeated twice, and the melody is always repetitive. This means that even a woman hearing the song for the first time is able to join in, making performance truly public. Since it is individuals who carry on and transform an oral tradition, these songs can also be viewed as private: an artifact of an individual's memory and aesthetic pleasure. It is this intersection between collective symbolic forms and individual subjectivities that most fascinated me, and which I sought to explore by talking to women about their songs.

Most women's songs are in the mountain dialect used for domestic conversations that is loosely termed Pahari, “of the mountains,” or Kangri, “of Kangra.” Kangra lies at the base of the Dhauladhar (“White Bearing”) Himalayan mountains that tower roughly twelve to fifteen thousand feet above the valley floor. Katoch kings once governed Kangra as a hill state, but these kings were brought under Mughal rule in the mid-sixteenth century, submitted to Sikh domination in 1809, and became part of the British colonial state in 1846. Kangra remained an administrative district of Punjab under British rule and for almost two decades following Indian Independence. When post-independence Indian states were rearranged on the basis of language, Kangra's local dialect, *Kangri bolī*, a subdialect of

Dogri, was politically construed as having a hill rather than plains identity. In 1966 Kangra merged with the northern hill state of Himachal Pradesh (Parry 1979:11-14). The linguistic mixture in women's songs reflects much of this history, with the local dialect mingling freely with Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and even smatterings of English words.

Another aspect of Kangra history that surfaces in women's songs is the region's association with Vaishnavism—the worship of Vishnu in his various incarnations, particularly as Krishna. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Kangra rulers patronized artists who painted exquisite miniatures, often featuring scenes from legends about the deity Krishna. Krishna was a ladies' man: a central theme in his mythology is the love of the cowherd maiden *gopīs* who suffer when separated from him. This emotion of *viraha*, love and longing in separation, is highly elaborated in the cult of Krishna (Hardy 1983). The taxonomy of *viraha* is also described by medieval Hindi poets whose verses formed the subject for some Kangra miniatures. The women I worked with were not familiar with this poetry or the miniatures. However, their songs appear to be informed by a wider cultural ambience that aestheticizes the anguished separation of lovers.

In 1991 the population of Kangra was roughly one million. This population was largely Hindu, dominated by the Rajput castes. All the families I worked with were in some way involved with agriculture, as land owners if not laborers. Subsistence farming in Kangra is backed by a cash economy, with the crucial part of each family's income hinging on remittances sent in from men working in the plains and beyond. While the pattern of male migration is an old one, increasing population with a fixed land base has made for a deteriorating person-to-land ratio, causing an increasing dependence on wage labor (Greenberg 1991). Currently, the state of Himachal Pradesh has among the fewest off-farm wage labor opportunities of any state in India. Men, then, must travel to the plains and even abroad in search of work.

Often it is in the early years of married life and while children are young that a husband is away, sending regular remittances home and returning for only a month or two a year to help with the farm. In a joint family of several brothers, one or more brothers may be at home at a particular time. By middle age the man has usually retired, and his sons are working outside. I observed that even as women lamented this pattern of male absence, it could also contribute to a sense of their own worth.

For example, after rereading sections about women in Jonathan Parry's *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*, I felt troubled by the misogyny of the upper caste male perspectives he describes: that having nine times as much

“heat” as men, women are sexually predatory, with a proclivity for liaisons; that daughters are an economic and social liability whose dowries strain family finances and whose hypergamous marriages threaten family honor (justifying female infanticide among the Kangra Rajput aristocracy during the last century); that married women’s quarrelsome nature disrupted the idealized unity of the joint family house; and so on (1979:146-48, 175-77, 213-15). Yet when I asked Vidhya Sharma, who was helping me with song transcriptions, about how she thought women were viewed in Kangra, she replied, eyes flashing over her hooked nose: “Women are viewed with respect here. They are seen in a good light. After all, most men are out for ten months of the year, and who takes care of everything—the farm, the house, the relatives, the guests who might come by? The woman does. The man is only here maybe two months during his leave. He *has* to respect her.”

Vidhya’s own husband was a schoolteacher who lived at home. Yet, in her comment, men’s potential absence was rhetorically manipulated to highlight the ongoing responsibilities that all married women faced, allowing her to vehemently claim women’s centrality to men’s social and economic survival. As I hope to show through an analysis of *pakharu*, men’s migration in Kangra is not just an ingrained social fact, but also a multivocal symbol through which women may comment on aspects of their lives.

Singing and Separation

In *pakharu*, a husband is usually referred to as the “employed man” (*naukar*, *chākar*), “traveler” (*musāphar*), or “soldier” (*sipāhi*). He may also be called *sumbā*, *dholā*, or *kand*, terms that women glossed as “husband” without cuing me in to the connotations surrounding a particular choice of word. Furthermore, a husband is called *Rām*, or *Shyām*, indicating that the *pativrata* construction of Husband as divine Lord spills over with embedded mythological allusions (and occasional irony) into women’s songs.

The woman protagonist in *pakharu* is usually referred to simply as *goriye*, which can be translated as “Fair One,” “Beautiful One” (Singh 1962), or, as a woman schoolteacher emphatically told me, “Wife.” The places mentioned in these songs indicate a network of migration spreading across North India and beyond. In a young girls’ song about the great Lord Shiva in his local form of Senkar, he is taking off to find work in the adjoining district of Chamba. Similarly, human men go to Jammu, Kashmir, and Delhi in the songs. Songs that obviously date to a time

before the partition of Pakistan mention Lahore, Karachi, and even Kabul. A few songs implore, “Take me with you.” (Though increasingly men may be accompanied by their wives and children, this situation of living together, as a nuclear family at a distance, is not usually economically viable and, by further isolating women, does not promote singing. To my knowledge, this situation has not been elaborated in *pakharu* texts.)

Here is a *pakharu* featuring the month of Chaitra—March and April. This is the month during which the tragic *dholaru* ballads are supposed to be sung by Dumna basket makers going from door to door. It is a favorite month within *pakharu* texts also, possibly because the spring flowers and the enhanced romantic atmosphere make the separation of lovers more difficult. In the following song, which includes many Punjabi words, a married woman tries to persuade her departing husband to stay with her as the valley explodes with the colors and fragrances of spring blossoms:

chaitre de mahīne jī
koī phūl je phūle
ajī phūlaṛe rabhānt
goriye torīye rakhe

In the month of Chaitra
flowers blossom;
a variety of flowers
that the Beautiful One plucks.

chākar musāphar
koī piṛhe ghoṛe
ghar rahendiyā de
jivare kuch thoṛe thoṛe

The Employed Man, the Traveler,
saddles his horse.
Staying home,
life ebbs away.

pakari lagām
goriye pās kharōṭī
aji jhundē de andar
goriye chham chham roī

Grabbing the reins,
the Beautiful One stands nearby.
Beneath a heavy veil
she splashes tears.

chhoṛ de lagām be
tainu rām duhāī
aji māpeyāndā dā des
tainu lāj na āī

“Let go of the reins,
I implore, by God!
Your parents’ place
does not give you honor.”

mapeyāndā des
mainu baṛā pyārā
aji rāj chhoṛeyā kāj
chhoreyā kāval jānā

“My parents’ place
I dearly love.
Abandon these royal duties.
Abandon going to Kabul.”

kāval de do panshi āe
karde pānī pānī
aji kand thā anjān
goriye kadar na jāni

From Kabul, two birds arrived
demanding “Water! Water!”
The husband I had is missing.
The Beautiful One knows no respect.

chature dī nār
baiṭi hār parote
aji mūrkhē dī nār
gallān suni suni rove

A clever man's woman
 relaxes, stringing garlands.
 A stupid man's woman
 listens and weeps.

chature dī nār
bole main sukh pāyā
aji mūrkhē dī nār
main dukh pāyā

A clever man's woman
 says, "I got happiness."
 A stupid man's woman
 says, "I got sorrow."

This particular rendition was led by Brinda Devi Sud at the singing session for her nephew's first birthday. The women who had gathered from adjoining households started out with songs dealing with birthday worship and the happiness of a mother. As the afternoon wore on, the songs became less focused on the ritual at hand. Devotional songs and also *pakharu* crept in. Throughout the session, the women often deferred to Brinda Devi. A woman in her fifties with hair greying softly and her *bindi* a bright spot of scarlet on her forehead, she sang through the missing teeth at the front of her mouth. Later in her home she explained to me that the wife in this song felt that her own life would ebb away with grief at her husband's absence. She tried unsuccessfully to stop him from going off to work in Kabul. When visitors came from the place where he worked, demanding hospitality and bearing news of him, two possible scenarios were at hand. "If a husband is clever (*chant*), he will work hard and send home much money," said Brinda Devi. "That is why the wife can sit stringing garlands without worry. But if he is stupid he makes a mess of everything and she weeps when she hears the tales." I noted this down, inwardly remembering the village gossip that Brinda Devi's own husband had gambled away a large property.

Orally transmitted texts, as we know, vary with performance. In the lush monsoon, I taped a variant of this song in a Brahman settlement where Kanta Pandit lived—again in the course of singing for a son's birthday. The song was identified as being "that one about the nose rings." Here the flowers that the Beautiful One plucked were affixed to the large nose ring (*bālū*), iconic of her married status. I should add that the wearing of a flower in the nose ring is not a cultural practice, but would seem to allude to sexual longings, particularly in light of Ramanujan's argument in this volume that flowers stand for female sexuality. The association with flowers also adds a new dimension to the fact that a clever man's woman is fulfilled, calmly stringing flower garlands.

During the monsoon, I also went with Vidhya Sharma to visit her parents' home. Here I taped another variant of the same song from Pushpa Devi, an animated woman of the Barber caste, as she reminisced about songs her grandmother used to sing. As women themselves noted, the husband's going to Kabul indicated that the song dated from a time well before India's partition from Pakistan, but Pushpa Devi's testimony of her grandmother also served to anchor the song in repertoires of bygone generations. In Pushpa Devi's variant, the Beautiful One requested specific flowers: roses for her husband's turban and fragrant jasmynes for her nose ring. Pushpa Devi's variant also shed new light on the line about the birds asking for water: Brinda Devi had said that the birds stood for guests, but in Pushpa Devi's song, no mention was made of the water (*pānī*) they demanded. Rather, it was through their speech (*vānī*), or birdsong, that these migrating birds brought news of the faraway man.

Apart from textual variation, ambiguous poetic wordings seemed to encourage differing interpretations. According to two Brahman women, Durga Pandit and Sangita Devi Sharma, it is the life of both the man and his family that ebbs away if he stays at home, since there is nothing to eat. They interpreted this line as referring to starvation rather than a tormented heart. White-haired Sangita Devi elaborated on the identity of a stupid man: "The stupid man is someone who doesn't go outside to work. He tries to find employment in the village, and can't make any money. When he tells his stories about everything that's gone wrong, his wife weeps." At this point I asked Sangita Devi whether her own husband had taken a job elsewhere. She admitted that no, he had not worked outside, but had held odd jobs such as that of village postman, for which he earned a maximum of 125 rupees (about six dollars) per month before he retired without a pension. "With four daughters to marry, things were very difficult," she said. She tried to earn money by spinning and knitting in her home, but there was not enough of a market for her handiwork. In the end it was her widowed sister, a schoolteacher, upon whom she relied for the most support.

Other songs express the fantasy of not just trying to delay a departure, but actively keeping a husband at home, maintaining him as a companion through the cycle of months. Poems describing love through the twelve months of the year were an inspiration in Kangra valley miniatures (Randhawa 1962: 27, 131-46). Throughout North India, there are Twelve Month songs in vernacular traditions (Vaudeville 1963-64; Wadley 1983; Zbavitel 1976), and in Kangra such songs accord with the natural rhythms and regional festivals of the area.

After singing the last song about attempts to defer departure, Brinda Devi Sud immediately started to sing the following one. I recognized it as a variant of a song I had taped at a wedding several months earlier.

bharyā kachharyā saurā puchhnā lagā
kai vo kharī maile bhes mein

In the crowded courthouse, Father-in-law began to inquire,
“Why do you stand here in disheveled attire?”

putra tā tere saureyā naukari chalā saureyā chākari chalā
tāin vo kharotī maile bes mein

“Your son, Father-in-law, is going off to work,
he’s going off to serve.
That’s why I stand here in disheveled attire.”

je tu hundi nue chatur sajād
jānde mahime jo horhadī

“If you’re clever, Daughter-in-law,
you’ll detain your departing husband.”

merā tā horheyā saureyā rahandā nahin
jāndā e bāi marorhadā

“When I detain him, Father-in-law, he doesn’t stay,
he takes off, twisting his arm free.”

diyā tā bali nue rakhiyā jharokhe
jānde mahime jo horheyā

“Light an oil lamp, Daughter-in-law, put it in the window,
detain your departing husband.”

chaitra na jāe piyā ban dhan phūle
bhariyo vaisākhe dākhā pakkiyā

“Don’t go in Chaitra [March/April], darling, the forests
and fields are in bloom.
In the month of Vaisakh [April/May] the grapes are ripe.”

jeṭhe na jāe piyā dhūpe paunde bhārī
hārhe ambue pakade

“Don’t go in the Jeth [May/June], darling, when strong
sun beats down.
In Adh [June/July] mangos ripen.”

sone na jāe pīyā pīnga main jhūlā

bhādon main rāti bhi niyāriyān

“Don’t go in Son [July/August], darling,
when you’ll rock me in a swing.
In Bhadon [August/September] blackness fills the nights.”

asu na jāe piyā pitar manāne

katake divāliyā āniyā

“Don’t go in Asu [September/October], darling,
the ancestors must be honored.
In Katak [October/November] comes the Festival of Lights.”

magar na jāe piyā pāle ponde bhārī

pohe leph bharāndiyā

“Don’t go in Magar [November/December], darling,
when the dew falls thick.
In Poh [December/January] we’ll fill comforters.”

māghe na jāye piyā lohṛī ghar āi

phagane holi main khelnī

“Don’t go in Magh [January/February], darling,
when the festival of Lohdi comes to the house.
In Fagan [February/March] I’ll play, tossing colors
for the festival of Holi.”

bīte ni goriye tere bārah mahīne

huṅ main naukariyā chalā

“Your twelve months have passed, Beautiful One,
now I’m going off to my job.”

bārah tā mahīne piyā horheyā raheyā ghar je raheyā

jānde di lage terī naukari

“For twelve months, darling, you were held back,
you stayed at home, may you find employment as soon as you go.”

Brinda Devi Sud explained that the father-in-law was a wealthy merchant, much like successful men of her own trading caste, and that he was in the midst of official business when he noticed the daughter-in-law standing nearby. The woman had not changed her clothes because of her grief, thinking, “Who will notice what I wear?” Like the husband who ordered the wife to let go of the reins, this husband at first dismissively twisted his arm free. But then he was lured by the oil lamp.

The oil lamp, Brinda Devi said, meant that the husband and wife would have a chance to talk, for in the old days it was only at night that a young couple was left alone together. There are strong sexual connotations to the verb “talking” (*gilānā*) among older women, and other *pakharu* also

use the image of a gentle, steady glow of the oil lamp for marital intimacy. With the authorization of her father-in-law, the male head of household, the wife in this song is indeed able to hold her husband back by apparently seducing him and then each month finding a persuasive new reason for why he should stay home. The year passes without any further reference to the wider family, echoing Sudhir Kakar's observation that the unfulfilled longing for intimacy within the joint family setting pervades women's lives in India (1989:22):

Generally fated for disappointment, the fantasy of constituting a "couple" not in opposition to the rest of the extended family but within this wider network, is a dominant theme running through women's lives, actual and fictional. Connecting the various stages of a woman's adulthood from an expectant bride to a more sober grandmother, the intense wish to create a two-person universe with the husband where each finally "recognizes" the other is never far from her consciousness.

In the song, to insure the family's survival, the husband must eventually abandon this companionship through the changing seasons. While many *bārahmāsa* songs describe the anguish of separation, this song is unusual within the genre in setting the stage for a sorrowful departure but then describing an emotional resolution. By the end of the song, the wife is resigned and fulfilled, sending the man off with her blessings. "She had him to herself for twelve months, and now she's ready to get rid of him!" joked happily married Vidhya Sharma, poking me in the ribs as she helped me transcribe this song.

Even though the man may be at a distance, most songs of separation address him as though he could hear. Here is another *pakharu* from Jamuna Devi, a Rajput woman in her fifties whose husband had been employed outside Kangra throughout most of their married life, first in the army and later in a factory. In 1991, she calculated that she had kept house and managed the fields by herself for over 25 years. I had dropped in to see Jamuna Devi before traveling off to the conference for which I was preparing a first draft of this paper. I mentioned to her that I noticed the theme of separation in many songs I had taped, and she responded with this song:

*e mere naukarān
nimbu pakke
ki rase bhariyā ḍāliyā*

"Oh my Employed Man,
lemons are ripe
and juicy on the branches.

e merī goriye

"Oh my Beautiful One,

<i>jammu kasmīr lagiyā laṛāiā</i> <i>ki chuṭṭiyān nahīn mildē</i>	there's a war in Jammu and Kashmir, I can't get a vacation."
<i>o mere naukarān</i> <i>apu tā gae pardes</i> <i>ki minjo kiliyā chhoṛi gayā</i>	"Oh my Employed Man, you have gone far away, leaving me alone."
<i>o mere naukarān</i> <i>kon bai pās mere</i> <i>phir kon mere dil bhare</i>	"Oh my Employed Man, who will sit beside me? And who will fill my heart?"
<i>e merī goriye</i> <i>naṇāna baiṭhe pās</i> <i>ki der terā dil bhariyā</i>	"Oh my Beautiful One, my sister will sit beside you, my younger brother will fill your heart."

"This is the relationship between a man and woman," Jamuna Devi said, switching to Hindi when she finished: "The man far away." I thought of the stereotype of the husband's younger brother as a potential sexual partner for a woman, and asked how he would fill the woman's heart. "Through laughing and joking," she said, disregarding the innuendo I saw, "and assuring, 'my brother will come home soon on vacation'."

Jamuna Devi told me that one could repeat this song, putting in mangos, leeches, or any other kind of fruit. I asked why fruit made the wife think of her husband, and Jamuna Devi explained, her voice sweet and patient: "Say I'm sitting alone. It's summer and the fruits are ripe. I think if he was here he'd bring me fruit to eat. Then too, I think, the one who could eat this is far away. How can I eat all by myself?"

As Owen Lynch has asserted, in India emotions "are more likely to be objectivized or substantialized" (1990:22). Jamuna Devi did not mention sexuality, but the juicy ripe fruit and the craving to enjoy it mixed with a longing for an absent husband—and the complaint that she cannot enjoy eating alone—suffuse this song with erotic overtones. Food is associated with love through many domains of Indian culture (Roy 1975:95; Trawick 1990:105-6), and sharing the pleasures of sweet food is an expression of intimacy.

A similar *pakharu* that starts with evocations of ripe fruit to be pleurably shared was sung by Kashi Devi, an 82-year-old Brahman woman with kind eyes and a bulging goiter. She had been urged by her niece (who was married into the same village) to sing songs from her times for my tape recorder. With her walking stick resting by her chair, Kashi Devi sang in a voice as soft and clear as a young girl's:

*kuthu dākhā pakkiyā ḍholā
ki kuthu tusān chakiyā
bāge dākhā pakkiyā goriye
ki othu asān chakiyā*

“Where do grapes ripen, Husband,
Where do you taste them?”
“Grapes ripen in the garden, Beautiful One,
that’s where we’ll taste them.”

*apu tusā turi chale ḍholā
yāñiyā goriya chhari chale
kiyān kari kaṭani ḍhola
yaniyā bares e*

“You have gone far away, Husband,
leaving the Beautiful One a young girl.
How are the years to be passed, Husband,
in this young life?”

sasu jo tu mā akhiyā goriye

*ki sauhre jo piyo akhiyā
dere jo akhiyā goriye*

ki ammā jāyā vīr e

“Address your mother-in-law as mother,
Beautiful One,
and your father-in-law as father.
Your younger brother-in-law,
Beautiful One,
you should address as if he’s a brother
born of your mother.”

sasu sārī mā nahīn ḍholā

*ki sauhrā sārā piyo nahīn
dere bhī ondare ḍholā
ki asala sarīkh hai*

“My mother-in-law is not my mother,
Husband,
and my father-in-law is not my father.
My younger brother-in-law, Husband,
is not true kin.”

kandā kanne pīṭh lāiyā goriye

ki charakhe kanne chitta lāiyā

*mīn mīn katanā goriye
ki miṭhṭhā miṭhṭhā bolanā
hansī hansī kaṭanī goriye
ki lambarī bares e*

“Keep your back to the wall, Beautiful
One,
and keep your mind on your spinning
wheel.
Spin thread finely, Beautiful One,
and speak sweet words.
Pass the years laughing, Beautiful One,
in your long life.”

*kandhā kanne pīṭh nahīn ḍholā
ki charakhe kanne chitta nahīn
mīn nahīn katana ḍholā
ki miṭhṭhā nahīn o bolanā
roī roī kaṭanī ḍholā
ki lamarī bares e*

“My back is not against the wall, Husband,
my mind is not on the spinning wheel.
I don’t intend to spin finely, Husband,
and I won’t speak sweetly.
I’ll pass the years weeping, Husband,
in my long life.”

“In this song,” Kashi Devi explained, “a young bride has been left behind and she is not happy. She won’t do what her husband asks her to.” Here, as in many other *pakharu* songs, the woman protagonist is outspoken and defiant. She refuses to accept her husband’s parting words that she consider his family her own, be industrious at the spinning wheel, speak sweetly, and

be happy throughout her life. The defiant tone of her replies is softened by her genuine sorrow over his departure in the last line—“I’ll spend the years weeping, Husband, in my long life.”

In a prior conversation, Kashi Devi had mentioned that she had lived with her husband when he worked in Simla. He had been a widower and she a fourth wife; even her stepson was older than she. Though married at 14, she did not have any children until she was about 30—first a son and then a daughter two years later. Soon after this, her husband died and she returned to their land in Kangra. Since she had accompanied her husband to his job, I was curious to know why she sang songs of separation.

Kashi Devi smiled at my question. “The thing is that he died when I was young,” she said. “After that, I *had* to sing songs like this.” The loss of a husband, for upper caste widows, is final. While marriage is allowed for widowers, widows must lead their lives marginalized and celibate, even if—as in the case of some women I knew—they were still teenagers at the time of their husband’s death. The separation described in *pakharu*, then, spills over into the grief of absence through death.

A husband’s absence also has resonance with the absence of the deity Krishna. His consort, Radha, is in Kangra women’s mythology portrayed as a wife rather than an illicit lover. Yet this does not stop Krishna’s notorious womanizing, which takes him off on expeditions that are not exactly job-related:

*hornā de andar dīpak baleyā
rādhā de andar andherā e
rādhā sai pucchdi parheyā je panditā
kuthu krishne dā ḍera e
jamunā kinnāre radhike
gopiyān dā kherā
uthu krishṇe dā ḍerā e
adi-adi rāti krishṇa jo sapne jo āyā*

rādhā bijogan je hoī e

*adi adi rāti krishṇe pakkā dharāte
āe riyā rādhā de pās e
lathāndi bāi krishṇe bhīt goāre
rādhā baithī pīṭh gherī e
Huṅ kajo pucchde shyām bāt mhārī*

*rādhā bijogan hoī e
ākhen guāiyān shyām roī tā roī*

Within others, oil lamps burn.
Within Radha, there is darkness.
Radha asks learned scholars,
“Where has Krishna camped?”
“On the banks of the Yamuna,
Radha, in a hamlet of milkmaids:
That’s where Krishna is camped.”
Halfway through the night,
Krishna dreamed
of Radha as a woman suffering
from separation.
In the fullness of night, Krishna
returned to Radha.
Krishna kicked the door open.
Radha sat, back turned away.
“Why do you ask after me now,
Dark One?”
Radha is suffering from separation.
I’ve lost my eyes to weeping,
Dark One,

kāyā guāi jhurī jhurī e

my body has become hunched
with sorrow.

This song was sung by Gauri Devi Dogra, who offered no explanation but immediately moved on. Many other songs about Radha and Krishna, however, expand on the same themes of his being away, sporting with his milkmaid girlfriends, and her suffering. While this separation has allegorical referents of the soul's separation from God (Hardy 1983), it was also sometimes used by women to comment on men's straying. For example, when visiting the home of the younger woman for whom her father had several decades earlier abandoned her mother, Durga Pandit began unexpectedly to sing about Radha's grief on account of Krishna's infatuations.

Apart from departures and absences, *pakharu* also deal with returns. These usually start with the formula "after twelve years husband (servant, soldier) returned home." Given this long absence, spouses in the songs tend not to recognize each other. In some songs, there is a tragic misunderstanding: a wife anxious about opening the door to a stranger claims there is a fictitious baby in her lap, leading the furious husband (who after twelve years knows the baby is not his) to rush in and kill her. Or else a jealous mother-in-law who does not want the couple reunited may poison the daughter-in-law, then incite her son to beat the prostrate woman for her sloth. A husband may also test a wife by pretending to be a stranger who asks her to elope, promising fine gifts; when she resists, he offers thanksgiving to those who arranged his marriage to such a good woman.

I was shocked at first by the prevalence of a woman's death—by murder or suicide—in songs of a husband's return. I wondered whether this return might be seen as the death of the dream of intimacy when the faraway husband, a subject of fantasy, becomes a dismissive man closeby. No women spoke directly to me about such disappointment, but Randhir Singh, an articulate male teacher of English in the army, confessed while on leave: "When you're away you do feel for her; it is only when you are around that you take her for granted. Like these beautiful mountains: so attractive, so charming from the distance, but when you go close, all gravel! Away from your wife you think how important she is, how much she has to suffer to feed you and run your house, but when you come home things sort of return to the routine."

Of all the disappointed or tragic songs of return, the most powerful I have heard is the following, sometimes referred to as "Foreigner Husband." A foreigner, *pardesi*, is one from outside the region considered home, for

des or *desh* can variously mean village, area, region, or country according to context. In wedding songs, a bride often laments, “I’m becoming a foreigner,” as she is taken to a distant village. But in this *pakharu*, it is a man who has been living at a distance who becomes the foreigner.

The version here was sung by Sona Devi of the Ironsmith, or Lohar, caste. She was a woman in her early forties: slim and quick moving, with large eyes and strong jaws that gave the impression of being perpetually clenched. She was unique among women in this village in having left her alcoholic and abusive husband to return to her parents’ home. Sona had stopped in to help with preparations for a sacred thread ceremony at a neighboring Rajput household. Women had gathered from the houses around to grind and clean spices, just as in the succeeding days they would come back to tend to rice, wheat, vegetables, or patting out yeasted bread. As they worked, they chatted, and when I came by, Sona was urged to sing. I immediately recognized this song as one I had taped as women picked through spinach greens at a Rajput wedding several months earlier; later, I taped several more elaborate variants from Kashi Devi and her female relatives of various generations.³

bārah bariye
kand ghare āyā
mangdā soyān dā sāg
kand pardesiyā

After twelve years,
Husband returned home
asking for fennel greens.
Foreigner husband.

sasu te chori hun
nanānā diye sōgi
chalī gai mālie de bāg
kand pardesiyā

Stealing away from mother-in-law
along with sister-in-law,
I went to the gardener’s garden.
Foreigner husband.

mālie dā larkā
puchhnā jo lagā
tu kajo āi mere bāg
kand pardesiyā

The gardener’s son
began to ask
“Why have you come to my garden?”
Foreigner husband.

bārah bariye
kand ghare āyā
mangdā soyān dā sāg
kand pardesiyā

After twelve years,
Husband returned home
asking for fennel greens.
Foreigner husband.

pūriyā pakāndi jī
thāliyā pāndī

I fried breads,
placing them on a plate

³ For a fuller discussion of this song and its variants, see Narayan 1994.

upar soyān dā sāg
kand pardesiyā

topped with fennel greens.
Foreigner husband.

latāndī bā
kande thālī saṭā
o piyā soyān sāg
kand pardesiyā

With a kick of his foot
husband upset the plate,
there spilled the fennel greens.
Foreigner husband.

na sukh saureyā jī
na sukh māpeyā
phuṭ gae mere bhāg
kand pardesiyā

Without happiness with my in-laws,
without happiness with my parents,
my destiny splintered.
Foreigner husband.

bharyā kaṭorā gorie
jaire dā pītā jī
sai gai hai bakhīyān de bāhar
kand pardesiyā

Filling a bowl, the Beautiful One
sipped poison.
She's off beyond the limits.
Foreigner husband.

“Finished,” Sona Devi said when done.

“So in this, a man comes after twelve years,” I began. “And then?”

“Then,” Sona Devi said with an air of resignation, “then she says, ‘How can I serve him?’ This is what she must have thought. She went to the garden to fetch some sweet fennel. She brought it, and she began to serve her husband. Anger rose up in him because she had gone out. She went out. She had gone in his service, but he misinterpreted it, ‘I just came home and she went out’.”

I nodded, reflecting on married women's lives around me as a constant stream of service, from early rising to make tea and fetch water through a day filled with activities from kitchen tasks, farm work, tending livestock, washing clothes, and looking after children to the late-night massaging of household elders' feet. Service, after all, is a central, merit-inducing component to the ideology of *pativrata* that shapes married women's lives (Dhruvarajan 1989). Yet as this song points out, men may neither acknowledge nor appreciate it. Further, as another woman pointed out in regard to this song, a husband may become suspicious of his wife going off outside the house, even if she has done so only in his service. The husband, it seems, suspected an affair between the woman and the gardener. Sona Devi continued:

She made the puris, she made greens, and she took it to her husband.
“Don't want! I don't want it!” OK then, he didn't want it though she brought it with such respect. So she felt pain, right? She said, “No

happiness at my in-law's place, no happiness at my parents' place, so my *karma* has splintered." So this is what she did, she ate poison and slept. With pleasure! [Sona Devi's laugh was loaded with irony. She was already standing up and halfway across the balcony.] OK, I'm going now. There's work at home.

The theme of fennel greens being prepared also occurs in a song that Brinda Devi and her sisters sing. Commenting on that song, which they title "Sumba"—"husband" (see Narayan 1995), Brinda Devi said: "Even now women are really attentive, but men, there's some real pride in them. They don't give a damn (*nahīn mārde prabhāv*). Then the irritation burns inside a woman as rage. But what else can she do? She can't do anything about it." One thing that women can do within the framework of auspicious and necessary action is sing about their sorrows.

Testimonies about Singing

"It's women's duty to perform actions for the well-being of men," explained a Brahman Pandit when I asked why women's songs were required at rites of passage. When I continued to ask this question of other people, I was sometimes told that this was "custom" (*rivāḥ*) or that since women had done this in the paradigmatic, primordial age of Sat Yuga, it is still done. But by far the most common answer I regularly received, from men and women alike, is that women sang "out of happiness" (*khushī se*).

Yet apart from songs chorused to a groom during marriage rituals (particular *sahere*, "crown" and *ghorī*, "mare" songs at his own home, and *gāliyān* abuses at the bride's place), men are rarely present when women sing. All the *pakharu* I taped from groups of women singers were performed in segregated gatherings where only women and children were present. Men actually appeared to be largely in the dark as to the content of women's songs. Certainly, the Kangra folklorist Dr. Gautam Sharma Vyathit's publications of women's songs (recorded mostly from his wife and mother) could be bought by any man at local bookstores, but this was not an arena that most men were even interested in. It seemed to me that this emphasis on songs being sung from duty and from happiness could be a form of "feminist coding" (Radner and Lanser 1987), making for a "hidden transcript" (Scott 1991) or "veiled sentiments" (Abu-Lughod 1986) whereby women could exchange subversive messages.

Songs like *pakharu* in the local dialect were often referred to as "old women's songs" (*jhabrī di gīt*), emphasizing their link to the past. This association with the past was reinforced by the content of such songs:

spinning wheels rather than mill cloth, oil lamps rather than electricity, horses rather than buses, geographically proximate destinations like Kabul that more recent political boundaries had made unnegotiably distant. Indeed, describing *pakharu*, women often spoke in terms of a bygone era (*pichleyā jamānā*). In this sense, the songs could be seen as a form of collective memory. Yet how such collective memory was mobilized by women, and how they reacted emotionally to the songs, could not be subsumed by a single theme.

It was understood that some women were more drawn to singing than others. Sangita Devi explained singing in terms of personal predilections. “It’s like this, Kirin,” she said. “Those who drink liquor will drink. Those who must have tea will have tea. Those who sing will sing. It’s a form of addiction. The more you sing, the more you have to sing. One song comes out after another song.”

At every singing occasion, Sangita Devi’s words were proven accurate: some women were indefatigable performers, belting out song after song. Others, however, would listlessly join in for the repeated lines, then return to the catching up on news that so often occurred between women at singing sessions. Having understood that songs were not equally shared by all, I was also curious as to whether singing carried over from collective settings into the lives of the singers. “Of course,” assured Sangita Devi. “Those who know songs won’t hesitate to sing. Like you, now you’re learning. When you know songs, you’ll be singing these even when you’re alone. Cooking, washing, walking, whatever you’re doing, you’ll be singing some song.” Similarly, Brinda Devi’s teenaged daughter complained with fierce embarrassment that wandering through the village or sitting on a bus, her mother might just burst into song. Along the same lines, Jamuna Devi, an energetic Rajput woman who gleefully filled three tapes of her favorite *pakharu* as soon as she met me, announced:

I’m always singing. I love songs. Even when I’m working, I keep singing something or the other. People passing by always say, “That’s Rashmi’s mother singing.” Rashmi is my eldest daughter. I’m interested in all sorts of songs. I listen everywhere I go. If I hear Chamar women sing something in the fields, I go sit there and make them repeat it so I can listen. I’ve learned all the *dholru* songs too, by sitting down with the Dumnas and listening to their songs. I can hear a song once, and it goes and sits inside me. I remember all the words and the tune. Yes, I have a real love (*sukinnī*) for singing.

It was also understood that different songs expressed—and evoked—different emotions. As Sangita Devi said: “If you sing a *sehrā*, or

you sing a *hansnu khelnu*, or a *janeo* song [all celebrating male rites of passage], what's there in that? Nothing! They are all songs of happiness. But other songs are filled with pain. Those who don't have troubles will sing, but they won't know what they're singing about. Those who do have troubles will recognize the pain. Everyone will sing, but it's only when you know pain that you really understand the song." Singing about painful issues was also seen as a form of catharsis. Jamuna Devi said that with sadness, "the song just begins by itself. When you're absolutely quiet, the weight grows heavier in the heart. By speaking, it lightens a little." Similarly, Sangita Devi observed, "However sad we are, whatever has happened in life, then sitting to sing, we're happy again. Those who don't sing don't know how this is."

Two middle-aged Brahman women related to Kashi Devi through marriage held the floor for collective singing during a wedding in 1991. Later, they took me aside to hold forth like a two-headed person. In response to my question about why women sang songs, and what they might feel when singing, Nirmala Upadhyay reflected for a minute, then said, "Songs divert the mind." Her neighbor, Narmada, added, "They make you happy." "Make you happy," repeated Nirmala. "This is what it is, these are my thoughts." She paused, then continued, "Some are filled with devotion," and reminded me of a devotional song she had promised to sing the following morning. This mention of devotion inspired Narmada to rephrase her assertion in terms of religion. "What it is is that we're sinners," she said. "We do all kinds of things we like, and God's name remains far away. Sinners can take God's name. One is trapped by all these ties, and sometimes one's mind is filled with sorrow. Then when one sings a beautiful song it brings happiness to the mind. All the sorrows go far away. That's all it is."

Nirmala had been musing, and now she interrupted, "Some songs are like this, that the time you want to sing them, you sing and the thoughts in your mind." "Happy," asserted Narmada. Nirmala shook her head, "Some of these thoughts come out in tears from your eyes, some come out in the form of the song. This is how it is." "How it is," echoed Narmada. "Some come out as tears, some come out as a song," repeated Nirmala. "Depending on the kind of emotion (*bhāv*) you have, that's the kind of song you sing."

Apart from being a form of catharsis, songs were also seen as a means of solace, connecting present experience to the experience of others in the past. Tayi, or "Auntie," a woman who had been widowed at 14, once commented that when she could not sleep at night, she lay thinking about songs from the old times: "When one sings a song like this [a sad one she

had just sung], you weep too. You sing about the pain in your heart. Then you get some solace in your heart that there have been times like this for others in the past.” Similarly, Brinda Devi Sud observed that singing together about difficulties reminded women in stereotypically hostile kinship roles to be more sympathetic towards each other: for example, that mothers-in-law be kinder to daughters-in-law, that husband’s sisters be more compassionate to their sisters-in-law, and so on.

Apart from expressing or relieving sadness, it seemed that songs could also evoke sorrow. Sometimes, when women were singing in a group, or when I played back a song over a tape recorder, someone present would begin to weep. Later, the reaction was explained to me by the weeping woman herself or her close relatives. For example, on one occasion, a song celebrating a mother’s love was sung. Durga Pandit and her sister, whose mother’s abandonment had led to lifelong emotional problems, burst into tears. On another occasion, a song about Bhatrihari, who abandoned his wives, caused tears to pour down the face of a woman listening in. The women who rushed to comfort her later told me that the woman’s sister had just been left by a husband who modeled himself on Bhatrihari.

I conclude this section with an interchange that connects emotion, singing, and separation from husbands. I had been transcribing the tape in which Nirmala and Narbada Upadhyia spoke as I sat in the sun at Vidhya Sharma’s house. I wanted to be sure I got the line about thoughts coming out as both tears and songs right, and asked Vidhya to listen through headphones. The postmistress, a widow from the next village, had stopped for a cup of tea on her long walk home. A thin woman with close-set eyes and a permanently puzzled look, she listened in, elaborating on Nirmala’s comment.

“When someone sings,” explained the postmistress, “Then you remember your own story. You can’t tell someone else what’s in your heart. But if there’s some pain, then it comes right out of your mouth in the form of a song.” Vidhya, always ironic, looked over at me with mischief on her face. “Haven’t you seen it in the Hindi films?” she asked, “A feeling, and then, just like that, a song?!” “When you’re separated you want to sing,” said the postmistress. “What do you mean?” I asked. “When you’re separated,” said Vidhya, enunciating clearly, “then you want to sing.” “Separated from whom?” I asked, aware that I was playing the dolt but hoping for elaboration. “Why would this make you sing?” “Get married and then you’ll know,” advised the postmistress.

Conclusion

The standard scholarly approach to folksongs in the Indian context has been to present song texts, and then to extrapolate from them truths about the condition of a collective Woman in that particular regional context. Certainly, the character of “the Beautiful One” in songs suggests that women are also constructing a generalized woman through their oral traditions. However, they do so with full knowledge that songs are not straightforward reflections of social conditions, a point that is sometimes lost on scholars. Looking for cultural truths in songs, scholars are in danger of reducing texts to ethnographic artifacts, overlooking the subjectivity and agency of performers.

Women’s “voice” refers not just to the spoken word, but also to perspectives on social relations that frequently go against the grain of representations stemming from dominant (male) groups (Gal 1991:178). In songs that are collectively sung, women join together in a common voice. As research elsewhere in India has also shown, women’s songs tend to express social distance: not just the distance between a woman and her husband, but also between kin groups linked through marriage, and between men and women generally (Jacobson 1975:46). Further, women’s songs—like women’s oral traditions generally—stake out an arena of cultural representation from gendered, female perspectives (Raheja and Gold 1994). In Kangra songs, women are presented as hardworking, headstrong, opinionated, and resourceful. They are separated from their families of birth, estranged from their in-laws, and literally or emotionally abandoned by husbands.

Women sing together, but they cannot be reduced to a fixed or monolithic “folk.” In Kangra, some women are singers; among singers, each is different, with her own tastes and repertoire; in one singer’s life, her favorite songs may change. Looking at gender representations in women’s songs, it is useful to think of them as collective representations overlaid through cultural practice on the lives of individual women, and also as self-representations through which individual women might speak about their life concerns. A slippage may well occur between collective and personal meanings, so that due to various factors (caste, class, age, life-stage, education) certain women may not be drawn to folksongs in their regional language, and so choose other media, like film songs, to describe their lives and emotions (Narayan 1996).

To what extent, then, does the genre actually mirror enforced separation through migrant labor that the political economy has tied into women’s lives, and what else is being commented on? As we can see from

the texts of particular songs as well as women's commentaries about them, men's expected absence is a charged, multivocal symbol. It can be used to indict the lack of worldly success of men who stay home, as a bereft counterpoint to the joys of being together and as an index of in-marrying women's alienation within the joint family. It can dramatize the emotional distance between men and women, where men simply do not sympathize with women's concerns. It can speak to the pain of a man's preoccupation with other women. Also, it can evoke the sorrow of abiding separation through death.

These songs lie on a continuum with other cultural productions from diverse parts of India that dramatize the emotion *virāha*, or separation, that is especially associated with Radha and Krishna. As Tharu and Lalitha (1991:127) observe in regard to songs from various regions, "The traditional motif of the longing of Radha for the absent Krishna is more recently infused in some of the songs we have translated with the new suggestion that the man might have had to leave the family and the village to seek a living in the town." As expressed through Kangra miniatures, *virāha* is also a complex emotion, with its own typology elaborated by medieval Hindi poets: the separation experienced in a fresh infatuation (*purvānurāg*), the separation of misunderstanding through pride or jealousy (*mān*), the separation of absence in a distant land (*pravās*), and also the separation caused by death (*karuṇā*) (Randhawa 1954:10-12, 1962:84-120). While Kangra women did not make reference to this more classical typology, their songs seemed to echo some of the same shades of complexity. That women are not singing *just* about migrant labor but rather using this reality as a multivocal symbol for relations between the genders is corroborated by the fact that in other parts of India where there is not such massive migration, women also sing such songs of separation.⁴

Drawing on Donald Tuzin's work in Melanesia, Alice Schlegel has recently argued with regard to the Hopi (1990:26): "When any single sex group is in operation, the other sex will be the "other". . . . Whether or not the 'other' is treated within that context in a demeaning manner may have less to do with the way that members of that action group actually perceive them to be than with the character of the group itself. In *pakharu*, husbands are clearly the male "other." If the "other" is far away, it follows that the "self" is close by. The distance described in this genre of songs comments not only on relations with husbands but also on the relations among women who sing together—as fellow performers and as fellow sufferers. Singing

⁴ Personal communication from Ann Gold for Rajasthan and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, Sylvia Vatuk, and Susan Wadley for Uttar Pradesh.

together would seem potentially to foster women's solidarity and sympathy across differences. This is similar to the situation observed in Greece by Anna Caraveli, who points out that the singing of a women's lament genre expresses protest in a "poetic voice that recognizes a 'sisterhood of pain' among women, a sense of communal victimization inflicted by either social or natural forces" (1986:181-82). Interestingly enough, the pooling of grievances about women's plight is akin to the Western feminist practice of "consciousness raising" that Chris Weedon has described as allowing women "the possibility of interpreting difficulties, problems, and inadequacies not as an effect of individual, personal failings, but as a result of socially produced structures" (1987:85). The practice of collective singing differs from consciousness raising though, in that instead of instigating change through gender solidarity, it appears to help women adapt to the constraints placed on their lives.

Women can sing together in this outspoken way because of two aspects of gendered distance: women's segregation and male absence due to migrant labor. Having a social space set apart from male surveillance appears to have fostered an arena in which women create and sustain self-representations that privilege women's points of view (cf. Sanday 1990:17). So women's segregation among high castes in Kangra can be viewed as a "symbolic shelter" not only in Hannah Papanek's (1982) terms of the culturally constructed evils from which segregation purports to shield women, but also in terms of providing a shelter for women's symbolic creations. Male absence is an extension of this principle. This may be one reason, I believe, that male absence is so elaborated in a genre that bluntly describes women's suffering.

All the women singers I have cited here are middle-aged or older; some younger women did not even know that a genre such as *pakharu* existed. Yet the theme of emotional distance between the genders may prove more enduring than any particular song genre, as is suggested by a rollicking dance song (*nāch gīt*) with which I end. Dance songs, which are accompanied by drums and clapping, are uproariously performed by women at mass celebrations. Not all dance songs dramatize separation, but some, like the following, do. Among the lead performers of this song were the Brahman daughters and nieces of a few of the *pakharu* singers cited in this paper. This song does not point towards the poetic past in which most *pakharu* are set. Instead, it uses English words like "coat" and "pen," refers to the metropolis Delhi, playfully invokes women's education, and speaks to the emerging possibility that women may accompany their migrant men:

Kālā koṭ tangāyā kiliyā

A black coat is hanging from a nail,

<i>tangāyā kiliyā</i> <i>apu chhoru rahendā Dilliyā</i>	hanging from a nail. My fellow lives in Delhi.
<i>minjo chhoṛi diyā ghar akiliyā</i> <i>ghar akiliyā</i> <i>merā man lage o Dilliyā</i>	He's left me alone at home, alone at home. My mind is fixed on Delhi.
<i>chiṭṭi likhnā jo pen dei jā</i> <i>pen dei jā</i> <i>nahin tā chhoru nāl lei jā</i>	Leave me a pen to write a letter, leave me a pen. Else, fellow, take me along. ⁵

University Wisconsin-Madison

References

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Abrahams 1970 | Roger D. Abrahams. <i>A Singer and Her Songs: Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. |
| Abu-Lughod 1986 | Lila Abu-Lughod. <i>Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. |
| Archer 1988 | William G Archer. <i>Songs for the Bride: Wedding Rites of Rural India</i> . Ed. by B.S. Miller and M. Archer. New York: Columbia University Press. |
| Bauman 1977 | Richard Bauman. <i>Verbal Art as Performance</i> . Rowley, MA: Newbury House. |
| Bryce 1961 | Winifred Bryce. <i>Women's Folk Songs of Rajputana</i> . New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. |

⁵ My personal ties to Kangra stretch back to 1974, and my interest in songs to 1980. This phase of research took place between September 1990 and September 1991 thanks to support from the University of Wisconsin Graduate School, the American Institute of Indian Studies, and the National Endowment for Humanities. I am also grateful to the School for American Research, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Social Science Research Council for granting me the time to think through and write about this research. I am grateful to Gloria Goodwin Raheja for organizing the stimulating conference that elicited the papers in this volume. This paper was first submitted in 1992, and I regret that for this revision I have not been able to more fully engage with more recent publications on women's songs. My enduring thanks to the singers mentioned here in pseudonym and to Didi Contractor for her encouragement. Also, many thanks to Eytan Bercovitch, John Foley, Don Handelman, Maria Lepowsky, Jonathan Parry, and Sabina Magliocco for reading and critiquing earlier drafts of this paper.

- Caraveli 1986 Anna Caraveli. "The Bitter Wounding: The Lament as Social Protest in Rural Greece." In *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*. Ed. by Jill Dubisch. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 169-94.
- Claus 1991 Peter Claus. "Kin Songs." In *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*. Ed. by A. Appadurai, F. Korom, and M. Mills. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 136-77.
- Claus n.d. _____. "Folk Literary Criticism and the Tulu Paddana Tradition." Unpublished manuscript.
- Dhruvarajan 1989 Vanaja Dhruvarajan. *Hindu Women and the Power of Ideology*. Granby, MA: Begin and Garvey.
- Dundes 1966 Alan Dundes. "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism." *The Monist*, 60:505-16.
- Finnegan 1977 Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flueckiger 1991 Joyce Flueckiger. "Genre and Community in the Folklore System of Chhattisgarh." In *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*. Ed. by A. Appadurai, F. Korom, and M. Mills. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 181-200.
- Gal 1991 Susan Gal. "Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender." In *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*. Ed. by M. di Leonardo. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 175-203.
- Greenberg 1991 Brian L. Greenberg. "Population, Migration, and Remittances." *Written Communication*.
- Hardy 1983 Friedhelm Hardy. *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇā Devotion in South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Henry 1988 Edward Henry. *Chant the Names of God: Music and Culture in Bhojpuri-Speaking India*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press.
- Jacobson 1975 Doranne Jacobson. "Songs of Social Distance." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 9:45-60.
- Junghare 1981 Indira Junghare. "The Position of Women as Reflected in Marathi Folk Songs." *Man in India*, 61:237-53.
- Kakar 1989 Sudhir Kakar. *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Karve 1939-40 Irawati Karve. "Some Folk Songs of the Maharashtra." *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, 1:79-95.
- Lynch 1990 Owen Lynch. "Introduction: Emotions in a Theoretical Context." In *Divine Passions: The Cultural Construction of Emotion in India*. Ed. by O. Lynch. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 3-34.
- Narayan 1986 Kirin Narayan. "Birds on a Branch: Girlfriends and Wedding Songs in Kangra." *Ethos*, 14:43-75.
- Narayan 1994 _____. "Women's Songs, Women's Lives: A View from Kangra." *Manushi*, 81:2-10.
- Narayan 1995 _____. "The Practice of Oral Literary Criticism: Women's Songs in Kangra, India." *Journal of American Folklore*, 108:243-64.
- Narayan 1996 _____. "Songs Lodged in Some Hearts: Displacements of Indian Women's Knowledge at Home." Forthcoming in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*. Ed. by S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp. 181-213.
- Papanek 1982 Hanna Papanek. "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter." In *Separate Worlds: Studies in Purdah in South Asia*. Ed. by Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault. Delhi: Chanakya Publications. pp. 3-53.

- Parry 1979 Jonathan Parry. *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Radner and Lanser 1987 Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser. "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature." *Journal of American Folklore*, 100:412-25.
- Raheja and Gold 1994 Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold. *Listen to the Heron's Words*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Randhawa 1954 M.S. Randhawa. *Kangra Valley Painting*. Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- Randhawa 1962 _____. *Kangra Paintings on Love*. New Delhi: National Museum.
- Rao 1991 Narayana V. Rao. "A Ramayana of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu." In *Many Ramayanas*. Ed. by Paula Richman. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 114-36.
- Roy 1975 Manisha Roy. *Bengali Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sanday 1990 Peggy Reeves Sanday. "Introduction." In *Beyond the Second Sex*. Ed. by P.R. Sanday and R.G. Goodenough. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp.1-20.
- Schlegel 1990 Alice Schlegel. "Gender Meanings: General and Specific." In *Beyond the Second Sex*. Ed. by P.R. Sanday and R.G. Goodenough. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 21-42.
- Scott 1991 James Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sharma 1978a Ursula Sharma. "Women and Their Affines: The Veil as a Symbol of Separation." *Man*, n.s. 13:218-33.
- Sharma 1978b _____. "Segregation and its Consequences in India: Rural Women in Himachal Pradesh." In *Women*

- United, Women Divided.* Ed. by P. Caplan and J. Bujra. London: Tavistock. pp. 259-82.
- Sharma 1981 _____ . "Women's Songs in Rural Punjab." *Cahiers de littératures orales*, 6:41-70.
- Singh 1962 Karan Singh. *Shadow and Sunlight: An Anthology of Dogra Pahari Songs.* Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Tharu and Lalitha 1991 Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present.* vol 1. New York: Feminist Press.
- Trawick 1988 Margaret Trawick. "Spirits and Voices in Tamil Song." *American Ethnologist*, 15:193-215.
- Trawick 1990 _____ . *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Trawick 1991 _____ . "Wandering Lost: A Landless Laborer's Sense of Place and Self." In *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions.* Ed. by A. Appadurai, F. Korom, and M. Mills. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 224-66.
- Vaudeville 1986 Charlotte Vaudeville. *Barahmāsā.* Pondicherry: Instituts Français d'Indologie.
- Vyathit 1973 Gautam Sharma Vyathit. *Kāngri Lok Geet.* Palampur: Sheela Prakashan.
- Wadley 1983 Susan Wadley. "The Rains of Estrangement: Understanding the Hindu Yearly Cycle." *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s. 17:51-83.
- Weedon 1987 Chris Weedon. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory.* London: Basil Blackwell.
- Williams 1977 Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams 1991 _____ . "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." In *Rethinking Popular Culture.* Ed. by C. Mukerji and M. Schudson. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 407-23.